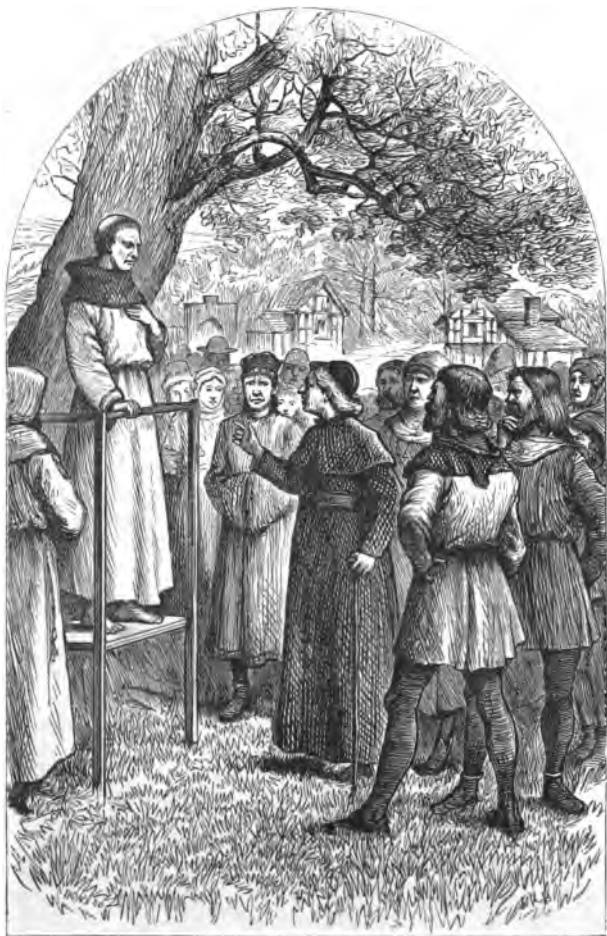


THE ORPHAN OF EVESHAM.



"Pax vobiscum, reverend brother."—(p. 64.)

TALES
ILLUSTRATING
CHURCH HISTORY.

ENGLAND,
VOL. III.
Mediæval Period.

BY THE
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CUTHBERT'S," "SCHOOLBOY HONOUR," &c.

With four Woodcut Illustrations.



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TO THE RIGHT REVEREND
GEORGE MOBERLY, D.C.L.,
LORD BISHOP OF SALISBURY.

My dear Lord Bishop,

I have your kind permission to dedicate a book to you, and have chosen these Tales, illustrative of English Church history, chiefly of the Reformation Period, as most appropriate for the purpose. It will, of course, be understood that your Lordship is in no way to be identified with the views or sentiments expressed in them. The dedication is simply a mark of respect on my part, and gratitude for benefits received from your teaching in earlier years.

*I have the honour to be, my Lord,
Affectionately and faithfully yours,
H. C. ADAMS.*

Cothill, July 1877.

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THE ORPHAN OF EVESHAM,
OR THE
JEWS AND THE MENDICANT ORDERS:
A TALE OF
THE TIMES OF EDWARD I.

The Orphan of Evesham, or The Jews and the Mendicant Orders.

CHAPTER I.

THERE are few lovelier spots in England than the ancient town of Evesham. It is built on a sloping eminence, rising from the banks of the Avon, which flows round three sides of it, leaving only the northern quarter open to an approach by land. In the thirteenth century, when the country was frequently disturbed by the struggles between the King and the more powerful barons, this peculiarity of situation was a great advantage; enabling, as it did, the citizens, in event of an attack, to concentrate all their forces on the only point where an enemy could assail them.

The country immediately adjacent has always been celebrated for the beauty of its scenery, no less than the fertility of its soil. But the town and its environs never presented a more brilliant spectacle than on the morning of Tuesday, the 4th of August, 1265, the day of the great battle of Evesham. Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, had marched his forces thither from Kempsey on the previous day, intending to await the arrival of his son, who with 30,000 men was presumed to be on his way from Pevensey in Sussex, and expected every hour to make his appearance. Prince

Edward, who had recently escaped from his captivity, was known to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of Worcester, at the head of a considerable force, though the exact numbers had not been ascertained. De Montfort was aware that delay was likely to prove more advantageous to his enemies than to himself, and therefore awaited with a good deal of anxiety the approach of his son. Almost before the dawn had dappled the skies, he was on horseback, attended by the chief nobles of his league,—Le Despenser, Beauchamp, St. John, Basset, and others. The spot where he had taken up his station was the market-place of the town, immediately adjoining the great Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary the Virgin, one of the most splendid religious houses of the day, from the great campanile of which a magnificent view might be descried.

It was indeed a lovely landscape that met the eyes of the soldiers, who, together with Nicolas, the Earl's barber-surgeon, had ascended to the summit of the tower. In the distance to the west was seen the soft outline of the Malverns; nearer, and more to the south, the richly-wooded heights of the Cotswolds and Bredon, with here and there the battlements of a baronial castle, or the spire of a village church peeping out through the foliage; to the north again appeared the line of the Lench hills, extending to Alcester; and in the broad expanse between them there lay a long succession of rich fields, yellow with the corn even now being gathered in, and orchards—plum, and pear, and apple—loaded with their ripening fruit.

The foreground was not less striking or picturesque.

Not only the market-place, and the long narrow streets extending upwards from the waterside, but a large part of the tract of land enclosed within the bend of the river, was thronged by De Montfort's soldiers, or with peasants flocking in to join his standard. Here was a company of knights in the glittering chain-mail of the period, their surcoats and baldrics, and the housings of their chargers, exhibiting the richest colours which the looms of Flanders could furnish, as they leaned on their long lances, or bent from their saddle-bows in anxious converse. Here was a troop of archers, equipped with steel headpiece and corslet, a sheaf of arrows slung in the belt over each man's shoulder, a short sword girded to his side, and his long bow of tough English yew held unbent in his hand. Scattered everywhere about were pikemen, slingers, crossbow-men, intermingled with the heavy infantry soldiers of the day,—the latter wearing hauberks, steel caps, and ring-armor for leg and arm, and carrying oval shields and long heavy spears.

Different views have been taken by historians as to the justice of De Montfort's quarrel, and the purity of the motives by which he was actuated. But it is certain that few men in the annals of England have wielded, for the time, a power so absolute, or enjoyed a popularity so unbounded. This had been evidenced by the shouts of welcome with which he had been greeted on his arrival at Evesham on the previous day, which were now repeated with still greater enthusiasm by the groups of countrymen who continued to pour in from the surrounding villages. The Earl seemed unwilling to acknowledge these as personal to himself choosing rather

to understand them as being raised in honour of King Henry, who, clad in armour, and mounted on a black charger, was present, in nominal command of the forces. But De Montfort's efforts could not prevent the throng from recognising in him, at a crisis like the present, the true leader and king of men. He was a man of tall, almost gigantic stature, with features somewhat stern in their expression, a jaw which seemed locked in iron, and an eye whose eagle glance pierced the bosoms of those on whom it was fixed. He preserved the most sedate calmness in the midst of the wild excitement by which he was surrounded; but his eye was seldom withdrawn from the quarter where the banners of his son's array might be expected to appear.

The sun had scarcely risen above the horizon when there came a shout from the battlements of the tower, and news was brought down that clouds of dust were to be seen in the distance to the north-east, through which the glitter of arms was occasionally visible. Almost at the same moment a horseman came galloping up from the same quarter, mounting the hill with difficulty, and making for the spot where the Earl was stationed. As he came nearer, a woman with an infant in her arms broke from the crowd, and ran to meet him, crying out that he was dying. He was indeed a ghastly spectacle to behold; he was covered with dust and blood, and scarce able to keep the saddle; his steed also appeared to be so exhausted, that it could hardly stagger onwards to the foot of the tower.

"Stand aside, Dame Marjory," said the man, as he

slid, rather than alighted from his seat, "I am not hurt, only sore wearied."

"Ha, good fellow, what tidings?" asked the Earl, as the man tottered rather than walked a few paces forward. "Bring you notice of the approach of my son? How far off is he? What force has he with him?"

"His men are dispersed or slain, Lord Earl," was the answer; "he himself hath scarcely escaped with his life, and some half-dozen of his followers, into his castle of Kenilworth."

"How, what!" exclaimed Lord Despenser. "Dispersed, say you, escaped? What enemy hath he encountered?"

"Prince Edward, who, with Mortimer, and Gloucester, and Norfolk, is on his march hither even now."

"Thou art dreaming, fellow," exclaimed Lord de Ros, who had just issued from the door of the tower; "they can see the standards of the host that is approaching, with sufficient clearness now to distinguish their banners, as well as the devices on the shields, and they are those of De Montfort."

The Earl bent his massive forehead into the frown which it was said no man could face. "Thou darest not trifle with us, I think," he exclaimed; "does anyone know this man?"

"I know him well," said one of the noblemen standing by, "he is Stephen of Westwell, as stout a forester as e'er a man in Wychwood. He was a follower of the Mortimer once, and now serves in my troop; nor have I a better man in it."

"What took him northwards?" asked the Earl.

"I despatched him thither by the King's orders," said the former speaker, bending his head as he spoke towards Henry, who sat silent on his charger; "I sent him to Sherbourne, to bring hither Ezra the Jew, who dwells a score of miles or so from this spot. Let his tidings be what they may, they may be relied on. Tell thy tale, Stephen," he added, "and as briefly as thou mayest."

"I have already told nearly all," said Stephen. "The Prince attacked my noble young Lord de Montfort three days ago, as he lay encamped outside Kenilworth Castle, and slew, or put to flight, or took prisoner, well-nigh his whole following. The news reached me at Sherbourne, it might be two hours after midnight. I straightway mounted, and rode to Ezra's house, bidding him take horse and accompany me hither without a moment's delay. He complied promptly enough; but before he was well mounted, we saw by the moonlight the Prince's vanguard approaching, and rode off at the utmost speed of our horses. They followed us as far as Stratford, where they took the Jew prisoner. I myself did not come off without a wound from an arrow, which razed my shoulder—St. Martin! had it struck me a few inches lower, I had not been here to tell the tale!"

"My son's host dispersed,—his standards captured!" exclaimed Leicester. "Doubtless, then, the Prince hath caused them to be borne before him, the better to detain us here, until he is close at hand. There is but one hope for us now, and that lies in immediate retreat. St. John, Basset, Le Despenser, friends all—get your

men together in marching order. We must not linger for a moment."

But the leaders he had named had scarcely left his side, when a second cry was raised from the Abbey tower. Not to the north only now, but from under the cover of the hills situated to the west, and in the rear, the flash of armour and the waving of banners, bearing the device of the earl of Gloucester, could be descried; while a third force had become visible in the eastern quarter, advancing from the direction of the Littletons.

A single glance was enough to reveal to De Montfort's experienced eye that he had been entangled in a snare, from which escape was hopeless. "The boy has learned the art of war from me," he exclaimed; "Now may the Lord have mercy on our souls, for our bodies are all Prince Edward's!"

But though convinced of the hopelessness of victory, the great Earl proceeded to array his men with unabated courage, and the military skill for which in that day he had no rival. Marching his whole force to the eminence known as Green Hill, he drew the men up in a deep and solid circle, which could only be attacked at a great disadvantage to the assailants. As soon as his dispositions were completed, he retired with his principal followers to the Abbey, and there confessed, and received the Sacrament, as was always his practice on the eve of battle, this time evincing deeper fervency, as knowing it to be the last. By his orders, during his absence, all possible arrangements were made for the protection of the women and children, most of whom withdrew into

the town, and found sanctuary in the Abbey or the Churches. There were some few of these, and among them Marjory Forester, who could not be persuaded to quit the field. It was in vain that Stephen remonstrated with his wife.

"Let me remain, Steve," she said; "I do not think Englishmen will strike defenceless women or children."

"Thou knowest nought about it," interrupted Stephen impatiently. "When a man's blood is heated by battle, he is as one beside himself."

"Still, I would rather remain," she persisted. "Whatever I may behold or suffer, it cannot be so terrible as the being shut up within stone walls, fancying every moment that thou wert being struck down or slain!"

"Nay; but the child," urged Stephen.

"Fear not, I will take heed to him," replied Marjory. "If the battle goes against us, I will await thee here, and we will try to escape together."

Stephen would have renewed his arguments, but the enemy was now close at hand, and he was obliged to hurry away to rejoin his company.

It is not proposed to give any narrative of the great battle which ensued. It is enough to say, that De Montfort upheld nobly his military renown that day. Attacked on all sides by overwhelming numbers, he repeatedly drove back their charges; and it was only when the fatal drain of battle had reduced his soldiers to a mere handful, that his resistance was overcome. No quarter was given, and the carnage was terrible. Nearly two hundred barons and knights were killed on the field, or died of their wounds. The Earl saw his

gallant son Henry slain before his eyes, and his companions in arms, Le Despenser, Beauchamp, Basset, De Ros, St. John, fall at his side. At last he himself, having for some time, it is said, successfully encountered no less than eight antagonists, received a mortal stab in the back from a dagger, and fell in the thickest of the fight.

The conflict was still raging, when a storm, which for some time previously had been threatening, burst forth with a violence which seemed to rival the fury of men below. The air grew so dark that the monks of St. Mary's, who proceeded with their services without heed to the strife around them, could not read the Psalms which they were chanting. In accordance with the custom of the day during a thunderstorm, the Abbey bells were rung; and their clang mingled with the roll of the thunder, as though heaven and earth alike were protesting against the ruthless deeds they witnessed. It was impossible, even for men whose passions had been kindled by the excitement of a bloody and protracted battle, to continue the slaughter in the face of such a tempest. Quarter was at last granted, notwithstanding that Prince Edward's order had been that none of the rebels were to be spared. The scanty remnant of De Montfort's forces, which had still continued the fight, for the most part threw down their arms, and were conducted as prisoners into the town; though some protracted their resistance to the last. At an early hour in the forenoon the main struggle was over.

The sun was still high in the heavens, when a small party of horsemen, which had arrived from the direction

of Stratford, approached the scene of the sanguinary conflict. It consisted of a dozen or so of men-at-arms, wearing the Prince's badge, and having in the centre of the group a man advanced in years, of whom they were evidently in charge. His peculiar dress, consisting of a tunic of dark-coloured cloth, a high square yellow cap, and a cloak, on the front of which two strips of white cloth were sewn, shewed him to be a Jew. He was treated with a curious mixture of deference and dislike by the leader of the party, a dark complexioned, strongly-built man of perhaps thirty, with a harsh and somewhat sinister cast of features. When they were within two hundred yards of the actual scene of action, he commanded a halt to be made.

"I should be glad to learn your pleasure, good Ezra," he said, "before we proceed further. Our orders were to conduct you to the presence of the King with as little delay as possible. If the storm had not delayed us, we should have arrived two hours earlier, but I know not that that, under the circumstances, would have been any advantage. It is plain that Prince Edward has gained a great victory, whereat we all rejoice. But we cannot tell yet whether the King has fled in company with the traitor De Montfort, or is now in the Prince's camp. Will you remain here while inquiry is made, or go on?"

"We will go on at once, so please you Messire de Gauden," said the Jew. "If the King should not be in the town, I will crave an audience of the Prince."

The officer gave the word, and the party moved on, traversing the fatal field, which was now rendered fear-

fully distinct by the broad light of the afternoon sun. The Jew's feelings were those of a man unused to bloodshed and suffering. His cheek turned pale, and his eye dilated with horror, at the numerous spectacles of woe and agony which he encountered during his brief ride. One group in particular awakened his pity so forcibly, that he almost insensibly drew his rein to gaze upon it. It consisted of several persons, for the most part not wearing armour, or carrying weapons,—two or three of them women. They had been cut down, it appeared, or transfixed with arrows, while attempting to escape. Conspicuous among them were two corpses—one that of a stout, soldierly man, whose skull, steel cap and all, had been cleft by the blow of a heavy sword; the other that of a young and comely woman, with an infant at her breast. The same weapon apparently had slain both. As the Jew gazed sadly at this melancholy sight, a low wail struck his ear; and, looking more closely, he perceived that, although both the parents were stone dead, the child still survived.

The leader of the party grew impatient.

"I pray you, worthy Jew," he said, "let us move on. The afternoon is far advanced, and the men need food and refreshment, of which they have not partaken since the morning."

"A moment, I pray you," returned Ezra, alighting from his saddle as he spake, and taking the infant from the arms which were already cold and stiff. "I cannot suffer this helpless babe to perish thus. Is there any one here," he added, raising his voice, "who will take charge of the child for the night, and bring it to

the house of Amos the Jeweller in the morning. I will requite him handsomely."

A woman who had been loitering about, either in search of some friend who might need her help, or possibly engaged in plundering the dead, stepped forward.

"I will take charge of it, Ezra," she said. "I know thee well, though thou knowest not me. I promise thee the infant shall be well cared for, and delivered to thy friend to-morrow."

The Jew gave the baby into her charge, and re-mounting his horse, accompanied his impatient escort into the town.

Meanwhile the old King and his son, in company with the Earls of Mortimer and Gloucester, were taking a brief interval of repose after the toil and dangers of the day. The Abbacy was at this time vacant, Henry de Worcester, the last Abbot, having deceased some two years previously, and no successor as yet having been appointed. But the Prior, who governed the house during the vacancy, hastened to render the royal party all possible respect and attention. He placed at their disposal the same chambers which had been occupied on the previous evening by De Montfort and his companions, and caused his guests to be served in a style befitting at once their royal rank, and the princely revenues of the Abbey. Possibly, he might have had an eye to his own advancement to the abbatial chair: possibly he was anxious to obliterate any unpleasant recollections which might be entertained of the deference recently shewn to the rebel Earl. However that

might be, his attentions were accepted in good part. The party was in truth inclined to be good-humoured. Henry was an affectionate father, and the Prince a dutiful son, and all present were elated at the signal triumph of the day. Edward uttered an impatient exclamation when, after an hour or two of cheerful talk, the door opened, and a chamberlain announced that Ezra the Jew, of Sherbourne, had arrived, under the escort of some of the Prince's soldiers, and was now awaiting the royal pleasure.

"Under the escort of some of my soldiers!" repeated the Prince in angry surprise. "How fell that, Sir? they should have known better!"

"Some of the Earl of Norfolk's company, I am advised, overtook the Jew early this morning, and learned from him that my lord the King had sent a messenger urgently commanding his presence;" answered the chamberlain. "Whereupon the Earl gave orders to Messire Ralph de Gauden, who holds a command under him, to conduct the man hither in all safety."

"He did well," observed the king. "Apprise Ezra that I will see him shortly." "Son Edward," he resumed, when the chamberlain had quitted the apartment, "it is long since we spake together concerning these Jews; but I remember that I could then scarce understand thy mind respecting them. Wouldest thou exterminate, or banish them from the land, as some propose? Nay, doubtless they are an accursed race, abhorred of God and man. Yet if Heaven permits them to live, may not man do the like?"

"I seek neither to slay nor to banish them," returned

the Prince. "Let them live among us, so they do no wrong to Christian men."

"Of what wrong speakest thou?" rejoined the King. "Of the outrages on Christian children, the poisonings, and crucifixions?"

"My thought was not of things like these," answered Edward; "I know not what may be the truth in those matters, never having had opportunity to inquire into them; and if any were guilty, they have been heavily punished. I spake of their manifold usuries and extortions, whereby they drive honest men to their ruin."

"Wouldst thou then forbid usury, my lord Prince?" interposed Gloucester. "How wouldst thou have them live?"

"By honest labour, like other men," said Edward; "Can they not till the ground, or work at the trade of the handicraftsman, like their Christian neighbours? These are useful and profitable to the land, like the animals which the farmer employs to assist his labours. But these Jews are as the devouring locust, which consumes the harvest which others have raised. Usury is forbidden by the law of God, and should be forbidden by the law of man also."

"Are you advised of that, my lord?" observed Mortimer; "I am no clerk, yet methinks I have heard that the Holy Scripture permitteth these Jews to lend money on usury. How sayest thou, reverend Father, is it not so?"

"The Prince hath well spoken," said the Prior; "What saith the holy Prophet Ezekiel of him that 'hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase?' Saith

he not of such an one, 'He shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him?'"

"By my faith," said the Earl of Gloucester, "that is somewhat of a hard sentence, and would doom to death not a few among Christians, as well as Jews."

"True, my lord," said King Henry; "and methinks the worthy Prior could tell us of another passage in Holy Writ, where these Jews are permitted to lend on usury to those not of their own nation. Ha! Sir Prior."

"There is indeed such a passage in the Book of Deuteronomy," said the Prior, reluctantly, "wherein it is said, 'Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother. Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury.' But the wisest expositors of Scripture, understand that the strangers here spoken of are none other than the idolatrous nations of Canaan, unto whom the Israelites were commanded to shew neither kindness nor forbearance, by reason of their manifold sins. Such passage, therefore, can have no application to Christian men."

"I perceive," said the King. "The Jews are not forbidden to lend to Christian men, but only to exact usury for their loans. It is well, and we will so rule us. But after all, my lord," he continued, "I fear me the Jews are not the only ones who despoil and cheat men of their goods."

"It is most true, my liege," hastily assented the Prior; "there be these wandering friars, who in this last generation have made their appearance in the land, and whose numbers seem ever on the increase. My lord the Prince was pleased but now to liken the Jews to

a swarm of locusts. Under his good favour, I would affirm that these begging friars, black, white, and gray, more resemble the insects whereof he speaks. They devour the earnings of the peasants, yea, oftentimes their very house and substance; they eat up the virtue and good name of their wives and daughters; they destroy alike the doctrine and discipline of the Church."

"True, holy Father," said Gloucester; "nor are the clergy the only ones they impoverish. We of the laity are like to be reduced to beggary even more speedily. If a man hath done amiss, he is not to make amends by prayer and penance, but by a new window to the Convent chapel, or a round sum to pay the Convent's debts. And if he wishes to atone for the sins of his past life, nothing less will suffice than the gift of his whole property, to build and endow a new monastery."

"Ye have not yet mentioned all the locusts," remarked Mortimer, "of which it must be admitted there is a goodly swarm. What say ye of these foreign prelates, who are possessed of benefices in this land, which they never serve, nay, which they never so much as behold? If any man were to reckon up the gold which every year goes into Italian coffers, for duties scantily performed by deputy, and still more scantily paid, these would be found, to my thought, the worst locusts of all."

"These are grave evils," said Edward, in a tone which shewed that the raillery of the two noblemen was unwelcome to him; "evils which we may hope at a more propitious time to see amended."

"Aye, at a more propitious time," assented the King; "but to return to the Jews, of whom we spoke first.

I regard them not as locusts, whatever the others may be. I, for my part, would rather liken them to honey bees, which are indeed busy in filling their combs, and doubtless find pleasure in the task. But the owner of the bees, as ye know, my lords,—and here is the gist of the comparison,—the owner of the bees is wont to relieve the hive of its honey at certain periods. That is the wiser mode of dealing with the Jews also.”

“The hives have been swept parlous clean of late,” remarked Gloucester; “there can be but small store left in them now.”

“Thou mistakest, Gloucester,” returned Henry; “knowest thou not that since the unhappy day of Lewes fight—”

“No longer unhappy, my liege,” interposed Mortimer. “This day hath made it seem only as the dark cloud, which throws out the rainbow in all its brightness.”

“Thou sayest well,” said the King; “but since that day great indulgence hath been shewn these Jews. Complaints against them have passed unheeded, even breaches of the law have been in some instances overlooked; their grievances have been inquired into and righted; protection and favour have everywhere been extended to them. All this time, then, they have been storing up wealth, amassing, I doubt not, in fifteen months, more than we Christians would amass in as many years.”

“Aye, truly,” assented Mortimer, “theirs is a harvest, which is as the hundredfold of Holy Writ. Mow the field of a Jew down to the very soil one day, and there will be a crop a yard high the next.”

“That being so,” said the King, “they will surely be prepared to furnish forth a goodly subsidy, to enable us to take the field with a fitting array. It was for this purpose that I sent for this Ezra, who is a man of mark among his countrymen, and more liberal-minded than most of them. De Montfort would have had the spending of the money, I suppose, had the Jew arrived yesterday. We shall now have the spending of it ourselves.”

“It is but reason,” said Gloucester; “yet, my liege, it will surely scarce be needed. Think how many estates have become forfeit to you, only this day, by the death of these attainted traitors. Surely they will be enough to satisfy thine utmost requirements.”

“Thou art young, Gilbert,” rejoined the King with his placid smile, “young, that is, when compared with me, and thou knowest not, I trow, what the requirements of kings may be. Hadst thou worn a crown as long as I have done, thou wouldst know that their wants are not so easily satisfied. Hast thou considered the debts with which we are burdened? Two hundred thousand marks would not pay them,—no, by our Lady, nor three hundred thousand either. These would of themselves swallow up the broad lands of many a baron, were he ever so wealthy. Besides, remember, though these estates be indeed forfeit, we are scarce yet in a position to claim the forfeiture. Many a castle must be besieged, many a sturdy rebel smitten down, it may be many a bloody field fought, ere we can enter into possession. No, we must have an immediate subsidy from our friend Ezra and his kinsfolk, whatever may be our position six months hence.

It were better I saw him at once, for the hour is waxing late."

"So be it, my father," said Prince Edward, rising, "and it were better methinks that you saw him alone. Mortimer, Gloucester, will you forth with me? Bigod hath by this time, I doubt not, ascertained the names of those who have been slain, as well as of those who are yet our prisoners. It were fitting that all needful arrangements were made for the punishment of traitors, and the ransom of honourable foes. Come, let us forth; the storm appears long since to have wholly passed away."



CHAPTER II.

ON the banks of the Avon, Shakspeare's Avon, some two or three miles from the town of Warwick, and nearly double that distance from Stratford, lies the pleasant village of Sherbourne. At the date to which this story belongs, the rich woods of elm and oak, in which the Bard of Avon was wont to roam, spread far and wide over the country, so that the villages were as oases scattered here and there in the heart of the greenwood. An English hamlet in such a locality was indeed a picturesque sight,—the embowering woods, the black-and-white cottages dotted here and there along the river bank, the stone-built farmhouses and granges, with their rudely-carved gables, the rustic way-side inn, the green where the maypole was erected in spring and the butts in summer, the massive and vener-

able church, which no ruthless hands of Puritan or Churchwarden had as yet profaned, the quaint and modest parsonage immediately adjoining—formed a picture which, for homely beauty, could hardly be surpassed.

So, probably, thought Father Algar, the parish priest of Sherbourne, as he trudged homewards on the morning of the 5th of August, from Stratford; or rather, so he probably would have thought, if his mind had been less preoccupied. He had gone out in the hope of ascertaining the truth of rumours which had been flying about respecting a great battle, said to have been fought at Evesham on the previous day, the issue of which was not fully known. The good Father, like most of the secular clergy, was warmly interested in the success of the great Earl of Leicester, and entertained a confident assurance that he would carry the day, as he had done at Lewes in the previous year. It may, perhaps, surprise us to hear that this was the general feeling of loyal subjects like the clergy. But it should be remembered that though it has been usual in more modern times to account De Montfort as in some sense a rebel, he was not so regarded then. His troops always marched with the royal standard displayed, and the King was present in his camp, to all appearance of his own free will. Then, the cause in which he had taken up arms—the rights of the English people against foreign intruders of whatsoever kind—was universally popular. Though men in those times discreetly held their tongues, for fear of the consequences of expressing their true sentiments, there can be no doubt in the mind of any one

who carefully studies that reign, that few public characters have been more profoundly or generally loved. His popular designation of "Sir Simon the Righteous," alone might shew this. The miracles attributed to him by the blind idolatry of the common people, and the ballads sung by the cottage fireside and on the village ale-bench, are further proofs of it. The secular clergy, if they did not go such lengths as these, were nevertheless warmly enlisted on his side. There was no class of men, indeed, who suffered more at the hands of the foreign intruders, the main objects of De Montfort's enmity, than Father Algar and his brethren. The more valuable benefices to which the working clergy felt themselves entitled to succeed, were every year more unscrupulously seized upon by the Pope, to be given to Italians; who, from their ignorance of the English language, would have been incapable of discharging the duties of the offices in question, even if they had had any thought of so doing. They resided abroad, never even seeing the parishes of which they were rectors, and doling out the scantiest possible payments to those who did their work. It is said that at this time the annual income which foreign ecclesiastics, with Boniface of Savoy, the Archbishop, at their head, drew from this country for duties, which none of them performed, was three times as great as the entire revenue of the crown. The good Earl would have amended this scandal if he could,—nay, there was good ground for hoping that if his influence with King Henry could be maintained, he would succeed in the attempt. It was the weakness of the King

alone, and of his father before him, that had permitted these encroachments on the liberties of England. The sturdy monarchs who had swayed the sceptre in previous generations, the Williams and the Henrys, would have dealt shortly and summarily with these abuses; and the present King had but to rouse himself to a due sense of the dignity of his crown, and he would put a stop to them at once and for ever. But if the Earl of Leicester should have sustained an overthrow, as some people chose to fancy he had, there would be an end to all hopes of improvement. Possibly Father Algar might have had in view a certain goodly piece of preferment, in a parish in the fair county of Sussex, which had just fallen vacant. If this should escape the clutch of his Holiness the Pope, and his foreign minions, Father Algar's influence with the Bishop of Chichester, a fast friend of De Montfort's, might be sufficient to obtain it for him. But if there was an end of De Montfort's power, there was an end of the Bishop's too.

The Father saw no reason for anticipating such unwelcome results. Nothing more was known at Stratford than that a great battle had been fought. Fugitives from the field during the action had brought in all manner of reports, for the most part quite inconsistent with one another, as is generally the case on such occasions. 'The sound of horses' feet behind him caused him to stop therefore, and look eagerly that way. Two or three men-at-arms were approaching, with an officer at their head. It was almost certain that they were the bearers of important tidings, and the Priest resolved

to await their coming up. As they drew nearer, he was not particularly gratified at recognising in the leader a man who had been from time to time a resident in Sherbourne, being indeed a native of it, though for a long time past he had not been seen there.

Ralph de Gauden, or Ralph the Rover, as he was not unfrequently styled, was the son of a franklin of ancient family, and no inconsiderable means, which for many generations back had owned the lands of Gauden. Rumour said, that in his early youth he had shewn so lawless and turbulent a temper, and agreed so ill with his elder brother Wilfred, that his father had turned him out of doors. According to another version of the story, he had voluntarily quitted home. In any case, he had taken to a seafaring life. The naval affairs of England, at this period of its history, are but imperfectly understood. The large fortunes amassed by traders shew that the commerce must have been considerable; but there were serious drawbacks to its successful prosecution. Merchant vessels were preyed upon by pirates of all nations, who were the genuine descendants of the Vikings of former centuries. These men would fortify themselves on some island or isolated promontory, and issuing from their strongholds, plunder the ships they encountered, and put the crews to death. Early in Henry's reign, a relative of the Earl of Pembroke had in this manner established himself in Lundy Island, where he did so much mischief to the ships passing in and out of the Bristol Channel, that a royal squadron was despatched against him. In the troubled times ensuing on the quarrels of the King and the barons,

many ships were fitted out as privateers on both sides. But the war thus commenced, soon degenerated into mere piracy, the crews of the privateers seizing and pillaging, without exception, whatever ships came in their way.

About six months previously to the battle of Evesham, Ralph de Gauden returned to his native village, from which he had been absent some twelve years. The waste of life occasioned by the barons' wars, and the fell diseases which ravaged the country, had so reduced the number of the villagers, that there were comparatively few who remembered him. He was recognised however, and received as a guest by his brother Wilfred, now the owner of Gauden Grange. The latter was a very different character from Ralph ; being a quiet, inoffensive, and somewhat weak man, whose health of late years had been gradually failing. Ralph took up his abode with his brother, and seemed at first inclined to remain his guest. But he soon grew weary of the monotony of his life, and the tame companionship of Wilfred ; who, on his side, was scandalized at the tone of Ralph's conversation and habits. Before long it was announced that the *ci-devant* sailor had taken service with Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, and soon afterwards, that he was in the camp of Prince Edward.

Father Algar was among those who could remember Ralph in his early youth, and he was in no wise pleased to number him again among his parishioners. He had been careful, however, to avoid a quarrel with him during his residence in Sherbourne, both for Wilfred's sake and his own. Ralph, on his side, had made little

secret of his dislike to Father Algar, whose rebukes in early days he had by no means forgotten. He had recognised the Priest even before Father Algar had perceived him, and would have ridden by, without bestowing any sign of recognition upon him, if the Father had not accosted him civilly.

“*Pax vobiscum*, my son! From whence come you?”

“From Evesham field, reverend Father,” answered Ralph pointedly,—“from Evesham field, where treason has met with its due meed.”

“Ah, indeed,” faltered Father Algar; “do you then mean that the Earl of Leicester—”

“Is carrion, cast out to the crows and the kites,” said Ralph, completing the unfinished sentence. “Yet the spearman who gave him his death-blow did him a service, or he would have had to undergo the doom of the traitor and the rebel.”

“The Prince hath won the day, then?” said Algar, endeavouring to assume as indifferent a tone as he could.

“Aye, the Prince hath won the day. He hath gained such a victory as will quell treason, I trow, for many a year to come. And now there will be a reckoning with those who survive. They who have plotted against the King and his royal son, will be arraigned, and axe and cord will be called into play. Knight and noble, boor and yeoman,—all will have to answer for it. Nay, it is even whispered, that not a few Bishops and Priests will have to render in their account with the rest.”

“I understand not your meaning, Ralph de Gauden,” said Algar, coldly. “If you level your shafts at me—”

“I should not so presume,” said the other mockingly. “It is the office of our reverend Fathers to take others to task for their sins, but in no wise to be taken to task themselves. They do say, however, that the godly friars of Coventry,—which city is not so far off after all,—are making a goodly stir about the doings of the parish Clergy hereabouts; which they are bold enough to affirm are a scandal to the Church. There is Father Lambert now, he hath taken a buxom dame and a comely into his household some three years since. Some men affirm that they are married, and some that they are not. I know nought about it for my part, save that the house is blessed with two stout boys already, who will doubtless be bred up as Priests, and it may be one of them will succeed his father in the charge of the parish. Such things cannot affect you however, Father.”

“I pray you ride on, Messire de Gauden,” exclaimed Algar, whose face had flushed red with anger. “I have hearkened to your insolence long enough.”

“Insolence! you mistake, holy Father. But I will pass on, if you so desire it. If you would learn more of Evesham field, you can make inquiry of our neighbour Ezra, who is scarce a quarter of a mile behind.”

“Ezra!” exclaimed the Priest in his surprise; “I thought he had been sent for to Court.”

“He was,” said De Gauden; “I conducted him to Evesham yesterday evening myself. But the King soon settled matters with him. Good truth, where one party is anxious to borrow money, and the other hath money that he durst not refuse to lend, a brief interview suf-

ficeth. But thou wert best to make no more complaint of Ezra, worthy Father ; he is high in favour with the King." He clapped spurs to his steed, and was gone before Algar could answer.

Father Algar resumed his way homewards in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. The intelligence of the ruin and death of the good Earl was sad enough, nor could he doubt that De Gauden had spoken the truth. The victory of Prince Edward meant the revival of the wrongs under which the Church and State in England had suffered so heavily in former years. But even this prospect was not so unwelcome to him as the intimation made in Ralph's parting words, respecting the Franciscan friars at Coventry—an order whom he, in common with most seculars, regarded with mingled fear and dislike. Coventry was not more than fifteen miles distant, near enough, no doubt, to allow of very considerable interference with his parish, if they were minded to trouble themselves about him.

The position of the secular clergy at this time was not a satisfactory one ; their influence with the people had been on the decline for a generation or two past, and there seemed little hope of their recovering their ancient prestige. There were several causes for this. The rivalry of the regulars had been most injurious : favoured by the Pope and his partizans, they had contrived from time to time, in several instances, to possess themselves of the advowsons of valuable livings, particularly those situated in the neighbourhood of their own convents. The revenues thence derived went to swell the wealth of the fraternity, and from the great numbers belong-

ing to it; they were enabled to perform the duties of the parish more efficiently, and dispense their gifts with greater liberality among the poor, than was possible in the instance of a single secular Priest. In this respect, then, they contrasted favourably with their rivals in the estimation of the people. Again, though the morals of the two orders might have been, in reality, nearly on a par, it was much easier to detect any offences against propriety in the instance of the secular than of the regular Priest. Shut up in his monastery, the public eye could not follow him, or know with any certainty what took place there. There were plenty of rumours, no doubt, imputing laxity of life to the brethren; but it was easy to give a general denial to these, as merely ill-natured stories circulated by their enemies. But the incontinence, or what was called such, of the secular clergyman, could not be denied or disguised. The woman who was regarded as his wife by his partizans, and his mistress by his enemies, lived in his house, and was as well known to the villagers as himself. Notoriously, in many instances, secular priests were succeeded in their benefices by their own sons: and though no doubt the great mass of the people were not inclined to be severe on this particular feature of their parson's character, it tended nevertheless to lower him in their eyes, and what was worse, in his own. The Canons continually made throughout the reigns of the Plantagenets, against the concubinage of the clergy, tended in the same direction, and still more the notorious fact that many parish Priests had to pay a fine to their Bishop, to omit the enforcement of the law in their

instance. There is no surer way of rendering men's lives corrupt, than by degrading them in their own eyes. "Individuals there would doubtless be," says an intelligent writer, "who formed a bright exception to the guilty mass; but when the Church at length woke up, and felt that some re-organization of her system was imperatively needed, if she hoped to keep her hold on the affections of mankind, no scandal was so generally confessed as that presented by the lives of the parochial clergy."

Father Algar had winced somewhat under the sarcasms of his parishioner, but it was not on his own account. He was himself somewhat of an ascetic; at all events, there never had been so much as a hint of any laxity of living on his part: but he was known to be the son of the previous incumbent, and had indeed been brought up and prepared for the priesthood by his own father. Ralph de Gauden had more than once levelled his shafts at this vulnerable point; and the good Priest was at a loss to know what answer he could give. He walked doggedly, and somewhat sullenly on, until the tramp of horses' feet once more induced him to turn round. This time it was no armed cavalier on his war-horse; the new comers were men of peaceful pursuits, dressed in plain dark tunics, and riding horses, serviceable enough, no doubt, in their way, but a marked contrast to the war-steeds of De Gauden and his followers. Even if Ralph had not apprised him of their approach, the Priest would have recognised the party at a glance. Ezra Ben-Hamuel had been resident for some years past in the village

of Sherbourne, together with his son now recently married. When he first made his appearance there, the principal landowners, who, whatever may have been their other merits, were not in advance of their day in respect of toleration, loudly complained of his presence. The house tenanted by him belonged to a Benedictine Monastery, and the Fathers had been tempted by the large rent offered by Ezra, to let it to him. The complainants insisted that the Jews could legally reside only in certain specified towns, and appealed to the law to support them; but the Benedictines, after long litigation, made a private application to the Chancellor, who, in consideration of a certain *douceur* to the royal treasury, not omitting another to himself, granted Ezra special licence to reside wheresoever he might please. This was Ezra's first introduction to the notice of the Court; but the acquaintance, once made, was found by Henry too useful to be dropped. Ezra was one of the wealthiest merchants of his day, and as the King had remarked at Evesham, one of the most liberal—that is to say, he was shrewd enough to perceive that it was no use attempting to exact terms which he could not enforce, and would simply cause him to forfeit the King's goodwill. He demanded no doubt a rate of usury, which may seem to us in the present day extortionate; but when we take into consideration the risk there was of there never being any repayment at all of the loan, or possibly a repayment of a kind which the lender would regard as worse than none, it may reasonably be doubted whether too much was really asked. At all events, King Henry did not

think so. He pronounced Ezra to be the very prince of money-lenders, and accorded him so much favour, that the people of Sherbourne had the wisdom to perceive that they had better leave their unwelcome fellow-parishioner alone. It is fair also to add, that as the years went on, the quiet and orderly demeanour, not of the Jew only, but of his son and the rest of his household, and the alms they bestowed on such as were willing to accept them, abated in a great measure the general prejudice.

Father Algar, always kindly disposed, saluted the old man with civility, nor was he perhaps disinclined to hold some converse with him on the subject of the battle of Evesham, only the bare result of which he had learnt from De Gauden.

“You are from Evesham field, as I learn, good Ezra. Is the fighting entirely over?”

“Yea, the fight is over,” answered Ezra. “It hath lasted too long already. A sadder sight mine eyes have never beheld. Nobles and knights lie slaughtered by the hundred, and of the common people an endless multitude. The very waters of the Avon run red with blood. Yet that is not the worst, to my thought; no, nor yet the wounded men whose hurts have not yet been tended, and whose sufferings might melt a heart of stone. The worst of all is to see the widows clinging to their husbands’ corpses, and the little children left with none to succour them.”

His eye strayed almost unconsciously, as he spoke, to a bundle, which one of his attendants carried on his saddle before him, and which, as a closer scrutiny

shewed, consisted of an infant, carefully wrapped up, and apparently not many weeks old.

"An infant, ha!" exclaimed Father Algar; "hast thou brought it with thee from Evesham? Is it one of the orphans of whom thou wert speaking?"

"Even so," answered Ezra; "I picked it from its mother's arms, who was lying cold on the corpse of her husband. It is my purpose to convey it to my house, and give it into the charge of Miriam, my newly-wedded daughter-in-law, to rear and nurture."

"Is it of thine own people, Jew?" inquired the Priest, with a sudden change of voice.

"Surely not," was the answer; "there are none of our nation in these parts. I knew not at the time who its parents were. But I have since learnt from some of the townspeople at Evesham that its father was one Stephen Forester, an archer from the forest of Wychwood, in the service of one of the Earl of Leicester's nobles."

"Then the child is of Christian parentage," rejoined the Priest. "Hath it received baptism?"

"I know not," returned the Jew, "nor did it occur to me to inquire, even if any know aught on the subject; I thought only of its utter helplessness."

"And thou didst well," said the Priest, in a milder tone. "Think not I blame thine act, but it behoveth me to care for this child's spiritual welfare, as thou hast cared for its bodily wants. I cannot suffer it to be reared in unbelief."

"I do not desire it," rejoined Ezra, sullenly. "Take the child, if thou wilt, into thine own keeping."

"I require not that," said Algar. "I will not take the infant from thee. It may continue under thy care and thy Miriam's, but I will first baptize it, and then see that it is instructed in the Christian Faith as it grows up. So may this orphan bring a blessing on thine household."

Ezra assented, more probably because he knew the hopelessness of offering resistance, than from any other reason. He took leave of the Priest, and the two repaired severally to their own homes.

Seventeen years passed away without producing any great change in the little village of Sherbourne. Father Algar did not walk so upright, and preached somewhat shorter sermons than had been his wont, and his hair had turned from dark brown to iron gray. Ezra was fast growing in years and in riches also, if the ordinary gossip of the neighbourhood was to be trusted. He had recently sustained a heavy loss in the death of his daughter-in-law, who for many years previously had been a widow. His household, apart from his domestics, now consisted of the little orphan of Evesham, to whom Father Algar had given the baptismal name of Bertrand, and his granddaughter Salone, some two years younger than Bertrand, whose rare beauty was the wonder and envy of the village girls. Bertrand had grown up a tall hardy youth, of the genuine Saxon type—his blue eyes, auburn hair, and rounded features, presenting a very marked contrast to the raven locks, deep hazel orbs, and rich olive complexion of the Hebrew maiden. Father Algar had been as good as his word; he had taught him, as soon as he was able

to learn, reading and writing and the rudiments of grammar; and would have proceeded to further instruct him in Latin, to fit him for entering the priesthood, if it had not been that young Bertrand shewed no readiness to embrace that calling, but on the contrary, a decided and ever-increasing aversion to it. He would attend respectfully and punctually enough at the appointed hours of study, and remain the prescribed time, paying what seemed to be a decent attention to the Father's instruction; but it was dull, spiritless work. The moment he found himself outside the Priest's door he became an altered being. He was off like an arrow to aid one of the Earl's foresters in striking down a deer, or to shoot a match at the butts erected by royal order on the village-green, or to take a lesson in the use of sword or quarter-staff from Dickon Hewlett, an old soldier, who had served in Ralph de Gauden's company, and had now returned to his native village.

But however much Bertrand might affect the society of this worthy, and delight to listen to his tales of King Edward's feats at Evesham and in the Holy Land, and at the celebrated fight of Chalons—he did not bestow the same liking on his late commander, who was now the owner of Gauden Farm.

Years had not done much to improve Ralph's good name among his fellows. He had continued for several years after Evesham fight to lead the same life as before, returning to his native village when weary of his roving life; and leaving it again when still more weary of its dulness. But about three years before the recommencement of the story, his brother died unwedded,

and Ralph hurried home on receipt of the news, to take possession of his inheritance. But he found the monks of Coventry in possession. The reader will remember Ralph's hint respecting their interference with the work of the secular clergy in Sherbourne, and the neighbouring villages. This intention they had carried out, by occasionally sending some of the brethren to preach and minister to all who were willing to accept their services. Among others they had contrived to establish a hold over Wilfred de Gauden, whose failing health and weak character laid him open to their influence. Father Martin, one of the brethren, constituted himself his confessor, and contrived to exclude Father Algar from the house during his last illness. When his will was opened, it was found that it was dated only the day previously, and devised the whole of his property to the Convent of the Grey Friars at Coventry.

Furious at the wrong done him, Ralph sought out his former patron, Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, and entreated his aid, which the Earl was willing enough, under the circumstances, to render. The subject of mortmain was at this time deeply stirring the minds of men. The practice of bequeathing lands, or money, to pay for masses offered in behalf of their souls, had been growing in England for many generations past. At a period many years antecedent to the present, it was affirmed, that one-third of the soil had already, in this manner, been devised to the clergy. But the mendicant Friars abused the influence of their office to a far greater extent than either seculars or regulars had done. Edward had long been meditating some decisive legis-

lation on the subject, and Ralph's case, along with half-a-dozen others, attracted unusual attention. A royal order cancelled Wilfred's will, and permitted the natural heir to succeed. Not long afterwards the celebrated statute was passed, by which all estates devised under such circumstances to the clergy, thereby became confiscate to the King.

Ralph now came home, and took up his abode permanently in the village; but after the lapse of a year or two, Father Algar began to doubt whether after all the mendicant monks would have proved more unwelcome neighbours. Ralph was in fact a perfect thorn in the good man's side. He never, by any chance, presented himself at Confession, nor at Mass; but then, just at the time when his neglect of these ordinances made the Priest's interference a matter of duty, he suddenly left the village: nor did he return, until the memory of his misconduct had more or less vanished from men's minds. Among other modes of annoying the Parson had been his continual complaints of Bertrand, whom he was for ever charging with trespass and breach of the forest laws, and it was in vain that the Priest endeavoured to prevent these *désagrémens* by urging Bertrand to give up his pursuit of woodcraft altogether.

But the lad had another mode of employing his time, when he was neither engaged in vénerie nor archery, nor sword exercise, which was more unwelcome to his preceptor than any other; and here, too, the remonstrances of the latter were even more unavailing than in the former instance. It was Bertrand's great delight of a summer's evening to thread the sylvan walks, or

wander by the banks of the Avon, in company with his foster-sister Salone, a sweet and gentle girl, the charms of whose mind, in Bertrand's eyes at all events, equalled those of her person. As years went on, and his pupil grew from a child into a boy, and from a boy into a stripling youth, Father Algar began to be sensible that he had not displayed his customary wisdom in allowing him to continue an inmate of the old Jew's house, in daily intercourse with such a companion. But it would have been extremely difficult to have found another home for Bertrand. Old Ezra himself always assured him that nothing would induce him to permit any love-making between the two. He trusted also, somewhat too much, to his own repeated admonitions on the subject. He now began to fear not only that these had had but little effect, but further, that nothing that he could urge would avail anything towards preventing a mischief already done.

In the world outside Sherbourne the eighteen years had wrought many changes. The long reign of the weak-minded Henry had come to an end; and the sceptre which had fallen from his feeble hold had been grasped by the powerful hand of his son, who had now been some ten or twelve years on the throne. The new reign had proved a welcome surprise to those who were anticipating the continuance of foreign spoliation, as the consequence of De Montfort's defeat at Evesham. If the great Earl could have arisen from his grave, he would probably have been numbered among the most loyal of Edward's subjects. The first ten or twelve years of his reign are among the most peaceful and

glorious of English history. Valuable laws were made, of which mortmain was one, many of which still remain unaltered. Many more have been the groundwork of subsequent legislation, which has exercised the most beneficial influence on the common weal. Security of property, protection to the weak from the tyranny of the strong, prompt and even-handed justice, placed within the reach of all classes of the community, are the characteristics of this bright spot in our history. The unquiet state of Wales alone disturbed the general tranquillity. It was not until the tenth year of his reign, however, that these reached a height which obliged King Edward to take up arms to punish the offenders.



CHAPTER III.

THE first of May, in the year 1282, was as bright and joyous as the pictures of it given by ancient writers would lead us to expect. The climate of England, when they wrote, must certainly have been different from what it now is, or else our forefathers took a far more cheerful view of the weather, than that in which we are apt to indulge. May-day is depicted by them as belonging to the pride and the height of the summer. The trees are represented as being in full leaf, the oaks only excepted, which nevertheless exhibit a tinge of green. The hawthorns and lilacs and laburnums are in the height of their splendour, every garden is brilliant with flowers. The warmer apparel, worn during the winter months, has been discarded weeks before.

The whole day from early morning till late evening is passed in the open air. Damp and cold appear to be things entirely of the past. Everything is redolent of warmth, light, and health.

The May-day of our story was just such an one as is here described, and the villagers of Sherbourne, especially the younger part of them, rose from their beds while the early dew was fresh on the grass, and the sun still low in the eastern sky, eager to partake of its enjoyments. The village-green had been already decked for the festivities of the day. In the centre, the May-pole had been erected, with its crown of flowers and gay ribbons. The small hostelry which stood at one corner, shaded by embowering elms, had been ornamented with garlands and green boughs, till the real frontage could hardly be discerned under them. The village maidens, tricked out in their best apparel, had repaired at the first blush of dawn to the abode of their temporary queen, to render her their homage, and conduct her to her sylvan throne. The dance and the revel followed, and was kept up, almost without intermission, varied by such rustic amusements as the villagers were acquainted with—a bowling match on the level sward between two clubs, a trial with the long-bow, or a wrestling bout, where the prize was a ram or a bull, or a butt of good ale given by the lord of the manor, or the abbot of an adjoining convent. Sometimes, though not so often, there was an encounter with the quarter-staff, the weapons being made of sturdy oak, eight feet and more in length, by which heavy and sometimes fatal blows were inflicted.

It was late in the afternoon of the day, and a considerable number of the villagers, somewhat wearied with the exertions of the morning, were gathered under the trees in front of the inn. The benches were fully occupied, and many were scattered about in knots on the green, watching the girls and their swains, as they kept up their dance to the sound of pipe and tabor round the May-pole.

"Why, Bertrand, lad!" said a forester, addressing the youth in question, "how now? Thou sitting here idle, while the lasses are footing it merrily yonder, and some of them, as I can perceive, lacking a partner! Fie, what laziness is this? See where pretty Rose Whiting is dancing all by herself, and looking this way to reproach thee for thy neglect. Up, man, and give her thy hand."

"Bertrand wont dance with any lass," said one of the bystanders. "He is sore put out, because they would not have the old Jew's granddaughter this morning for queen."

Bertrand darted a quick glance of anger at the speaker, but deigned no reply.

"The saints preserve us, neighbour," said the woodman, in a gibing tone. "Bertrand never proposed that to be sure! What would the Parson have said,—hey, Bertrand?"

"I cannot tell, Hubert!" remarked Bertrand, shortly. "And it may be that I should not greatly heed."

"Well said, my lad!" said a man in the garb of a soldier, whose scarred cheek and weather-beaten features told the tale of more than one campaign. "Well said! A likely lad of thine inches may do better, I trow,

than attend on the orders of an old shaveling, with one foot in the grave. Come with me, lad! I am on my way to join my troop at Worcester. Thou canst ride I'll be swore."

"Aye, Gilbert!" remarked Dickon Hewlett, "as well as e'er a man in thy company; and he can draw a good bow too. There is never a lad in the village can match him."

"I can well believe it," said Gilbert, "he hath soldier written on his face. Come with me, Bertrand, if that be thy name. King Edward is about to punish the rebellious Welshmen, and he hath a keen eye for a proper lad like thee; a campaign or two will make a man of thee in earnest, and thy Jewess, I will adventure on my head, will turn Christian for thy sake."

Bertrand rose without reply. "Ye are very ready to settle my affairs for me," he said, as he walked away, "but I do not need your meddling."

"Hot and quick," remarked Gilbert. "What is he to the parson?"

"His godson," answered Hubert. "Father Algar is one of his godfathers, and old Ezra the Jew another, I suppose! Ezra picked him up on Evesham field, I have heard, and hath fed, lodged, and clothed him ever since; while Father Algar hath taught him book-learning, meaning, they say, to make a parson of him like himself. But I doubt me the Father will make no parson of Bertrand. He is more like to turn Jew for love of pretty Mistress Salone, than parson for love of Father Algar, I trow."

"Thou sayest well," observed Dickon with a broad

grin; "if the good Father intended Bertrand for a shaveling, he would have done well to keep such cattle as the comely young Jewess out of his way. She is a strange sort of playfellow for a holy clerk!"

"How, a playfellow?" exclaimed a voice. "Mean you that your parson hath permitted his pupil to be reared in the same house, and live in daily intercourse with unbelievers?"

All present started, and looked somewhat confounded. A barefooted mendicant Friar, whose dress consisted of a long gray robe, with a cape of the same material, a hood which might be turned up or down at pleasure, and a girdle of rope with a cross depending from it, had come unperceived upon the scene. Father Martin was not altogether a stranger in Sherbourne, though his visits of late years had been few. He had been the confessor, as the reader has heard, of Wilfred de Gauden, and when his schemes for gaining possession of his penitent's property had failed, he had felt the disappointment so keenly, that he had little inclination to visit the scene of his failure again. On the present occasion he was on his way to Stratford, having been sent thither by his superior. He was merely stopping half-an-hour for rest and refreshment, when he overheard Dickon's speech. Ever on the look-out to pick holes in the coats of the secular Priests, he caught at the words, and proceeded to make inquiry.

None of the villagers answered his question for some time; but perceiving that he still looked for a reply, Hubert at last spoke, with a demure expression on his face.

"It is not for us of the laity to judge our most reverend teachers, holy Father."

"And there is no better or likelier lad in Sherbourne than Bertrand," remarked a man who had not hitherto spoken, and whose attire and manner, somewhat superior to those of his neighbours, shewed him to be a franklin or farmer,—“no better lad, or one more attentive to the duties he oweth to Holy Church.”

"Yet, methinks, I heard some one say that he was unwilling to embrace the holy calling proposed for him," said Father Martin.

"Aye, it was I who said so," said Hubert. "But thou knowest, holy Father, that there be but few worthy of such great honour. Bertrand, to my thought, deserves to be commended, for the lowly estimate he has formed of himself. And as for the Jewess,—the saints preserve us, it were sacrilege to believe that the Priest's own favourite pupil could think of her otherwise than as a companion and a playfellow, as Dickon said, albeit the phrase liked you not."

"Thou dealest too lightly with this matter. This seemeth to me to be a great scandal, and one that should in no wise be overlooked. It is strange that I heard nought of this before; but I judge this Bertrand could have been little more than a child when I was wont to visit here." This last sentence was spoken in an under tone, audible to himself only. "It is a great scandal, I say," he repeated, in a louder voice, "and one which it is the duty of a faithful servant of the Church to denounce. Know you not that we are sent out—we of the holy order of St. Francis—to

expose these evils, and that everywhere the people hearken to us, and follow our teaching? Nor can there be better occasion than the present, when ye are all met together for the indulgence of idle vanity and carnal gratification. For thus, what hath little profit in itself, yea rather, what is full of pernicious mischief, may be turned to your spiritual profit. See," he continued, pointing to the rustic seat, of rude carpentry, and adorned with wreaths of flowers and green boughs, which stood at no great distance raised upon steps of turf, being the throne where the Queen of May had received the homage of her subjects,—“see yonder chair, set up for the indulgence of the merest vanity and folly; follow me thither, and it shall be turned to holy uses. I will make it the pulpit, whence the word of the Living Truth shall be preached to you, to the opening of your eyes on many points, to which they have hitherto been blinded.”

He glanced round him as he spoke, and perceived to his satisfaction that he had attracted a considerable audience, most of whom were attentive, and many seemed somewhat impressed. Much encouraged, he moved towards the chair, and was followed by a good many of the bystanders.

“A plague on him!” muttered Oswald, as the franklin was called; “we shall have rare work now. He will stir up the people to discontent, if not to open violence, against our parson, who is a good and worthy man enough. Can we do nought to prevent it, Hubert?”

“Methinks there is little fear of the folk listening to his discourse to-day,” rejoined Hubert. “There is the

wrestling bout between Hob Miller and Hodge of Pulbrook, who hath come over for that special purpose, thou knowest; and there is the match at quarter-staff after that. It wants scarce a quarter-of-an-hour, by the dial yonder, to the time appointed for the wrestling. They will scarce hearken to the Friar, when Hob and Hodge strip for it."

"You are mistaken," said Oswald. "These Friars get the ear of the people, so that they will attend to nought else. I heard one of them preaching not long since at Harbury Cross—just such another one as this, only he was a black Friar instead of a gray one—and the people listened to him for two hours and more, and were scarce satisfied even then. Good truth I could scarce tear myself away, for the matter of that, notwithstanding that the rain came on enough to soak us to the skin."

"Mass! that will not do certainly," responded Hubert. "We will come a step nearer." They approached accordingly, and found that the Friar was engaged in a panegyric on the order of St. Francis, as compared with all other ranks of the Clergy, and especially as contrasted with the lazy drones, the parish Priests. The Franciscans were even, he said, as the Apostles of the first days of the Church had been, not living in luxurious houses, not wearing costly garments, not eating and drinking of the fat of the land, not possessing abundance of gold and silver, but having no house of their own, content with the coarsest dress, the simplest fare, and living wholly on the alms of the charitable and pious. These good deeds had greatly won for

them the favour of Heaven, by which in sooth they were directly inspired, so that the Blessed Virgin herself had taken them under her special protection; and not them only, but all those who attended to their teaching, and especially who bestowed alms and gifts upon them. The blessed St. Francis indeed, their Founder, had been one so pious and so holy, that the great Founder of the Church, Christ Himself, lived again in him. And to prove to men that such was the case, the body of that transcendent saint had been marked by the angels with the prints of the same wounds with which the Body of the Saviour Himself was impressed. Therefore they might be assured that that which was preached by his followers was pure and unmixed truth, and they would do well, for their souls' sake, to hearken to it.

He paused, and again looked round him to note the effect of his words upon his audience. Hubert took advantage of the occasion, "Thou speakest excellently, holy Father," he said; "nor is this altogether new to us. It was even thus that Friar John discoursed unto us not many weeks since, and deeply did his words stir our hearts."

"Ah, is that so?" said Father Martin, unwarily; "I knew not that my brother had been among ye. He is a good man and a zealous. Ye did well to treasure up his words."

"He doth indeed remind us of thee," rejoined Hubert, "though his dress was not the same as thine. Yet what signifies the dress?"

"His dress different, ha?" exclaimed Brother Martin, hastily.

"Aye, he wore a black cloak and hood, and had no girdle round his waist. Nor do I think his feet were bare, as thine are; and it was not of St. Francis, but of some other holy man that he spake. But in all other things—"

"In all other things," exclaimed the angry Friar, "in all other things do we differ, far more widely, from these men than in any matter of outward attire. Beware, my brethren. Ye have been listening to the words of falsehood—to the followers of the impostor Dominic. They are even as the serpents that creep into houses, and sting men unawares; ravening wolves are they, that devour every soul that doth not flee from them, bats and vultures—"

"Nay, good Father," said Hubert, "but he spake also of poverty and self-denial, even as thou didst, and of the special favour wherewith the Blessed Virgin regarded—"

"They!" reiterated the Franciscan, now red with anger, "they possess the favour of the Blessed Virgin, whose holiness they blaspheme, whose birth without sin they deny! I tell thee that the Holy Mother regards these men not with approval, but with pity and anger."

"But, reverend Father," persisted Hubert, "he spake also of miracles—miracles that proved the truth of his teaching, just as—"

"Like enow," again broke in the angry Friar, "such is ever the tale of these impostors. They teach falsehood in place of truth, and affirm lying wonders in proof of it. Give no ear to these sons of Belial, I charge you."

"Good Father," observed Oswald, "it would seem

that, between ye, we of the laity are in somewhat difficult case. First of all, Friar John warneth us not to hearken to the preaching of our own pastor, with whom we simple folk had been well content for I know not how many years past. He told us that Father Algar was a blind leader of the blind, and we were all in danger of falling into the pit of destruction. But if we did but hearken unto him, he said, he would lead us all straight to heaven; and now thou tellest us that he is a yet blinder guide than our own parson, and I suppose the pit into which we should fall by hearkening to him, is deeper and blacker than the other would be. Sooth to say, I can discern parlous little difference between ye, except that the one wears a gray cloak, and the other a black. And it may be that there will come yet another next week, who will be clad in white, in place of black or gray, and who will tell us that thou art the blindest guide of all, and thy pit the worst and the miriest of any. How say ye, my friends? Methinks there is but little profit in hearkening to teachers like these?"

"Well spoken, Richard Oswald," exclaimed Hubert; "we have had enow of this, and it is time now for the wrestling match to begin; let us go down and see it."

The Friar would fain have detained them, but he had lost their ear, and the attraction was too potent. In a few minutes his audience had melted away like a snowball on an April morning. With an angry exclamation he took up his staff, and moved off in the direction of the Coventry Road—not however before he had registered a vow, that he would bring these Sherbourne

boors to a better sense of their duty, and more particularly that the unfaithfulness of Father Algar in the matter of his pupil should not pass unheeded.

Meanwhile, Bertrand had wended his way homewards in a very discontented frame of mind. The jests with which he was now frequently assailed respecting his foster-sister, grew daily more distasteful to him, as the damsel herself became more attractive in his eyes. It was not true that he had made any suggestion that she should be made queen of the revels, as Dickon had declared; but it was true that her absence from the festive scene deprived it of all interest in his eyes. Salone was indeed a noble girl; her exquisite and refined beauty was but the least of her charms. Her temper was gentle and affectionate, and her sisterly love for Bertrand had never been disturbed by any misgivings, as to the possibility of its bringing trouble either upon herself or him. She had been far better educated than was usual with maidens of her station, and was possessed of a keen intellect and a warm imagination. The past history of her people, with all its glories, contrasting so forcibly with their present humiliation, the deep wrongs they sustained at the hands of their fellow-men, and the unflinching resolution with which those wrongs were endured, tended to deepen and strengthen her character. She was devotedly fond of her grandfather, who on his part doted on her, as the one object which had now any interest for him in life. Perhaps it was this very affection on his part, coupled with the regard which he also entertained towards Bertrand, that had induced him to allow a companionship,

which his knowledge of the world must have told him was likely to be embarrassing. But they had been playmates during the period when no distinction of creed could be understood by either, and the years had slipped away without anything occurring to warn him that it was time to break off the intimacy. Perhaps, too, he trusted, with something of a bitter feeling, to the impossibility of any Christian youth conceiving an attachment for a Jewess; and on the other hand, to the proud feeling of a daughter of that despised race, which would permit no tender feeling to spring up in her mind for one who held her race and creed in abhorrence. Had he known the truth, that their intercourse had caused the first childish love gradually to grow into a more enduring and passionate affection—nay, more, to induce Salone insensibly to regard the creed of her lover, if not with favour, at least without dislike, and as a thing which it might not be impossible for herself to adopt,—he would, doubtless, have been greatly shocked and distressed. Salone's feelings, however, on this subject were but imperfectly comprehended by herself at this time; nor did anything ever pass openly between her and Bertrand on the subject.

The latter had, for a long time past, cherished the idea of her adoption of his faith, and a union with him consequent upon it; and though this, in the eyes of all sober men, might be but a wild fancy, what will not youthful passion believe? But even he could not help acknowledging that his dream could not, for years at least, be realised; and this rendered the recent gibes of his companions extremely unwelcome. He would not

remain in Sherbourne to be the sport of every idle jester. The proposal, therefore, just made him by the King's soldier, Gilbert, found favour in his eyes; it seemed to offer a release from his difficulties. He reflected that his father—as gallant an archer, they told him, as had ever drawn bowstring—had served under Mortimer before he joined De Montfort; and the former Earl, he was assured, would welcome him for his father's sake. He would be able to make his own way in the world, and be rid of the Priest's importunity to follow a calling for which he had no inclination. It would be better for Salone also. She would be delivered from the persecution she was beginning to undergo on his account. When he returned, in a few years' time, he might find her willing to accept both his creed and himself; at present she was of age to do neither.

In this frame of mind he entered the Jew's house, and was pleased to find Salone by herself. Ezra, it appeared, had received a summons from the magistrates at Warwick, in consequence of some complaint made against him. This suited Bertrand. If he should accept Gilbert's offer, he could not go without first communicating his intention to Ezra and his granddaughter—indeed, without coming to some understanding with the latter.

The Jewish maiden was seated on a pile of cushions, engaged in embroidery-work. The room in which she was sitting, though not large, was well, indeed richly furnished for those times; for the Jews indemnified themselves for their inability to hold landed estates by profuse expenditure on the interiors of their dwell-

ings. Salone's dress, too, was both costly and well fancied: she wore a turban of dark red silk, a kirtle of the same material, secured by golden clasps down the bosom; her rich black hair, matching well with the colour of her eyes and the olive of her complexion, fell in graceful profusion over her neck; she wore also a necklace of alternate diamonds and pearls. Altogether, her appearance might well have dazzled eyes more inclined to be critical than those of Bertrand. It should, however, be mentioned, that though the lovely Jewess indulged herself within the shelter of her father's house with these costly decorations, she never ventured to display them in public, where they would probably have attracted the scoffs, if not the violence, of those who beheld them.

There was a look of sadness in her dark eyes, which Bertrand was quick to perceive.

"Hath aught happened amiss, Salone?" he inquired.

"I fear there has," answered the Jewess. "An hour ago there arrived some men from Warwick, who were the bearers of a summons from the mayor requiring my father to appear before him. Ralph de Gauden hath made a complaint that an unlawful amount of usury hath been demanded on a sum that my father lent him, I know not how long ago. He hath sought in vain for repayment; but now, at last, when he hath insisted on having his money back, with a threat of the law if his demand was not complied with, this complaint hath been made."

"Nay, but all men know Ezra to be a merciful man, as well as a just," said Bertrand. "The mayor will

dismiss the complaint, and thy grandfather will get his own."

"Aye, so he would, were justice done," said Salone. "But thou knowest what wrong is done to our people, and how easily are the minds of the judges prejudiced against them; no tale, so idle or monstrous, but if it be told against a Jew, the people will believe it. This Ralph knoweth that the King would fain forbid money-lending altogether, and is ever inclined to deal harshly with those who practise it: my grandfather, too, knows this, and it was Ralph's importunity alone that wrung this loan from him. Further than that, it is pretended that the gold pieces paid over to Ralph were light of weight, and that he had tampered with them. The charge is as false as the accuser himself is; but it is a most dangerous one. Great numbers of our people have been arrested and put to death on account of it, for the most part without any reason at all. If justice be done him, my grandfather is safe, not only from death or imprisonment, but even from censure: but who shall assure the poor Jew that justice shall be done?"

Bertrand took one or two turns up and down the apartment. "I grieve for thee, Salone," he said, "yea, and for thy grandfather also, who hath ever been as a parent to me. It is grievous wrong, doubtless, but I know not how it is to be prevented. While you continue in unbelief, it is impossible that Christian men can look on you as brethren—"

"Aye, indeed, Bertrand," interposed Salone reproachfully. "Yet thou hast told me many a time that thou lovest me as a sister!"

“Yea, and I spoke truly,” said Bertrand; “or rather I should have said no sister could be so dear. But then I know thee for what thou art; and I owe thee and thine a debt of gratitude, which I were base indeed to forget. And besides,” he added more doubtfully, “that is not all; thy race look upon our Creed, I know, with a scorn and aversion, which at least equals what Christians feel for thine. Yet thou hast told me, more than once, that thou dost not so view our Faith,—that thou canst at least understand its holiness and beauty.”

“I understand its holiness and beauty as taught by Father Algar, or, at least, as thou hast reported his teaching to me,” answered Salone; “But it seems to me that thy creed is one thing as preached by him, and another as practised by thy countrymen. Thou didst talk to me of God having made all men of one blood, and of there being no difference in His sight between one man and another; how that thy Paul himself declared that thy faith saw no difference between Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female. To a creed like that my heart would warm. But, Bertrand, is that the faith of thy people, is it at least their practice?”

Bertrand again paced the room. “Father Algar would say,” he answered at length, “that the holy Apostle meant that Christ would accept all who came to Him, whatsoever their race or condition; but that the Jews would not come to Him, and therefore forfeited the blessing. But wherefore shouldst thou not so come, Salone? If the creed be lovely in thine eyes, wherefore not embrace it?”

“And join with those who have trampled on my race and people, and number myself among those who despise and persecute them!” exclaimed the maiden. “Bertrand, thou shouldst know me better than that! The law, which we both acknowledge as true and holy, commands us to honour our father and mother,—shall I obey that law by casting dishonour on my grandsire’s grey hairs? It bids us to care first and love most those of our own nation,—shall I be fulfilling it, thinkest thou, by forsaking them for the company of their deadliest enemies?”

“Nay, Salone,” said Bertrand; “but let me pray you to talk with Father Algar on this matter; he will be patient and gentle with you, and will make plain to you what is your duty. Do not deny me this request, which, it may be, is the last I shall make of you.”

“The last!” repeated Salone; “how mean you?”

“I mean that I cannot continue longer an inmate of your house; I mean you no reproach,” he added quickly, as he saw the change in her face; “I shall ever owe you and yours the deepest gratitude. But I cannot silence men’s tongues—”

“I understand,” said Salone, colouring deeply. “But my grandfather—”

“I cannot serve him, believe me,” said Bertrand; “my presence rather does him injury. He has the King’s protection; that must be his safeguard.”

“I fear that is a reed that grows every day more rotten,” said the damsel. “The King hearkens more and more to those counsellors who hate our race, and assail us with the most monstrous calumnies. Even his will to defend us may undergo change, and if not his

will, certainly his power. But if thou leavest Sherbourne, whither goest thou?"

"To the Welsh wars," said Bertrand; "I have some hope of finding favour with the Earl of Mortimer, and if I should gain advancement, I may be able to render help to Ezra. But my movements must be prompt. Gilbert Bain, who is of Mortimer's following, leaves Sherbourne to-morrow. He offered to take me with him, but I gave no token of my intention to accept his offer, wishing to keep my departure a secret. I shall seek him now, and urge him to depart at early dawn. This, then, must be our farewell. Thou wilt grant my last request, Salone,—that thou refuse not to hearken to Father Algar. Wilt thou do so?"

"Yes," said Salone softly, her eyes filled with tears. Bertrand kissed them away, and they parted.



CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT six weeks had passed since Bertrand's sudden departure, and the latter event had almost ceased to be a subject of wonderment in the village. It was Sunday morning. There was the same peculiar and solemn hush—still pervading our villages on the day of rest—the observance of which depends rather on the character of the people, than the doctrines prevalent in the Church of the age. You met scarcely any peasants abroad in the roads or fields, and such as you did encounter, wore their best clothes, and walked leisurely, as men who had no business on their minds. The

farmers' horses looked over gates and hedges at you as you passed, or stretched and rolled themselves luxuriously in the sun. The deep repose was broken only by the sound of the church bell, summoning the congregation to Mass. Father Algar left his parsonage at the usual hour, and trod the pathway leading from his garden-gate to the church,—the same pathway he had used for more than thirty years, with little difference, except that his step was somewhat feebler. But his mood was considerably changed when he issued from the chancel-door, at the conclusion of the service.

His congregation had been exceptionally small,—smaller than he had ever known it; excepting at those times when one of the fearful maladies, to which those ages were liable, had swept over the country. There was no sickness now, but, nevertheless, the Priest was at no loss to account for the scantiness of the attendance. Even had this been otherwise, the spectacle he beheld, as he passed out of the churchyard-gate, would fully have explained everything.

A good deal had passed since the May-day festival. Father Martin, as the reader will remember, had taken himself off in great dudgeon. He had failed altogether to induce the people to listen to him: he was an obstinate man, and opposition only rendered him more determined. If the inhabitants had lent him the half-sleepy attention he so often met with, he might have felt little inclination to visit Sherbourne again; if he had discovered a good many holes in Father Algar's coat, so to speak, he might have considered him as scarcely worth attacking. As it was, he resolved to re-

deem his credit by some vigorous measures, which he felt assured would not fail of success.

Among the attractions, by means of which the mendicant Friars contrived to gain the ear of the common people, none were more successful than the mysteries, or miracle plays, which they were in the habit of performing. A great deal has been written of the profanity of these exhibitions, as well as of their gross absurdity. Doubtless, if one of them should be reproduced, exactly as it was acted in the thirteenth century, it would appear to us ludicrous in the extreme, but for its seemingly blasphemous irreverence. But it should be borne in mind that the lower orders of that day were not only ignorant to a degree which it is hard for us now to conceive, but also that there was the utmost difficulty in conveying instruction to them. Even if they could be taught to read, there were no books within their reach. The Bible, now to be purchased for less than the price of a man's daily meal, was then a costly article, even for a rich man's purse. Art was at so low an ebb, that it was hopeless to attempt instruction through pictures or statuary. The persons qualified to convey information by oral teaching were comparatively few, and for the most part otherwise employed. The miracle plays unquestionably did afford some knowledge of the fundamental truths of Christianity, and had the advantage of attracting the attention of the people, as no sermon would have done. It was perilous work, no doubt, and the evils arising from it were neither few nor small. To deal with the most sacred mysteries and the holiest characters of Scripture as materials out of

which to compose a play, which would please an audience and yet preserve the deep sanctity and reverence due to such things, is what not one mind in a generation is capable of performing. We may see in such traditional expressions as a "Merry Andrew," a "Man John," a "Simple Simon," and the like, the manner in which the Apostles came, at one time or another, to be handled; and, it is needless to add, how injurious to the minds of the spectators such treatment of them must have been. Only let it be remembered, that they were not (originally at least) undertaken in any objectionable spirit, but were an honest attempt to meet an acknowledged difficulty.

The Franciscans, as has been already intimated, were famous for their successful performance of these plays; and it is said that no convent in England was so celebrated for this branch of sacred art as that of the Grey Friars at Coventry. Father Martin resolved to employ, if possible, the dramatic talents of his brethren in carrying out his designs; and had no sooner returned to Coventry, than he sought an interview with the Prior, and made known his wishes. The brethren were then engaged on preparing a play for Whitsunday next ensuing, representing the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, and the miracle of tongues which ensued. The convent was a large one, but nearly the whole of the brethren, and a considerable number of supernumeraries, were employed in it. Father Martin himself enacted the part of St. Thomas, and had, like the rest, to repeat a string of unintelligible jargon, which was interpreted by one of the bystanders as being perfectly

intelligible to him. Each of the twelve had a species of lamp attached to the peaked caps they wore—the lamps being simultaneously kindled by some of the bystanders at the proper moment. The Prior himself took the part of St. Peter, delivering the address with which, and the prostration of the multitude at his feet, the whole concluded.

The good Fathers were very proud of their performance, which they flattered themselves would surpass all former exhibitions, renowned though these had been. The mystery was to be acted at Coventry, of course, on the Sunday; on the Monday, by special request, it was to be repeated before the Earl of Leicester at Kenilworth Castle; and at Warwick on the Tuesday. Brother Martin besought the Prior, as a personal favour, that a fourth performance might take place at the village of Sherbourne, before the Fathers returned home on the Wednesday. The village, he said, was in a state of great spiritual darkness, and he was anxious to obtain a hold over the people, which the exhibition of this play would greatly facilitate. Many would also come from Stratford, who would not travel as far as Warwick. The Prior had consented, and the play was accordingly performed in the great barn at Gauden Grange, lent by Ralph for the occasion.

The reader may wonder at this circumstance, considering the quarrel that had taken place between the Convent and Ralph respecting Wilfred's bequest. But De Gauden bore a bitter dislike to Father Algar, and was shrewd enough to see that nothing would be so distasteful to him, or so injurious to his influence, as the suc-

cess of the miracle play. He had accordingly swallowed his resentment, and offered the barn. The mystery produced all the effect hoped for. The splendid dresses, the sudden kindling of the light, the antics of the men seeming to be "filled with new wine," the Babel of unintelligible sounds, followed by the conversion of the multitude, were received with rapturous admiration. When Brother Martin visited the village a day or two subsequently, and hinted that if he continued to receive as cordial a welcome as they now seemed inclined to give him, the mystery of the Nativity, which they had now in preparation for the ensuing Christmas, might be acted in Gauden's barn, the intimation was received with an eagerness which told him that his work was already half-done. Several of the villagers came at once to him for confession and absolution; and the ice once broken, there were plenty to follow their example. Old Luke Wendell, whose unmeasured potations had brought him under Father Algar's censures, and who had undergone a penance of entire abstinence from strong drink for six months; Roger Bramwell, who had been lectured last Lammas for his close-fistedness, and required to distribute a dole of warm clothing at Christmas to the poor; Rose Hulse and Bridget Elford, whose gossiping tongues had been still more severely punished, by a command to abstain from all speech altogether, until they had repeated a prescribed number of Pater Nosters and Aves; Lucy Stockton, who had been threatened with a public reprimand in the face of the congregation, if she persisted in walking in the woods with young Frampton,

a youth of notoriously loose character—all these straight-way betook themselves to this new confessor, and all met with a ready sympathy in their complaints of their pastor. Whatever penances had been imposed were remitted; a simple promise of amendment was proposed in lieu of these, and this having been given readily enough, all the penitents received absolution. It needs not to add, that they were ready enough to proclaim their victory over their parish Priest, and reports of Father Martin's strictures on the latter were circulated through the village, most of which however, it must in justice be added, had their origin in Dame Hulse's inventive powers. The effect was soon felt in the slackening of discipline, not in the instance only of the persons already named, but throughout Father Algar's flock. If he reproved, those whom he censured murmured that he was too severe; if he forbade any doubtful indulgence, he was reminded that others were more lenient; if he allowed anything which might be cavilled at, his concessions were commented upon as culpable laxity. In short, Father Algar underwent all the trials to which a parish Priest is liable in the present day, in a village where Dissent is rampant. The nineteenth-century Parson may lament that his work is marred, or be angry that his character is maligned, by the Baptist or Independent minister, who preaches at the rustic Bethel on the green, and perhaps may look back with a sigh to past centuries, when, as he fancies, all was unity. But he may comfort himself with the certainty, that he cannot undergo greater annoyance than his prototype had to endure, six hundred years ago, at the hands

of the Franciscan or Dominican Friar who had invaded his fold. Nor ought he to overlook the important fact, that whereas the nonconformist minister of the present day comes before the people in his own name only, the adversary of the thirteenth century could claim the authority of the acknowledged Head of the Church, the holy Father himself, in his justification.

Brother Martin resolved to follow up promptly the advantage he had gained. Accordingly, on the very next Sunday after the performance of the miracle play, he repaired to Sherbourne, accompanied by two of the lay brethren, who carried the moveable pulpit from whence he was wont to preach, as well as all the requisites for the Celebration of Mass afterwards in the long disused chapel of Gauden Grange. He took care to arrive a little time after the commencement of the service in the parish church, and to keep the knowledge of his intended visit a secret from Father Algar; so that the latter only became aware of his presence in the village, when he issued forth from the church at the close of the service, and found Brother Martin pouring forth his most fervid periods to a numerous throng, who ought to have been in attendance on their own pastor's ministry. Father Algar was a mild man, but this was enough to stir the bile of the meekest of human kind. Uttering an exclamation of grief and anger, he almost leaped over the paling of the churchyard, and strode up to the spot where the intruder's pulpit had been set up. Many eyes had been on him, and there had been much speculation as to how he would comport himself under circumstances so new and trying. The Fran-

ciscan stopped in the middle of his discourse, as he perceived his antagonist's approach, and prepared to do battle with him. Father Algar's congregation had followed their Priest, and such of the villagers as had not been present at either service came hurrying up, anticipating, doubtless, an exciting scene.

The Parson glanced indignantly round him, but for a minute or two he did not speak. Perhaps, notwithstanding his resentment he was unwilling to commence a war of angry words with a brother Priest, when all were, ostensibly at least, met together for God's worship. But the Friar was troubled with no such scruples.

"*Pax vobiscum*, reverend brother," he began; "we have come here, as thou seest, to do what lies in our power towards the feeding of these sheep of the Church's fold, who so sorely need it."

"I see thee," said Father Algar; "but I know not by what right thou presumest thus to take out of my hands the flock over whom I have been set in the Lord. Knowest thou how many years I have laboured among this people, and how the Lord hath blessed my labours?"

"Nay, I know it not, my brother," said Martin; "and judge that thou art mistaken in so thinking. It seemeth to me that they need to be awakened to the knowledge of the light, rather than to possess it in such abundance as men should do who have long had the benefit of sound teaching. But what further wouldst thou ask?"

"I would know by what authority thou comest into this parish, (in which I have been placed by the Lord

Bishop of this diocese,) and strivest to supersede me in mine office?"

"By the authority of the holy Father," said Martin, "who is the superior of thy Diocesan, as he is also of thee and me. Thou canst not but have heard that the short-comings of thyself and thy brethren have provoked the gravest scandal, sorely distressing the heart of him who is the Priest of all priests, and the Bishop of all bishops, having no superior but God, Whose Vicegerent he is. Surely thou knowest that these doings have so deeply troubled him, that he hath sent us out—us of the Order of the holy St. Francis—to correct your errors and supply your defects, so far as it may be in the power of men to do so."

"I know nought of the kind," cried the Priest, his indignation now mastering his self-command. "If I have done aught amiss, let it at least be proved, ere these terms are applied to me in the presence of mine own people."

"With what dost thou charge him, holy Father?" asked the franklin Oswald, who had formed one of the Parson's scanty congregation. "He may have done many things amiss; but, if so, none in this village, so far as my knowledge extends, are acquainted with them."

Oswald was a man of considerable weight and importance in the village, partly from his position, partly because he spoke but seldom, and to the purpose when he did speak. A murmur of approval followed his words. Father Martin noticed the effect they produced, and felt constrained to answer them.

“Well, let us inquire somewhat about this Parson of yours,” he rejoined. “Is that his house yonder?” he asked, pointing to the neat and modest parsonage, the gables of which might be seen through the foliage of the churchyard elms.

“Yea,” said Oswald, “and a tight and comfortable parsonage too.”

“And yonder nag—that is his horse, I suppose?”

“Yea, and there be worse hereabouts, and elsewhere too.”

“I warrant me he hath no lack of good provender, or befitting apparel?” continued the Friar.

“Surely,” rejoined Oswald; “for what dost thou take us, that we should grudge our Parson things like these?”

“My friend,” rejoined the Franciscan, “how shall any man teach that to others, which he doth not practise himself. Thinkest thou that they who have abundance of this world’s goods, are likely to persuade others to care nought for them? As well, I trow, might ye go to a usurer to learn honesty, or a swash-buckler to acquire meekness. It is the Holy Scripture that saith, ‘Take no thought for the things of the morrow,’ yet it would seem that your parson hath taken good thought of things for many a morrow to come.”

“Thou takest no thought for the morrow then—thou and thine?” remarked Oswald.

“We do not,” replied the Friar confidently. “They who follow the holy rule of St. Francis obey the commands of the Gospel, and care nothing for the things of this life. They are abundant in labours, but not for the meat that perisheth. They store up treasure, but

it is not the treasure of this world. That, then, is one thing with which I charge these parish Priests. They live on the fat of the land, and command others to be content with the lean thereof. They lay heavy burdens on men, but touch them not themselves with their little fingers. They oblige others to fast and watch, but themselves sleep and take their ease. They command others to bestow their goods in alms, but they themselves spend their own substance on their lusts and fancies. Above all, they punish unchastity in others, but they themselves observe not their vows of chastity. They—”

“Soft you there,” broke in Oswald, “methinks you have said enough, if not too much already, master Friar; and I for one have no mind to hear more. Neighbours and fellow-parishioners,” he continued, raising his voice, “shall we stand by and hear our Parson thus abused in his own parish, and speak never a word in his behalf? Forty years have I lived in Sherbourne, and never heard the like said before. For thirty of that forty hath good Father Algar had the charge of us, and who ever knew him do any of the things which this stranger—for with all his stage plays and his brave words, he is but a stranger—imputeth to him?”

“You are right, Dick Oswald,” exclaimed Hob Miller. “I have known Father Algar since I was little better than a stripling youth, and I make mine avow that he is a good man and a holy, and deserveth not these bitter words. If he hath laid aught upon us, it has been for our souls’ good; nor doth he refuse to bear our burden. In the year of the great sickness, when

we were all like to die, and many men stood aloof from the houses of those who were taken sick, was he among those that held back for fear of catching the infection himself? Not so, he was foremost in attendance upon them; and it was marvel, as we all thought, how he came through it alive."

"And as for spending his money on himself only, a' gives away pretty nigh all a' has," added a woman.

"And as for the sin of uncleanness, Master," wound up Hubert, "you are altogether out in your reckoning there. Ne'er a man has charged him with aught of that kind, from the day he entered Sherbourne till now. We have had enough of this, neighbours, methinks."

"Enough and to spare," said Dickon Hewlett.

"And won't hear any more," shouted Miller; and a very general cry echoed his words.

"You hear, Father," said Oswald, "your room will be more welcome than your company. Should you again visit Sherbourne, you will do wisely to speak civilly of the Parson, or to hold your tongue altogether about him."

The Franciscan's wrath was greatly roused by this change in the popular feeling.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "do you presume to treat me thus? Beware, lest I report this to the Prior of my convent, who, I doubt not, will at once make it known to the Archbishop—"

"Report it to whom thou wilt," rejoined the sturdy Oswald, "only, if thou art discreet, thou wilt take thyself off before worse comes of it. Thy bare scalp and thy

grey hood may be of great moment in men's eyes, but I trow the one will not protect thy back against the blows which some of the profane here may lay upon thee, or the other guard thy head from being broken by some of the heavy stones which lie about here. Will ye take up this preaching-trap of yours," he added, turning to the two lay brethren, "will ye carry it off, I say, or must we help you to do it?" He laid his hand as he spoke on the desk of the moveable pulpit, and the lay brethren, probably mistaking his purpose, rushed upon him, shouting "Sacrilege!" with all the power of their lungs, and endeavouring to drag him from the spot. Hob Miller and others ran up to his rescue, and a scuffle ensued, greatly to the disadvantage of the strangers. Covered with mud, their cassocks torn, and severely bruised, the Friars were obliged to betake themselves to flight, leaving the pulpit behind them. They were soon a quarter of a mile from the spot where the fracas had taken place, and were still hurrying on, when they were stopped by a friendly voice, which exclaimed, "What, Father Martin, wherefore this haste, and how come ye in such a plight?"

Martin stopped, and looked hurriedly at his questioner, in whom he recognised Ralph de Gauden.

"Messire de Gauden, I entreat your help and protection," he exclaimed; "I have been shamefully entreated by these boors, my ministrations contemned, mine office abused, my person mis-handled. But I know well that it is the false Priest Algar who has secretly stirred up his congregation to do me this de-

spite. But he shall dearly rue it. Let me but reach Coventry—”

“Thither will I ride with you, holy Father,” said Gauden, “as soon as you are somewhat rested and refreshed. Pray you step into my poor house here, where at least you will be safe from insult.”

Father Martin readily consented, and followed De Gauden, continuing to pour forth voluble outcries against the ingratitude of the people and the misdeeds of Father Algar—especially in the matter of his godson and the Jewess, which he was resolved to report without delay to his superior: this charge having just recurred to his recollection, and appearing to him the most suitable weapon wherewith to assail his enemy.

Ralph listened to his complaints with much satisfaction. He himself bore a bitter grudge against the two principal persons included in the Friar's indictment,—Father Algar, that is to say, and the old Jew, Ezra. He had returned on the previous evening from Warwick, where the suit between Ezra and himself had just been determined by one of the newly-appointed circuit judges, who heard cases now three times in every year. De Gauden had known well enough that the rate of interest charged him had not been higher than the law permitted. He knew also that the other accusation he had preferred against his creditor, that of tampering with the coinage, had not a particle of trustworthy evidence to support it. But he had relied on the general prejudice existing against the Jews on both these subjects, as well as on the venality of the judges,

who might (he thought) be easily enough induced, by bribery, to decide any case in favour of a Christian against a Jew.

It is quite possible that he might, in other shires, have succeeded in this design. The corruption of the judges in previous reigns had been notorious. Indeed, only a few years subsequently to this time, nearly all the chief legal functionaries were indicted for bribery, and with scarcely a single exception convicted and severely punished. But it chanced that Adam de Brome, before whom the cause was tried, was one of the few who formed an honourable exception to the general rule. He had insisted on all the facts being brought forward and fully sifted. Therefore, notwithstanding the plausible suggestions of Ralph's counsel, and the clamours of the common people, who had been stirred up to a riotous demand for vengeance on the Jew extortioner, judgment had been given against De Gauden; and the sum he was ordered to pay was so heavy, as to threaten him with ruin.

It now occurred to him, as he listened to Father Martin, that possibly the Franciscan might help him in escaping from the dilemma in which he found himself involved. If a Jew could be proved guilty of having by bribery induced a Christian to turn renegade, his ruin would be speedy and complete. And this, so far as he could ascertain, was the charge the Friar now brought against Ezra. He resolved, however, to make sure that such was the case.

"Ezra the Jew!" he exclaimed, at the close of one of the Friar's most indignant periods, "hath he had aught

to do with this outrage then? That were a scandal indeed, and one for which no penalty could well be too heavy."

"It is rather Father Algar, than he, whom I accuse," returned Father Martin, "though doubtless the Jew hath a large share of the blame. Grievous indeed is the scandal, yet who can wonder after all, that one who can stir up godless men to persecute the holy Brotherhood of St. Francis, should be guilty also of conniving at the apostasy of his own godson and pupil for the sake of gain!"

"His own godson and pupil!" repeated Ralph; "what that malapert, Bertrand, dost thou mean? Hath he turned Jew then? I knew that he had disappeared from the village some weeks ago, but I knew not the reason."

"The reason is well known," said Martin, who had been informed of Bertrand's disappearance, together with its presumed explanation, by the veracious Dame Hulse. "It is well known that he hath conceived an unlawful affection for the granddaughter of this Jew. I have never seen her, but—"

"But I have," said Ralph, "and do not greatly wonder at the springald's fancy. She is a damsel of rare grace and beauty, and thou knowest, holy Father, that however much it may diminish her inward excellencies, the fact of her being a Jewess does not impair her bodily charms."

"It may be," said the Friar austerely. "I bless Heaven I know nought of such matters. But it is certain, not only that the youth hath entertained this

affection, but that the old grandfather lends himself to it. Yea, he hath offered the youth the damsel's hand in marriage, if he will renounce the Christian creed, and partake in his own belief."

"Methinks, holy Father," rejoined Ralph, who was staggered at this assertion, "Bertrand would scarce venture on such a step as that. There be heavy penalties—"

"Aye, if it were done in this country," said the Franciscan. "But it is their purpose to betake themselves to some foreign land,—Morocco probably, or Granada,—where they may live among those who blaspheme Christ like themselves."

"Ha! and he hath gone abroad to make preparations, and secure a home for them, ere they also depart. Is that thy meaning?" asked De Gauden.

"Even so," answered the Franciscan. "I chanced to be over here some few weeks ago, when I first heard of this matter, and threatened to make inquiry respecting it. That very same evening my young master disappeared, and no man knows whither he is gone. Who can doubt that it is even as I have said?"

"No one," said De Gauden. "But if complaint of this should be made to the King or the Archbishop, certes it would prove the ruin of the Jew."

"Yea, and of Father Algar also," said the Friar.

"Surely," assented Ralph; "they are both alike to blame, and ought both to be punished. Let us make common cause then, my Father, and bring this matter before the King and his council. I have interest with the Earl of Norfolk and the Lord de Warenne; to

them will I submit this matter, praying them that they lay it before the King. Thou on thy part can doubtless aid the matter."

"I can," said Martin; "His Grace, the Primate, was once a brother of our Order, and he has never forgotten the fact. I will straightway ask for letters to him from our Prior, and make in person my complaint against this insolent and unfaithful Priest."

"Hasten to do so," said his worthy ally, "and we shall prosper. We strike at our foes with a two-edged weapon thou seest, and if one edge should be found blunt, the other may yet be trenchant enough for our purpose."



CHAPTER V.

It was some four months after the discomfiture of Friar Martin, as related in the last chapter, when our story is resumed. The scene is now transferred from England to North Wales. A long train of horse-soldiers—the greater part of them armed with helmet and breast-plate, and carrying either long spears or bows and arrows—were winding their way along the banks of the river Clwyd, about two miles from the point of its influx into the Irish Sea. The soldiers were divided into two bands, one of which rode in advance, and the other followed in the rear, of a company of about eighty or a hundred horsemen, whose escort they formed. At the head of the central party rode a man of middle age, stern of feature and grave in deportment, to whom great deference was paid by the others. He was

nevertheless very simply dressed, wearing the long grey coat and hooded cloak, together with the rope girdle, of a Franciscan friar. This person was John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was on his way to join the King, then engaged in actively prosecuting his campaign against the Welsh Prince Llewellyn. He had held the Primacy for about four years at the present time, having been nominated to it by Pope Nicholas III., without the concurrence of either King Edward or the Chapter of Canterbury. Considering the character of Edward, and the unprecedented assumption of power which such a proceeding displayed, it is surprising that the appointment was allowed to stand good. But there were special circumstances which induced both the Sovereign and the Chapter to accept the Papal nomination. It was not on the whole, however, a wise election. Peckham, as the reader has already heard, had been a Minorite Friar, and his enemies declared, not without some reason, that he never ceased to be one. His sympathies were always on the side of the Pope, the great patron of friars, in any contest which might arise between him and the English people: his sympathies were on the side of the monastic clergy, in any contest which might arise between them and the seculars: above all, his sympathies were with his own order, the Franciscans, in any contest which might arise between them and any rival fraternity. His prejudices often warped his judgment, and he was apt to be harsh and severe towards those who opposed or resisted him. But it is fair to add, that he was sincere in his opinions, and strict in his own daily life.

On his right hand, wearing nearly the same dress, but mounted on a steed of less pretension, rode Brother Martin of Coventry. He had lost no time in putting into execution the projects devised by himself and Ralph de Gauden; but he had found that personages of high rank were not so easy of access as their suitors expect or desire. The King was already in Wales, engaged in a bloody and doubtful campaign, when the conspiracy between the two worthies was hatched. The journey to the Menai Straits was a long and hazardous one. Moreover, Ralph surmised that Edward would have little leisure, and less inclination, to concern himself with an affair so trifling as that of the misconduct of a country parson or a Jew trader. A great nobleman, who had access to Edward's presence, might take an opportunity of bringing it to his notice. But De Gauden's patron was not at this time in the camp, and nothing therefore had been said to him on the subject. It was different, now that the Archbishop had joined Edward. Peckham had readily granted Martin an audience, and the complaints he urged greatly moved him. The Archbishop had been much scandalized by the low tone of learning and morals among the secular clergy; one of whom he had caused to be publicly whipped at Salisbury. "The ignorance of Priests," he says in one of his Constitutions—meaning by the Priests the parochial clergy—"plunges the people into error, and the stupidity of clerks doth rather mislead, than teach them." He charges them also with the gravest immorality. "Incontinency is a lamentable disgrace to the clergy," he writes, "and a common

scandal. We lay all clergymen and laymen who practise such filthiness, under sentence of the greater excommunication, reserving the power of absolving them to the persons of the Bishops only, except at the point of death."

Such being the feeling of the Archbishop on this subject, a complaint against a secular Priest of slackness in his duty, was sure to receive, at least, all the attention it merited from him, and particularly when preferred by a Franciscan. The other point, too, laid before him was equally certain to engross his attention. An increasing dread and jealousy of the Jews seems to have been the sentiment which at this time most agitated the religious world. It was declared that the Jews, protected now by the impartiality of the law, which repressed popular demonstrations against them, were rapidly growing so wealthy, as to set public opinion at nought. They were building sumptuous synagogues in conspicuous places, putting the Christian churches in their neighbourhood to shame by comparison. They were even reported to be alluring Christian men to apostatize from their Faith by the offer of tempting bribes. It is not impossible that there was some truth in these charges; at all events, they were generally credited. Not long afterwards, Honorius IV. addressed a Bull to the Primate, complaining of the negligence of the clergy in overlooking these Jewish aggressions. "The Jews," he writes, "lure men to their synagogues on the Sabbath-day. They buy Christian servants, both male and female, and at their common eatings and drinkings malicious attempts are made to lead them

astray." He also intimates that in many cases the attempts to pervert the Faith of the Christians was successful.

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that Brother Martin gained Peckham's ear without much difficulty; and he was invited to accompany the Archbishop into Flintshire, whither he was about to proceed in the course of a few weeks, mainly for the purpose of trying his influence with Prince Llewellyn, and bringing about a reconciliation with Edward.

Travelling in those days was a tedious and expensive affair, especially for persons of exalted rank. No doubt, at the great convents which lay between London and the estuary of the Dee, the Archbishop might always reckon on hospitable entertainment and free quarters; but the rate of progress,—made entirely on horseback, and by roads in some states of the weather almost impassable,—was necessarily slow, and required halts sometimes of two or three days, in those places where it was found difficult to procure the supplies for a large cortege. Therefore it was necessary for a great man to take nearly the whole of his establishment with him, together with a sufficient military force for their protection. On the present occasion, the cavalcade comprised the Primate's house-steward, half-a-dozen cooks and kitcheners, as many body-servants, his farrier, mediciner, and chaplains. There were sumpter-horses, and grooms in charge of them, some laden with meat and wine, some with dinner and toilet services, some with the wardrobe of the principal personages of the party. It was fully six weeks from the time of their quitting Lam-

beth, and late in the afternoon of an October day, before they reached St. Asaph. There, however, they found shelter for the night; notwithstanding that the Cathedral and the Bishop's Palace lay in ruins, having been recently destroyed in an attack on the city by Edward's forces.

On the following morning they set forth for Rhuddlan, about three miles distant, winding their way through the Vale of the Clwyd, now richly diversified with corn-fields and meadows and orchards, and smiling villages scattered among them; but in those days one mass of wild and tangled forest, overhung with rugged and precipitous mountains. In the middle distance immediately before them rose the strong and picturesque Castle of Rhuddlan, built partly of limestone, and partly of red sandstone. It was octagonal in shape, and was defended by six round towers of enormous strength, the walls being seventeen feet in thickness. The steep acclivity towards the river was further strengthened against attack on that side by massive walls and square towers. The entire buildings were surrounded by a moat of unusual depth and width, faced on both sides with stone.

A messenger had been despatched by the Archbishop to announce his approach; and, as the cavalcade arrived within half-a-mile of the castle, a troop of horsemen were seen advancing to meet them. It consisted of the Earl of Mortimer, the King's confessor, and several knights attached to the King's household, despatched by Edward to bear his greetings to the Archbishop, and assure him of his welcome. After the

customary interchange of civilities, the two cavalcades joined company, and were admitted into the castle, where, as the Primate was informed, the King was waiting to receive him.

Edward I., sometimes called the greatest of the Plantagenets, but in truth the only one of our English kings, from the time of Alfred downwards, who can really claim the title of Great, was at this time in his forty-fifth year, in the lusty vigour of his strength. He was one of the tallest, as well as the handsomest men of his day, and was renowned for feats of strength and military skill. His features were handsome, and their expression frank and noble. No English sovereign has probably ever been so misunderstood—not in his own day only, when there might be some excuse for inability to comprehend a wise and far-sighted policy, but in times long subsequent—nay, even in our own, when we are profiting by the tardy fulfilment of the designs which his rare foresight conceived five centuries before. He has been represented as ambitious, unscrupulous, and bloodthirsty. But whatever ambition he had was for the aggrandisement, not of himself personally, but of Great Britain, which he had the wisdom to discern could never be strong or peaceful, until it was cemented into one people. Far from unscrupulous, no sovereign ever respected the rights and privileges of his subjects, when it was in his power to infringe them with impunity, as did Edward. For bloodthirstiness, it may safely be affirmed that his most kingly and special attribute was mercy. While the annals of the sovereigns before and after him are deeply stained with the blood of men

sent to the scaffold for political offences, that of Edward is almost entirely free from this reproach. He put to death the treacherous David of Wales, no doubt, and no man ever better deserved his fate. He sent to the scaffold William Wallace, whom the mistaken patriotism of Scotchmen of a later day has invested with a halo of ideal virtues and exploits; but he sent him to the scaffold mainly as a robber and a homicide. He has been charged with the massacre of the Welsh bards, but no accusation can be more unfounded. It is not pretended that he was altogether free from the crimes common in his age and station, but it may certainly be affirmed, that his life was a rare and bright contrast to those alike who preceded and who came after him.

He received the Archbishop in the great hall of the castle with frank and royal courtesy, presenting him to his queen, Eleanor of Castile, a lady every way worthy of her husband, who bore her a deep and even romantic affection. Several days passed, during which debates were held as to the expediency of entering into further negotiations with Llewellyn; who was still maintaining the war in his mountain strongholds, though his cause, in the judgment of all experienced soldiers, had become hopeless. Edward was merciful alike to friend and foe, and desirous of avoiding needless bloodshed. At a council held on the third day after Peckham's arrival, it was resolved that the Primate should seek an interview with the Welsh prince, and persuade him, if possible, to surrender himself to the clemency of the English king. When this important business had been despatched, Edward inquired of the Arch-

bishop whether there were not certain minor matters which he desired to bring before the council, before it broke up.

“There are, my Liege,” replied Peckham. “I have placed the papers relating to them in the hands of the Chancellor, who, I doubt not, has them in readiness.”

He turned, as he spoke, to an ecclesiastic who occupied a seat immediately on the left hand of the King, sitting between him and the Earl of Mortimer. This was the celebrated Robert Burnell, Bishop of Bath and Wells, and for nearly twenty years Chancellor of England. He was one of the greatest statesmen this country has produced, and to his political foresight much of the wise legislation of Edward's reign is due. He replied to the Archbishop's remark by producing a bundle of parchments.

“I have them here,” he said, “and will take them in order. Here is, in the first place, the complaint of Brother Martin, of the convent of Grey Friars in Coventry, and of Ralph de Gauden, gentleman—”

“Ralph de Gauden,” repeated the King, “and the convent of Grey Friars at Coventry. Those names seem somewhat familiar in my ears. Have I not heard them before?”

“You have, my Liege,” replied the Chancellor. “They were plaintiffs and defendants in a suit some time since, which gave the council some trouble. The brother of this Ralph had devised all his lands, when he was almost *in articulo mortis*, to the convent at Coventry, this Brother Martin having been his confessor.”

“I remember,” said the King; “and the council an-

nulled the bequest. It was one of the cases which influenced us in passing the statute of mortmain. Well, it would seem they have composed their differences now."

"They have, my Liege," said Peckham. "The grievous scandal that hath arisen might well unite all worthy men, whatsoever might be their differences."

"Humph!" said the King. "I pray you proceed, my Lord."

"They charge one, Ezra of Sherbourne," proceeded the Chancellor, "a Jew of eminence among his countrymen—"

"Ezra of Sherbourne," again interrupted the King. "He also is known to me, unless I greatly mistake. Is he not the person to whom my father granted a protection and licence of residence at this same Sherbourne?"

"He is the same," said Burnell. "We, too, have had dealings with him, and have accounted him a worthy man. Yet this complaint affirms that he hath induced a youth to apostatize from the Church, offering to give him his granddaughter, the heiress of all his wealth, in marriage, if he would abjure the Christian Faith. Further it is alleged, that proceedings against the youth having been threatened, he hath disappeared, and (it is believed) hath gone abroad to some infidel land, whither the Jew and his granddaughter mean shortly to follow him."

"Is that the whole?" inquired the King, as Burnell paused.

"No, my Liege. The complaint further states, that the youth's apostasy is in great measure due to the

laches of one Algar, parish Priest of Sherbourne. The lad, it seems, was this Priest's godson and pupil. Yet he was permitted to lodge in the Jew's house, notwithstanding the remonstrances of the neighbouring clergy; and when these were urged publicly by Brother Martin, he incited his parishioners to a violent attack on the Friar, who hardly escaped with his life from their hands. These facts are attested by a number of what seem to be respectable witnesses, residents in Sherbourne."

"Have you inquired what character Father Algar bears in the estimation of his superiors and neighbours?" asked Edward.

"I have," said the Chancellor. "I have questioned my brother of Coventry, the Archdeacon, and other men of worship who dwell in that neighbourhood. They all speak of him as a pious and learned clerk, who for a long term of years has laboured zealously and without blame among his people—"

"I pray you a word, my Lord King," interposed the Archbishop. "Attribute not too much weight to the testimony of the Bishop of Coventry, the Archdeacon, and the like. Doubtless they are honourable men, but prejudiced in favour of their own friends. The charges have been sworn to by men of credit, and vague praises of any man's character are no answers to positive allegations of fact."

"True, my Lord Archbishop," rejoined Edward. "Moreover, this is a heavy charge, and one in which, I doubt not, the council would feel bound to make an example of the offender if proved guilty. There have been not

a few cases of the same kind reported of late, and though I will not suffer the Commons to take the law into their own hands, even where the honour of our blessed Faith is immediately concerned, I dare not overlook such offences myself."

"It seems to me that this youth—Bertrand Forester, that appears to be his name," said the Bishop of Bath, again referring to his papers—"It seems to me that this Bertrand should be found, and closely examined, before we can be in a position to judge rightly of this matter."

"Every inquiry has been made," said Peckham; "but nothing can be learned."

"How called you him?" inquired the Earl of Mortimer, who had sat hitherto leaning back in his seat, little interested in what was passing; "Bertrand Forester, said you? What may be his age and appearance, if you chance to know it?"

"I have his description here," said the Chancellor. "Bertrand Forester, a tall, well-grown youth, of nearly eighteen years, fair complexion, blue eyes, and long nut-brown hair."

"And you say he left his home in May last?" pursued the Earl.

"Even so, my Lord," returned Burnell. "Know you aught of him?"

"Methinks I do," returned the Earl, "or of one marvellously like him; and so do you also, my Lord King. You will remember the day when the Welsh attacked our men on the Anglesey shore, and they were driven to the boats?"

"Aye, Mortimer," said Edward, with a grim smile; "many a year will pass ere I forget that unlucky skirmish, which in sooth happed not three months since."

"And you remember also, perhaps, a youth who defended one of the boats so determinedly, that the advance of the enemy was checked, and the remainder of the army got safe across?"

"I am not like to forget so brave a deed," said the King. "If I mistake not, he was publicly thanked, and admitted among the number of thy squires."

"Your memory is correct, my Liege," said Mortimer. "Well, that youth bears the name of Bertrand Forester, and his appearance corresponds with the description given by my Lord of Bath and Wells. A brave lad he is, and will make a stout soldier. Moreover, I have it in memory that it was somewhere towards the end of May that he took service with me, having been introduced to it by Gilbert Bain, one of the squires of my body."

"It were worth inquiring, at all events, whether it be the same," said Burnell.

"Under your favour, my Lord," said the Archbishop, "it were no sufficient answer to the charges made by the complainants, if this runaway youth should prove to be a soldier in my Lord Mortimer's following. Bravery in war were but a poor excuse for abnegation of the Christian Faith."

"Doubtless, your Grace," said the Chancellor; "but one of the main difficulties of dealing with the matter would be removed. We shall be at least able to

examine this youth, if he be the same who hath disappeared from Sherbourne; and ascertain how far the charge of being a renegade from the Faith is true."

"It is well said," said the King. "Let this Bertrand Forester be straightway sent for."

One of the serving-men in attendance was accordingly despatched on the errand, and returned, after half-an-hour's delay, accompanied by Bertrand.

The latter had greatly improved in appearance during the five months or so since his flight from Sherbourne. This had been made secretly by night, he being unwilling to have the place of his retreat known, lest he should be beset by entreaties from Father Algar to return. He had found Gilbert as willing to depart as himself, and the two had set off an hour or two before midnight, and had well-nigh reached the banks of the Severn, on their way to Worcester, before the fact of Bertrand's departure had been fully known; and as he and his companion had encountered no one during their night's journey, all clue to his movements was lost. He had no suspicion of the reason for which he had been summoned into the royal presence, presuming it to be some matter of military duty. The King contemplated him with an approving glance. A stout soldier himself, perfect in all manly exercises, he ever loved to look upon one who possessed, or promised to possess, the like claims to warlike honour; and the youth's open brow and eagle look were even greater passports to his favour. He addressed him in a tone that shewed his inward feeling.

"Thy name, good youth," he said, "if we be rightly

informed, is Bertrand Forester. What is thy parentage, and what has been thy place of abode?"

"My father, so please you, my Lord King," answered Bertrand, "was a man-at-arms, a horse-archer in the service of the Earl of Mortimer. He was afterwards slain on Evesham field."

"Fighting among my followers?" asked Edward.

"No, my Liege," answered the youth, a deep flush suffusing his face. "Some two or three years previously he had taken service with the Earl of Leicester."

"And so did many a brave soldier," said Edward kindly; "we retain no unfriendly memory of those who fell on that day. Proceed with thy tale."

"I was taken from my mother's arms, who had been slain along with my father, by one Ezra a Jew—"

"Who conveyed thee to Sherbourne in Warwickshire, where thou hast since dwelt," added the King.

"Even so, my Liege," said Bertrand in surprise.

"It is the same then," said the King. "Thy conjecture, Mortimer, is correct. Knowest thou, youth, that a heavy charge has been brought against thee, and not thee only, but this Ezra of whom thou hast spoken, and the parish Priest by whom thou wert brought up? His name has escaped me."

"It is here, my Liege," said Burnell, "Algar, Father Algar. Thou knowest him, youth?"

"Surely, my Lord," answered Bertrand. "I know him for a good and holy man, to whom my gratitude is deeply due for his care and nurture of me. It has grieved me since that I left him so abruptly."

"Left him," repeated the Archbishop, with a stern

frown. "It is to be feared thou hast left him indeed, if he be the holy man thou dost declare him—yea, left not him only, but the Faith of which he is the appointed teacher. Knowest thou the penalty, young man, of apostasy from the Church?"

"I understand you not, my Lord," exclaimed Bertrand in evident astonishment.

"He hath not heard the charge preferred against him," said Burnell. "Hearken, youth; this document is a complaint made by Brother Martin, a Franciscan Friar, and Ralph de Gauden of Gauden—thou knowest the parties?"

"Ralph Gauden right well," said Bertrand, "and I know him for mine enemy, and the enemy of my best and nearest friends. For Father Martin, I have seen him a few times on the occasions of his visits to Sherbourne, but have scarce exchanged a word with him."

"That matters nothing," said Peckham. "Proceed, my Lord."

"They declare," proceeded the Chancellor, "that thou hast been brought up in the house of Ezra the Jew, and that thou wert placed there by this Father Algar, in spite of the remonstrances of Christian men, of the danger that would thereby ensue to thy faith."

"I never heard that such representations were made," replied Bertrand. "I was received a helpless orphan into the household of Ezra from sheer kindness and charity; but the Father stipulated that the whole of my nurture and education should be conducted by himself, nor have they ever made any attempt to disturb my faith."

"How, young man?" exclaimed the Primate, "meanest thou that there has been no talk of marriage between thee and the granddaughter of this infidel—nay, that ye are in some sort contracted to one another?"

Bertrand flushed crimson. "I may not wholly deny it," he said. "I have sought her in marriage, and have good hope that she will one day become my wife."

"The charge is true then," pursued Peckham, "thus far, at least. Does thy Priest, this Father Algar, does he know of thine intention?"

"He does," said Bertrand.

"And has not forbidden it?"

"Not entirely," answered Bertrand.

"Thou knowest," continued the Archbishop, "that by the law no marriage can take place between those who are not of the same faith. It were idle to believe that this Ezra and his household will be brought to a knowledge of the truth. He is one of those, I think, whom the Friars of the Order of St. Dominic have again and again endeavoured to bring into the fold of Christ, exerting all their learning and eloquence and entreaties, without melting, even in the slightest degree, the stony hardness of his heart. Is it not so, my Lord King?"

"I believe your Grace speaks truly," said Edward. "When I was requested by the Dominicans to require that the principal Jews should attend on their preaching, and so at least learn the truth, I remember the name of Ezra was especially included in the list of persons whom it was thought important to bring over to

the Faith. I heard, too, that he was among those who remained determinedly obstinate."

"Thou hearest, Bertrand," said the Chancellor, kindly; "hast thou any answer that thou wouldest make?"

"I thank your Lordship," said Bertrand. "I have ever known that Salone and myself must be of one faith, ere the Church would sanction our wedlock; but I trust that our faith may become one, not by my perversion to unbelief—which may the holy Virgin and the Saints forbid—but by her eyes being opened to the truth. She hath long been a willing listener to the doctrines of our holy Faith, and half-disposed to embrace them. I have good hope that, aided by the pious prayers and instructions of good Father Algar, when I return to Sherbourne I may find her a candidate for Baptism."

"Ha!" exclaimed the King, "this puts the matter in a different light. If what this youth affirms be indeed the fact, the whole charge falls to the ground. Ezra would be scarce likely to tempt this youth into wedlock with his granddaughter, if his influence were like to induce her abandonment of her unbelief. Father Algar, too, would be but acting in a manner befitting a pious and zealous servant of the Church. Think you not so, my Lord Archbishop?"

"To my mind, my Lord King," answered Peckham, sourly, "the youth would do better to seek a Christian maiden for his wife, if he must needs have one, than entangle himself with one who is at present, at least, an unbeliever, and may continue one for aught we know to the contrary. Methinks, too, the youth's word should

not be thus certainly received, without some evidence at least of his trustworthiness."

"I can supply such evidence," said Mortimer, who had been speaking apart with his chaplain, Father Nicholas. "My chaplain here informs me that, among all the soldiers under my immediate command, there is none of whom he accounts more highly than Bertrand Forester, none more regular at confession, none more devout in his observance of his religious duties; nor hath he observed in him any disposition to cavil at, much less deny, the doctrines of holy Church."

"We rejoice to hear it," said Edward. "My Lord," he pursued, addressing Burnell, "we dismiss this complaint as founded entirely on error. Admonish those who brought it, that they inquire more carefully for the future into the truths of the statements they lay before us. Youth, we owe thee some amends, nor did thy gallantry in the defence of the broken bridge escape our notice. We will see that a command is given thee, nor shall our further favour be wanting shouldst thou continue to deserve it."



CHAPTER VI.

IT was a cold winter's day in the month of February, 1290. The road between Stratford and Warwick lay deep in snow, which no one in those times thought of attempting to remove. The deep drifts, therefore, in hollow places rendered it wholly impassable to horses or carriages, and dangerous even to foot-passengers, who

would suddenly be plunged up to their waists if they deviated ever so little from the proper track, and not unfrequently were unable to extricate themselves. It was difficult, indeed, to keep the right path. By a law made early in this reign, neither bushes, nor hedges, nor dykes were permitted to be made for two hundred feet on either side of the road. This, of course, was to protect travellers from robbers, who might find such shelter a convenient place from whence to rush suddenly on their victims. The regulation was a wise one during the other seasons of the year, but in winter it only enhanced the dangers of the wayfarer. The law did not, indeed, apply to great forest trees, standing apart from one another, which afforded no cover to footpads. But these grew few and far between, and were but of little service in marking out the track.

So, at least, thought a stout and stalwart youth of five-and-twenty, whose dress and bearing alike bespoke the soldier, though he carried no offensive arms except the sword, which almost all men wore. He had made tolerable progress at first, the road for some little distance from Stratford having been trodden by passers to and fro sufficiently to guide him in the right direction. But, before he reached Fulbrook, the trace of footsteps had altogether disappeared. He was obliged to proceed cautiously, feeling his way along the flat plain of snow by the help of a long pole, with which he had provided himself. By this means he contrived to advance safely, though very slowly; and it was with great satisfaction that, after two hours at least spent in this cautious mode of advance, he saw, about a quarter

of a mile before him, the gables and chimneys of a large farm-house, which the traveller recognised as that of Richard Oswald. His farm was situated just on the borders of Sherbourne, and therefore gave the traveller the welcome assurance that he had nearly reached the end of his journey. He moved forward with a more elastic step, and soon reached the outward gate of the enclosure, from which a rude stone causeway led directly to the front entrance of the mansion.

Dickon Oswald was seated at dinner in his spacious kitchen, with his family and household assembled round the rude, but well-plenished board which stood in the middle of the room, the appetite of the party in no way impaired by the severity of the weather. There were possibly still some remains of the yeoman's Christmas stores; at all events, there was an abundance of good cheer. Large joints of beef and mutton were to be seen, half a pig, salt herrings and roasted cod, the latter brought from the northernmost parts of Scotland. There was also plenty of bread, and large jacks filled with beer were scattered up and down the board. At other seasons of the year there was probably no deficiency of vegetables, though, with the exception of peas and beans, not of the kind now in ordinary use. But at present none were to be seen but a few salted greens.

The meal was not more than half-advanced, when the approach of the traveller was perceived by the host, who rose instantly, and advanced to meet him.

"By the Mass!" he exclaimed, "I scarce thought to have seen any man abroad in the public roads on a day

like this. The way to Stratford was scarce passable yesterday, and last night's fall must have added a foot more to the depth of the snow in the hollows. St. Mary, but ye must be a stout fellow, or the business on which ye have come an urgent one indeed. But come in, and warm and dry yourself before the fire, and then partake of such cheer as we have to offer you."

"I thank you, my host," said the new-comer. "My business is indeed of moment, or I had waited for better weather. But methinks you fail to recognise an old friend and neighbour, Master Dickon."

"I know the trick of thy face," said Oswald, looking earnestly at the other; "I thought so when I first caught sight of thee. Yet I cannot recall thy name. But I am getting in years, and it may be mine eyes are waxing somewhat dim."

"It is seven years and more since they beheld me," said the other; "therefore they may be well excused. But I think you will remember the name of Bertrand Forester."

"Remember it, my lad, aye, right well," said Oswald, again cordially grasping his guest's hand. "We have heard of thy renown in the Welsh wars, and how thou hadst been advanced to the King's service, and wert high in his favour. Aye, and we heard, too, of the foul attempt of Friar Martin and his accomplice Master Ralph to ruin thee, lad, and we rejoiced heartily at their discomfiture. Good Father Algar, he was as pleased as any. He would have welcomed thee gladly, Bertrand, and fair Mistress Salone's eyes would have looked brighter than ever, poor lass."

"Poor lass!" repeated Bertrand; "Father Algar *would have* welcomed me. I trust nought ill hath befallen either?"

"Ha! thou hast not heard?—why it is many months since—I scarce know how many—"

"I have been absent from England for more than three years," said Bertrand, "in attendance on the King in Gascony and elsewhere. Before that time, the troop to which I belonged was detained in Wales, so that I have never been able to re-visit Sherbourne."

"And hast thou never heard aught from Father Algar or thy Jewish friends during all that time?" inquired the franklin in some surprise.

"Letters have found me from time to time," said Bertrand; "and I have also written in reply. But I doubt not the greater part have been lost by one mischance or another; and for more than a year past no news at all has reached me."

"Truly, is that so?" said Oswald compassionately. "I fear then thou wilt have but a sad tale to hearken to. When Ralph de Gauden failed in his attempt to ruin Ezra, he was compelled to leave the country. The Jew had obtained judgment for his debt, and seized on Gauden's house and lands as a security for its payment. There he lived till about three years ago, when all the Jews throughout the kingdom were seized and thrown into prison, for playing tricks with the coinage, it was said. Then Ralph de Gauden suddenly re-appeared."

"He is always re-appearing," grumbled the Dame.

"Aye, truly, he is like a bad penny," said Oswald,

"never failing to turn up again, when one most wants to be rid of him."

"But Salone, what became of her?" asked Bertrand impatiently.

"The damsel went with her grandfather to prison. There had been a deal of talk about her in the village for years before that. Father Algar was constantly visiting her and her grandfather, but nothing ever came of it. Stories there were without end, but no better authority for them, that I could ever learn, than the chatter of Dame Hulse, whose tongue would be none the worse for a taste of the brank, I trow."

"What happed next?" asked Bertrand.

"Ezra compounded for his freedom, and they both returned to Sherbourne, but Ralph would not deliver up possession for a long time. He and Brother Martin devised between them a scheme, whereby the old man's money was to be made over to his granddaughter as a convert to our faith, and she was then to become De Gauden's wife. The damsel could not endure the mention of it; but she was sorely persecuted, and but for good Father Algar, might have been compelled to submit. Through his help, Master Ralph was again worsted, and then we saw no more of him till last summer, when we had the great misfortune to lose our good and faithful Priest."

"Is the Father then dead?" inquired Bertrand.

"Even so, lad. He died on the Feast of the blessed St. Thomas of Canterbury, at peace, as he had lived, with all the world."

"I am deeply grieved to hear of his death," said

Bertrand. "These be heavy tidings indeed. And Ezra and Salone, how have they fared?"

"But ill, I grieve to say," answered the good franklin. "After the Father's death, it was discovered that the Grey Friars at Coventry had been making efforts, for many years past, to get the living of Sherbourne into their possession; and through their favour with the Pope and the Archbishop, both of whom they tell me were once Franciscan Friars—"

"Aye, that is so," observed Bertrand; "I have heard of that at King Edward's court. Men say that the Franciscans declare the Pope to be the sun, and the Archbishop the moon of their order."

"Aye, indeed!" said Oswald. "Good sooth, then it is no wonder that they seek to make hay, as the proverb says, while the sun shines. Anyway they have gathered this sheaf into their barn. Our parish hath been handed over to the care of the Friars, and Brother Martin hath been for a month or two past our parish Priest. His appearance was the signal for De Gauden once more to shew himself, and then began the old game again with the Jew and his granddaughter."

"But it did not succeed—tell me that," exclaimed Bertrand.

"Well, not wholly," said Oswald. "She refused as stoutly as ever to hearken to him, though they spread reports of your death, Messire Bertrand, in foreign parts. She would have nought to say to him, and would not answer Father Martin's inquiries as to any possible change in her faith, though he threatened her sorely. So matters went on for many weeks, until one

day there came a rumour, which hath since been confirmed, that the King and the Parliament purposed to take measures against the Jews, sterner than any hitherto adopted. But why say I this to thee, who doubtless know more than I do on the subject?"

"That is not so," said Bertrand; "I landed but a few days ago at Pevensey, and have come straight hither. I know nought of the doings in London. Proceed, I pray you."

Oswald complied: "About a month before we first heard the reports," he said, "old Ezra and Salome disappeared; nor hath any one been able to discover the place where they are hiding."

"Efforts, then, have been made to find them," said Bertrand.

"Aye," returned the farmer, "by Ralph and his worthy accomplice Father Martin. But they could discover no clue. It was thought by some that they had gone abroad, but that is now held to be impossible. All the Jews have been required, so at least we learn, to deliver in a statement of their property, of whatsoever kind; and until this has been done, none will be permitted to quit the realm. Now it is certainly known that no such return has yet been given in by Ezra!"

"How know you that?" inquired Bertrand.

"De Gauden learnt so much from the official at Warwick, to whom the returns of the county had to be made."

"Aye, good-man," said Dame Oswald, who had sat silently by, but lending an attentive ear; "but it is

also rumoured, that Messire Ralph learned somewhat more, than he saw fit to tell to others. He hath been once or twice absent from home of late, telling no man whither he was going; and Will Withern, his groom, assured me that he returned one day last week, after one of these absences, in company with several men whom Will had never encountered before; and that he saw next morning some saddle-bags, which did not belong to his master, and which he was well-assured he had once beheld in the house of Ezra the Jew."

"Ha, wife, are you well assured of it? That were something," said Dickon. "And yet I know not—Master Gauden is dark and subtle, and no man would succeed in coaxing his secret from him."

"Is Ralph Gauden now at his house?" inquired Forester.

"Aye, surely," said Oswald. "Anyway he was so yesterday, and this is scarce weather for men to stir from the ingle nook, unless necessity drives them. But what now, Bertrand—you are not thinking of departing, surely. Nay, tarry here awhile, until this bitter cold be somewhat abated. At least, stay until you have recovered from the fatigue of your journey."

"Thanks, good Dickon," said Bertrand; "but I am already restored, and need but another cup of your good ale. I must see De Gauden without loss of time, for every hour may be of value." He rose as he spoke, and began putting on the heavy boots which had been put down to dry before the fire.

"Well, if nought else will content you, my shepherd Grimbald here shall shew you the nearest way across

the fields to Gauden's house. Good truth, I know not but what you may be right. Ralph de Gauden is one who seldom loses time in the fulfilment of his purposes, and is troubled with no scruples which might impede them. If they are to be frustrated, it can only be by a promptitude and vigour that may match with his own. Fare ye well, my brave lad. May the Saints protect and aid you."

Bertrand accordingly took his leave, and followed his guide along the intricate and dangerous road which led to De Gauden's house. He was greatly moved by what he had heard—the more so, because he had his own reasons for being assured of the truthfulness of the greater part of it, at all events. Father Algar, as soon as he had ascertained that Bertrand was with the royal forces in Wales, had written more than once respecting Salone. He told him that he had frequent interviews with her, and that she never repelled, or appeared offended at his admonitions and arguments. He assured him that he would do all that lay in his power to bring her to an open acknowledgment of the truth, and was not without hope of success; though he could not perceive that he made any certain progress in the attempt.

This had gone on for three or four years, after which time the Father ceased to dwell on the subject of Salone's conversion altogether, merely mentioning, when he spoke of her, that she was in good health. Bertrand could not help fearing that the Priest had found his efforts unavailing, and had at last given them up. Surely this must be so, or Salone would have communicated her change of faith to him herself. In any case, her

position now must be trying in the extreme. The only possible course that he could think of was, for him to discover the place of their concealment, and then accompany them to some foreign land. There he could make a last appeal to her : if he should fail, he would be indeed compelled to give her up for ever ; still, even then, he would have the satisfaction of leaving her in security and freedom.

But how was he to learn whither they had been conveyed? Ralph de Gauden, it was more than likely, was acquainted with this, and might be compelled to reveal it. Bertrand resolved to try, at all events.

Wrapt in these thoughts, he approached the gate of De Gauden's house, which lay close to the high road. The dusk of evening was now coming on ; and through the windows might be seen the blaze of a huge wood-fire, burning in what was doubtless the hall, or dining-place of the family. Bertrand did not wait for ceremony. He struck heavily with the pommel of his dagger on the massive oak door, which stood half-open, and receiving no answer to his summons, advanced to the entrance of the room in which he had observed the fire, and in which he now heard the voices of persons conversing. The door of this chamber was also partially open ; and as Bertrand was about to enter, the spectacle he beheld within the room induced him to stop.

Ralph de Gauden was seated in a massive oak chair, with a stoup of wine and a metal cup before him, to which he had evidently been rendering a good deal of attention. On his right hand was Father Martin, before whom also a goblet had been placed ; but it was

empty, and did not appear to have been filled. They were engaged in conversation, or rather in angry dispute, with some person further in the room, whom Bertrand could not see, but the feeble and broken tones seemed to be those of old age. Little accustomed as he was to play the eaves-dropper, Bertrand paused. He felt tolerably sure that De Gauden would refuse the information he desired, if simply asked for it; and he was unwilling to resort to force if it could possibly be avoided. It was possible he might hear what he wanted, without asking De Gauden at all.

“You persist in your obstinacy then, Ezra,” said De Gauden. “You either will not believe, or will not trust me, though I assure you that I have your good and that of your granddaughter at heart.”

“I will not trust you,” returned Ezra; “I will never reveal the place of Salone’s retreat to you. You may spare yourself further entreaties.”

“If you will not trust De Gauden,” said the Franciscan, “you may surely trust me. Salone needs a friend, and you will nowhere find a better one than me. I can mean her nothing but good.”

“Aye, I know the good you would do her,” retorted the Jew bitterly. “You would mew her up in the house which King Henry built for those who are, or who are declared to be, apostates from their faith—shut her up where I should never see, or hear of her again; as you did Reuben of Leicester’s wife, whom you declared to have received Baptism, though her husband knew nought of it. There you would keep her, and never more permit her to see the faces of her own kindred,

for fear they should lead her back to her ancient faith."

"Thou speakest folly, Jew," said Martin. "Having won a soul to Christ, should we suffer it to run the peril of lapsing again into unbelief?"

"Of course not," said Ezra, in the same tone as before; "and for the same reason, when you see signs of any Jew returning to the belief of his fathers, you straightway put him to death, as you did Simon of Towcester, so that he may be certain to die a Christian!"

"It avails not talking thus, Ezra," said De Gauden; "If thou choosest to tell us where thy granddaughter lies hidden, well and good. It shall be to her advantage and thine. If thou refusest, I shall deliver thee up as a prisoner to the law, having taken thee in the very act of attempting to fly the land, in evasion of the King's command."

"It was not my purpose to fly the land," said Ezra; "I only sought to escape from thy malice, until such time as we should be permitted to leave England."

"Thou mayest say that," said De Gauden; "but who will believe thee? Nay, come, be reasonable, Ezra; if thou continuest obstinate, thou and thine will be stripped of all that ye possess, and it is like that thou mayest suffer bonds and imprisonment, and worse than these, into the bargain. Now if thou wilt give me thy granddaughter to wife, and she will profess Christianity, to which I am well assured that she has no objection, all will go well with thee and her. She will get a good husband, all thy wealth will go to her and me, instead

of into King Edward's coffers. We shall be able to make fitting provision for thy maintenance and comfort."

"A good husband," repeated Ezra, scornfully; "were she indeed to become an apostate to her faith, it might be a fitting punishment for her to undergo such a fate as wedlock with thee. As for me, I would rather suffer all that cruelty and injustice can inflict, than be dependent on thy bounty."

"Say you so, Ezra?" said De Gauden; "then methinks it will be best for thee to go back to thy dungeon once more, till you have learned wisdom, or until we have discovered by other means the spot where thy granddaughter is concealed. Come, it is idle to resist; there is no one at hand to help thee, and my servants are not far off."

"You are mistaken, Ralph," said Bertrand, striding into the room, "help is nearer than you are aware of. Ezra, thou wert best to accompany me to Oswald's house for this night; who, I doubt not, will give thee shelter for my sake. To-morrow we will seek Salone in company."

De Gauden had stood transfixed with surprise at this unexpected intrusion. He now started forward, and laid his hand on his sword.

"Who, in the fiend's name, art thou?" he exclaimed; "and what doest thou here?"

"My name is Bertrand Forester, Master Ralph," said Bertrand, "an old acquaintance both of thine and Ezra's; and I come here, not in the name of the fiend, but in that of right and justice, to prevent foul mis-doing."

“Bertrand Forester!” repeated De Gauden; “he is abroad in Gascony.”

“He was, I grant you, but he returned from Gascony some two days since. You know me, Ezra, and will trust me,” he continued, addressing himself to Ezra.

“Willingly, Bertrand,” replied the old man; “I had scarce hoped to see thy face, or hear the sound of thy voice again; but I know that thou art true and faithful, as thou hast ever been. Cut these bonds, and I will gladly leave with thee this detested house.”

“Stop, young man,” exclaimed Brother Martin, “I shall remit this matter to the Prior of my convent, who is the fitting person to deal with it, seeing that the Jew here is accused of having kept a Christian in his house for years past, whom he persuaded to conceal her faith. Beware how thou interferest with the Church in such a matter.”

“I shall appeal from the Prior to my Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells, who is the Chancellor,” said Bertrand. “To him the matter would have to be ultimately remitted. And before him, I will undertake for it, Ezra will appear to answer the charge, which I know to be false and calumnious.”

As he spoke he stepped forward, and with his dagger began to cut the bonds with which the old man was secured. But Ralph had now recovered from his surprise: he drew his sword, and at the same moment shouted to the attendants who were waiting in an adjoining chamber. Bertrand, who was an able swordsman, drew also, and they had hardly exchanged half-a-dozen passes, before De Gauden’s weapon was wrested

from his grasp, and he was for the moment at his antagonist's mercy. He endeavoured to follow up his advantages by completing Ezra's release, and escaping with him from the house. But before he could accomplish this, De Gauden's followers were upon him,—three or four stout, well-armed fellows. Forester put his back against the wall, and defended himself resolutely; he struck one man down, and wounded another. But Ralph now joined them, and the pressure of numbers was too much for him. He received a sword-thrust through the arm, which obliged him to drop the weapon, and another at the same moment in the breast. He fell to the ground, and became insensible.

It was broad day when he again recovered consciousness. He was lying on a pallet-bed in a room wholly unknown to him; it was very scantily furnished, as indeed the sleeping rooms of those days for the most part were. There was a heavy oaken chest against the wall, one or two rude stools, and a small table by the bedside; water also stood in a ewer on a slab in the corner. But there was nothing which gave him any clue as to the house in which he was harboured. He turned his eyes to the window, which consisted of a series of narrow slits in the wall, divided from one another by massive stone mullions; but there was too little of the landscape outside visible to give him the information he desired. He could only see the tops of one or two trees, and the blue sky beyond. The sight of these, however, caused him considerable perplexity. It was the middle of February, he well remembered, when his encounter with De Gauden took

place; the trees were bare, and the snow lay deep on the ground. But the elms he beheld opposite to him were in full leaf, nay, he could almost fancy, changing to their autumnal colour. It seemed, too, as if there was a long blank in his memory, confusedly broken by half-recollections of figures moving about the room, and whispered conversations, of which he did not understand the import. Gradually the particulars of what had occurred at De Gauden's house returned on his memory. He recollected the wounds in his side and arm: pulling aside the sheet with which only he was covered—for, according to the invariable practice of that day, he was lying entirely naked—he looked to see how the hurts were progressing. They were entirely healed, and had evidently been healed for some considerable time, for nothing but two scars were visible. While he was still lost in perplexity, the door opened, and a stout, middle-aged woman, in whom he immediately recognised Dame Oswald, entered the room with a cautious step; but a glance at Bertrand shewed her that the long-expected change had now taken place. She uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

“Now blessed be the name of the holy St. Michael,” she said, “who hath vouchsafed this mercy. We of this household offered up a special prayer to him in thy behalf at early Mass to-day, and see how quickly the good Saint hath answered. I make my vow that a candle of the best wax shall burn before his shrine for six months to come. How dost thou feel, my son? for I have tended thee so long and so anxiously, that thou seemest even as a son to me.”

"I thank thee, good Dame," said Bertrand. I scarce know what, or how much, I owe thee, but I surmise that it is my life?"

"Thou owest it rather to Grimbald," answered Dame Oswald. "He it was that brought thee off, or rather gave such information as enabled us to bring thee off."

"Grimbald, the herd?" repeated Forester. "Ha, he accompanied me, if I mistake not, to De Gauden's house. I remember that. Pray you, Dame, tell me all that chanced, for it lies at present very confusedly in my memory."

"It is soon told," said the Dame. "Grimbald, when he had conducted thee to Ralph de Gauden's gate, did not turn back as he was bidden, but followed thee at a distance, curious to know what would happen. The door of the house, and that of the chamber beyond were both open, so that he could overhear, and in part see what passed. Presently he came hurrying back open-mouthed, with the news that thou hadst been set upon by De Gauden and his ruffians, and sore wounded, if not to death. My good man, who is one of the constables for the hundred, straightway went down to the house to make inquiry as to what had passed. He found that thou hadst been consigned to a heap of straw in an outhouse, with no one to attend thy hurts; and there would speedily have been an end of thee, poor lad, hadst thou remained in their hands. But Messire Ralph was alarmed, when he found himself in danger of being called to account for his deed, and willingly enough consented to hand thee over to our care. And here thou hast lain all through the bright spring and summer months, as nigh unto death

as one can be, who nevertheless comes safe through it at the last ; and now, thanks to the blessed Saint, thou art like to be as hale and strong as ever again."

"And Salone and Ezra," exclaimed Bertrand anxiously, "What has befallen them all these months?"

"That no man knows," returned Dame Oswald. "No man, that is to say, unless it be Messire de Gauden. Grimbald said nought to us respecting the Jew ; who, we have since learned, had been seized by De Gauden somewhere on the sea-coast, and carried by him to his house, where he had kept him a prisoner for some days. No sooner hadst thou been removed, than he and his servants disappeared, taking Ezra with them. My husband made inquiry as to whither he had gone, as soon as he learned the facts ; but he could glean nothing on the subject, except that it was supposed that the party had travelled towards London. Rumour says that De Gauden hath since been employed in conveying the Jews, who are now fast leaving England, to one foreign country or another, and, as he exacts almost any sum he pleases for their passage, he has already made money enough to make him a rich man again. But whether Ezra and Salone are among those whom he thus transported, no one knows."

"I will know though," said Bertrand, making an effort to rise from his bed. "I have friends in London, who have power enough to compel him to render a strict account of his doings. If he has them still in durance he shall release them, and pay the penalty of his mis-doing ; if he has done them any deeper wrong, he shall heavily abye it."

"Lie still, my poor lad," said his hostess ; "the leech

says thou wilt not be fit to travel for this month to come. It is now the end of September only, and the Jews were not ordered to quit the land until the tenth of October. And now the good King hath further extended the time to All Saints Day. Before that, if thou art patient, thou wilt have recovered thy strength again. Meanwhile, Oswald will journey up to London, and learn, if possible, what has become of thy friend."

"I thank thee a hundred times," said Forester. "I will give him letters to Father Nicholas, who is Chaplain in the Earl of Mortimer's household, which will much help him in his inquiries. Blessed be the memory of the holy Father Algar, who taught me to write like any clerk. Soldier though I am, I have had need many a time already to be thankful that he did so."

CHAPTER VII.

It was the last week, and nearly the last day in October. There was great stir and excitement in the city of London, and especially in those parts of it that bordered on the river. The order for the compulsory departure of all Jews from England, which had been issued in the July previous, was now on the point of being rigorously enforced. Great numbers of the proscribed race had already quitted the English shores; but many still lingered to the last. Perhaps some had been unable to dispose of such property as they could not take with them, unless at a ruinous loss; perhaps some hoped that even at the last moment the order

might be revoked; perhaps some were incapacitated by the mere helplessness of despair from taking the necessary steps for departure; but the time had now come at last when they could no longer delay. It had been most positively decreed, that all who should be found to have remained behind after the festival of All Saints, should straightway suffer the penalty of death.

It will be proper in this place to give a brief sketch of the condition of the Jews under the Norman and early Plantagenet Kings, and the causes which led to the present stern, and apparently tyrannical, decree. Few passages in history are more perplexed and complicated. That the Jews should have suffered less under the rule of Kings so lawless and merciless as Rufus and John, than under that of the good-natured Henry and the upright Edward, is in itself a most singular fact—only to be accounted for by a most careful consideration of the occurrences of the day, and the peculiar position, at the time, of this alien race.

During the reigns of the pure Norman Kings, they were not only tolerated, but protected from injury. The sovereigns indeed borrowed money of them, after a fashion, which was very nearly the same thing as open pillage; but they suffered none else to oppress them. Being the only bankers of the day, a careful and thrifty generation, in the midst of men utterly ignorant or reckless in their pecuniary transactions, they acquired enormous wealth, notwithstanding the exactions of their protectors, repeated again and again without shame or scruple.

The spectacle of their wealth soon rendered them unpopular. That Jews should live in luxury on gains wrung from Christians, was an idea odious enough in itself to the people generally, and at all times. The feeling was heightened by the crusading spirit, which at that time largely leavened society. The loans which furnished the Crusaders with the means of wresting the Holy Sepulchre from the infidels, were mainly derived from Jewish lenders. When, then, these adventurers returned home, after having expended all their money in the pursuit of barren honour, and found that the only consequence of their self-devotion had been to involve them in debt to infidels, as obstinate as those they had gone to Palestine to encounter, it was no wonder they grew discontented. In the succeeding reigns, when the struggles between the Barons and the Kings convulsed the whole land, the Jews adhered, as a matter of necessity, to the side of the sovereigns, their patrons and protectors against the mob violence which continually threatened them. But this policy only heightened the aversion with which they were regarded. The wars of John against Salisbury and Arundel, of Henry III. against De Montfort, were carried on, in a great measure, by the help of the Jews. Thus the public prejudice grew in every generation, until it culminated in the reign of Edward I.

Its progress was evidenced by tumultuary outbursts, incited by hideous and monstrous charges made against them. They were accused of kidnapping Christian boys, in order to offer them up on a cross, in hate and mockery of the Saviour's Passion. This was first al-

leged in the reign of Stephen, A.D. 1145; and repeated in that of Henry II., A.D. 1160 and 1181. On these occasions, the presumed offenders were punished by heavy fines, a most suspicious result of the inquiry. Early in the reign of Richard I., the people were persuaded that the Jews had formed a design of bewitching or murdering the sovereign, and a massacre ensued, which had to be suppressed by force. In A.D. 1235 and 1243, the stories of their having crucified boys were revived, with greater evidences of popular fury than before. Finally, in 1255, so fierce an outcry was provoked by a repetition of the same charge, that at the inquest held on the supposed victim, all the Jews of the realm were declared guilty of the crime. Ninety-one of the leading men were sent to trial as accomplices in it; of whom eighteen were hanged, and twenty more thrown into prison, to await the like fate.

It is difficult to imagine that any intelligent person of those days could have believed these allegations to be anything but idle fancies or calumnies. It has, indeed, been suggested that the confessions wrung from some of these wretched sufferers, by torture and the fear of immediate death, might have contained some truth in them—that men goaded to madness by the extremity of wrong, and having these crimes continually thrust before their notice, might have become so diseased in mind, as actually to perpetrate them. This, however, is only an ingenious conjecture. The stories told by these unhappy wretches bear, on the face of them, the impress of palpable fiction; and may vie, in respect of hideous extravagance, with the calumnies

circulated by the heathen respecting the early Christians, or the admissions of guilt made by those condemned for witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

But the results produced by these monstrous slanders shew plainly enough the growth of the national hatred towards the Hebrew race. In the reign of Edward I. a new charge was made against them, that of tampering with the coinage. It is possible that they were guilty of this, to some extent at all events; but even here the circumstances attending the accusation are extremely suspicious. It was not a few only, or even a considerable number, against whom the crime was alleged, but the entire Jewish population. Further, notwithstanding that nearly three hundred were condemned and executed for it, this was so far from satisfying the commons, that they broke forth into armed violence against the objects of their hate, and were only put down by Edward's prompt interference.

There was yet another cause of the universal abhorrence in which they were held, and that was their obstinate refusal to embrace Christianity. Previously to the reign of Henry III., few attempts, if any, were made at proselytism. Compulsory baptism, and the alternative of conformity to the Church or instant death, though frequently employed in other parts of Europe, are unknown to English history. The Church seems to have treated them, not only in accordance with the Scriptural saying, "as heathen men and publicans," but as heathens, for whom the message of salvation had not been designed. With the arrival of the Mendicant

Orders in England there came a change in this respect. The Friars zealously preached the Gospel to them, and obtained royal orders, compelling the principal men among the Jews to pay careful heed to their teaching. Henry even founded a "Domus Conversorum" in Chancery-lane, where those who had renounced their errors might be protected and maintained. But when, after long and earnest efforts, no perceptible progress was made in their work, the preachers began to exclaim against the inveterate obstinacy which zeal and patience were unable to subdue: and even the most pious and charitable men grew weary, and swelled the cry against them.

The concurrence of all these causes brought matters to a crisis in Edward's reign. The nobles, the Church, and the common people, all had their reasons for holding the Jews in the bitterest detestation. The King alone could protect them; and even the power of Edward, firmly as it was established, might ere long become insufficient for the purpose. He might well have thought, that the most merciful policy he could employ towards them, would be to order their departure from the kingdom; seeing that if they remained in it many years, he might be unable to save them from total destruction. Added to this, probably, were the strong religious convictions of Edward himself. He was a great King, but it would be idle to expect him to be wholly uninfluenced by the current opinions of his day. Few men can be so even in a private station; fewer still, who are set in high places, to administer the affairs of others. Not improbably, too, he felt that

to oppose himself singly to his united people, in behalf of a guilty and accursed race, would misbecome a Christian king. Doubtless he erred in so thinking, and the injury to himself and his subjects which followed from his error, was heavy and lasting. But this is the most probable explanation of his decree; and if this theory be not adopted, I am aware of none which we can reasonably take in its place.

Whatever may have been Edward's motives in issuing the edict, it caused those against whom it was directed the deepest suffering. England had not been a safe or genial home to the Jews, but it was the only home they had ever known: nor need men be told that oftentimes sorrow and trial endear the scenes in which they have been endured, as neither prosperity or joy can endear them. To be compelled, on a sudden and for ever, to quit the cherished abode of infancy and youth, the associations of a chequered life, and the graves of the beloved dead—to break off, with one rude wrench, all connection with the past, and go forth into a strange and unfriendly world to begin life anew, when the wearied spirit desires nothing but repose—this is one of the heaviest woes that can befall humanity. And when this is further heightened by harsh words and wrongful deeds, when every look and action of those around drives the iron deeper into the soul, the suffering becomes insupportable. Bertrand, as he traversed the rude wharfs contiguous to the Tower, and beheld group after group of unwilling exiles hurried on board the ships awaiting them, amid the brutal jests and unrestrained outrages of the assembled crowds, was moved

by the spectacle to an extent that surprised himself. Possibly, the fact that Salone was a daughter of this trampled race might have had something to do with this: but certainly the doubt occurred to him, as it must have occurred to many an honest mind in those days, whether such usage of God's creatures could be acceptable to Him. Here was a father, striving to protect his daughters against the coarse insults of a throng of apprentices, who had made holiday for the occasion; here a mother, who had lost one of her children, separated from her either in wanton mischief, or by some zealous Churchman, who designed it to bring up in his own faith; there a merchant, seeking to recover some packet of jewels or gold-work, which had been violently torn from his grasp; there, again, a feeble old man, whose infirmities made him unable to walk, entreating to be put to death, rather than forcibly carried to a strange land. Friends, and relatives, and lovers, who were to be conveyed in different ships, perhaps to lands widely apart, were being violently torn asunder. Bertrand would have interfered twenty times to help these unhappy sufferers, if it had not been that the urgency of his own business allowed of no delay.

He had been detained nearly a month at Sherbourne, and it was not till past the middle of October that he was able to travel by slow stages to London; and when at last he did reach the Earl of Mortimer's city residence, he was obliged to remain for two or three days inactive, to recruit his strength. Father Nicholas visited him on the second day after his arrival. The good Priest, with whom Bertrand was an especial favourite,

had not been able to send any intelligence of importance to Sherbourne by Richard Oswald. Ralph de Gauden was, indeed, as well known on the wharfs near the Tower, as the Tower itself. His vessel, named the "Flower of Castile" in honour of Edward's beautiful and gentle Queen, had made repeated voyages during the summer to Italy, and Spain, and Holland, carrying on each occasion considerable numbers of Jews, from whom Ralph was reported to have exacted such enormous sums for passage-money, as to have more than refilled his empty coffers. He was absent at the time of Oswald's arrival, but returned during his stay in London. Attempts were then made to discover whether Ezra and his granddaughter were among those already conveyed abroad, or whether he still had them somewhere in confinement at home. But all efforts were vain to penetrate the mystery. Ralph himself peremptorily refused to answer any questions, and his movements were so skilfully managed, that it was next to impossible to learn anything about him, which he wished to withhold. It had now, however, been ascertained, that he was about to sail for Tunis, and as this was the last occasion on which he could take any Jews as passengers, it was certain that he would convey them on ship-board now, if he had not already done so.

"It was my purpose, my son," said Father Nicholas, "to have gone down to the Thames with a guard of men, just before his ship left the shore, and have made careful examination of her. But thou hast now happily arrived thyself, and canst take in hand thine own business."

"I thank thee, Father," returned Bertrand; "on what day dost thou say she is to depart?"

"On the eve of All Saints, so we were informed," said the Priest; "the day after to-morrow, that is."

"I shall of course follow your advice," rejoined Bertrand; "but I think it will be safer if I visit the river-side to-morrow, and make sure that the truth has been reported about her. If Ralph connects me in any way with the inquiries which have been set on foot respecting Salone—and the chances are that he does—he will not improbably name a day for his departure later than the one on which he really means to sail. But I shall not make my search till the last minute. If he has Ezra and Salone still in his custody, he will not take them on board until the day on which he departs."

On the following day, accordingly, Bertrand repaired, as the reader has heard, to the water-side. He discovered easily enough the "Flower of Castile," a stout, serviceable vessel of considerable size. Her cargo was being stowed away, and a good many of her intended passengers were already on board. He noticed also Ralph himself, who was busily engaged in giving the necessary orders. Whether he was himself observed by De Gauden he could not be sure, but he fancied that for a moment the eye of the latter had rested on him.

Satisfied that the vessel would sail on the following day, and could not sail earlier, Bertrand returned home. The next day, taking six stout fellows on whom he could depend, he proceeded to the wharf. The Earl of Mortimer's badge and colours, not to speak of their

stalwart forms and the keen edges of their partizans, caused ready way to be made for them through the crowd. Bertrand marched them straight to the spot where the "Flower of Castile" was lying. She had now apparently got all her cargo on board, and was on the point of weighing anchor. De Gauden, in fact, appeared to be giving an order for the removal of the plank which connected her with the wharf, when Bertrand, followed by his men, shouldered the bystanders aside, and crossing the plank, confronted Ralph on the deck of his vessel.

The latter looked in real or feigned amazement at the intruders, and then demanded who they were, and what was their purpose in entering his vessel.

"You need not inquire my name, Ralph de Gauden," replied Bertrand; "we are old acquaintances, if not friends. I have come here to demand of you the persons of Ezra of Sherbourne and his granddaughter, whom you have long unlawfully detained in confinement, and whom you are now believed to have on board this vessel."

"And by what warrant do you thus presume to intrude yourself into this ship, of which I am the owner, and which has paid all the necessary dues to the royal officers?"

"By the authority of our good swords," said Bertrand, "which you will find sufficient for the purpose. We seek to do no violence, but merely to ascertain whether the two I have named are on board."

Ralph stepped sullenly on one side. "You are the stronger party," he said; "and have taken me by sur-

prise. Moreover, I cannot delay my voyage. Make what search you will then, but be speedy."

The examination did not take long. There was but one lower deck, and in that was gathered a number of Jews, with their goods and packages of all descriptions, leaving no nook or cranny in which anything could be concealed. Bertrand carefully examined every face; neither Ezra's nor his granddaughter's were among them. He turned back, passed Ralph, who greeted him with a mocking smile, and, followed by his men, stepped on shore.

The plank was now cast off, the anchor raised, and the ship swung slowly off into the tide. Bertrand watched her sadly as she moved down the river; but she had scarcely gone a hundred yards from the wharf, when he saw a boat putting off from the opposite shore with two passengers on board. Bertrand eyed them suspiciously; they were muffled from head to foot in dark cloaks, and seemed to move stiffly and awkwardly, as though their limbs were confined by bonds. Presently, the boat touched the vessel's side, and the two passengers were handed up. The wind blew the folds of their garments aside, and Bertrand could discern that they were the persons of whom he was in search. He rushed instantly down to the water's side, and endeavoured to obtain a boat in which immediate pursuit might be made, but he could find nothing suited to his purpose. The heavy row-boats that were lying about, even if they could have been manned and cast loose on the instant, would have been left hopelessly behind in the chase.

“Follow and overtake that ship yonder,” replied an old oarsman to Bertrand’s repeated requests; “there’s not a boat on the river could do that. She has caught the wind, and is running along at a pace which will take her out of sight in a very little time, and she is one of the fastest sailers on the river too. It would be of no use trying to catch her.”

“There’s my lord’s own galley lying off the Tower,” said Piers Marley, one of the men-at-arms, “and her crew are on board her. She would soon overtake yonder craft, and, I doubt not, Sir Osborn will give permission. My lord himself, as thou knowest, has gone northwards with the King, and Sir Osborn intends to sail for Scotland in her himself, but not till next week.”

“Well and happily thought of,” said Bertrand; “I thank thee from mine heart: I will lose no time in making the request. Meanwhile, do thou and the others hasten to the Tower stairs, and inform Geoffrey Woolstan, who commands her, of what has happened. Say, I entreat of him of his grace, that he will get all in readiness for sailing instantly, should I obtain the required licence.”

Piers departed on his errand with his comrades, who were all as well inclined to the adventure as himself, while Bertrand hurried back to the Earl of Mortimer’s palace, and sought an interview with Sir Osborn Langford, the Earl’s Master of the Horse. He listened attentively to the request of the young man, who was a favourite with him, as with most of the officers of Mortimer’s household.

“Ralph de Gauden,” he repeated; “that name has been more than once of late brought before the King’s notice, as of a man suspected, at least, of more than one deed of hardship and violence. It will go ill with him, should this charge against him be proved true. The King’s compassion is already largely awakened in behalf of these miserable outcasts, and he has declared his intention of punishing severely any further wrong done them. Hasten then, good youth, on board the ‘St. George,’ which I believe is, as thou sayest, ready for sailing at once. Report to me how thou hast prospered on thy return.”

Bertrand thanked the worthy knight, and hastened to the river side. There he found that the Captain of the vessel had complied with his wishes; everything had been in readiness for weighing the anchor for half-an-hour past, and in a few minutes more the “St. George” was on her way.

The shores of the Thames presented a very different appearance from that which they now exhibit to the eye of the outward-bound voyager, as he glides by the endless array of ships and barges, wharfs and warehouses, stately mansions and humble dwelling-places, which line the Thames for many a mile, when London Bridge has been left behind. Soon the Kentish woods were reached, rising in slopes one behind the other far inland, and now rich in the fast-deepening tints of autumn. The noise and turmoil of the city soon died into silence. Only every now and then they overtook a bark laden, generally with wool for the foreign trade, or perhaps carrying despatches to the ports of Guienne, or encountered

one returning with its load of foreign merchandise. A careful watch was kept, and a reward offered to the first who should descry in the distance the "Flower of Castile," easily known by the arms of Castile emblazoned on her sterncastle. There was a fair breeze, and the vessel made its way gallantly down the river.

"Be of good comfort, Bertrand," said the Captain, as he noticed the anxious looks which the young man from time to time cast down the stream. "She is going right nobly, and be sure is overhauling this villain's vessel every minute. She cannot be so much in advance, but that we shall catch her before the mouth of the Medway is in sight."

"They had a long start of us," said Bertrand, doubtfully. "Notwithstanding all my haste, and thine too, good Geoffrey, they must have been gone three hours full ere we were clear of the city."

"Three hours is not enough to make the difference," said Woolstan, "in a voyage so long as that to the Nore. And, even should they have passed that, remember, they know nought of our pursuit, and will be sure to hug the English shore as far as the Devonshire coast. Fear not, we are sure to catch them."

Bertrand felt somewhat comforted by his confident assurances, but nevertheless continued anxiously to pace the deck, pausing often to strain his eyes in the eastward direction, until the fast-deepening shades of evening made it useless to do so. They were off Gravesend, when the light of the moon, nearly at the full, rendered objects on the silent highway again discernible. The night passed slowly on. The moonlight tipped with

yellow radiance the leafy eminences of the Kentish uplands, and revealed here and there white patches of the ancient road which ran from Gravesend to Rochester; and occasionally a peaceful village, with its Gothic church in the centre, and its graceful spire, built as a landmark in that wooded country, was discerned, nestling, as it were, in the shelter of the embowering forests. The cry of bird and beast, and occasionally the shout of the human voice, came on the ear. But the river itself presented nothing but a smooth expanse, unbroken by mast or sail.

The dawn broke at last. They had passed the entrance of the Medway, and were proceeding to stand off somewhat to the north, to avoid the banks of mud and sand collected near the mouth of the river, when a cry from one of the seamen drew the attention of all to a different point of the horizon from that in which their eyes had been fixed.

"Yonder lies the 'Flower of Castile,'" said the sailor, pointing to a vessel at some distance, close to the Kentish shore. "I know her quite well by sight, and can almost make out the painting on her stern."

"You are right," said Woolstan: "that is the ship we are in pursuit of. But what could take her into those dangerous shoals, and at low water too, I cannot think. De Gauden must have run aground in the dark."

"It matters little what may have caused the mishap," said Bertrand, "so long as we have him safe. Can you approach nearer, Woolstan, or must we board the vessel in our boats?"

"The tide is fast rising," said Woolstan, "and by the

time we could reach him, there will be sufficient depth of water to enable us without risk to lay ourselves aboard of him. Be easy now, Bertrand; it is impossible that he can escape us."

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CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE the "Flower of Castile" had pursued her way down the river more rapidly than Geoffrey Woolstan had supposed. The sailor on the Tower wharf had been right in declaring her to be the swiftest vessel under canvas of any belonging to the port of London, and Ralph's long experience enabled him to handle her skilfully. It was doubtful whether the "St. George" really had the advantage of her. At all events, when the sun set, the "Flower of Castile" was ten or twelve miles at least in advance of her rival. At nightfall, the unhappy exiles on board of her laid themselves down to obtain what rest they might; and Ralph took advantage of the comparative quiet, to make his final proposal to his two captives.

Of these, Ezra had been in his power for nearly a twelvemonth past. In the course of the previous winter, the old man, who had long foreseen that Edward would take the decisive step of banishing all the Jews from his dominions, received private information confirming his fears. He thereupon took his granddaughter to London, and having left her in the charge of some friends, endeavoured to secure some means of leaving England before the blow should fall. He chose Bristol as the most suitable place for this pur-

pose; but unfortunately, in the month of January, while he was in that city engaged in bargaining for his passage, he accidentally encountered Ralph de Gauden, who was on the point of sailing for London. Ralph laid violent hands upon him, and conveyed him on board his vessel, on a pretended charge of treason. On his arrival in London, he conveyed him for greater security to his own house at Sherbourne, where he made the proposal which the reader has heard. After the encounter with Bertrand, De Gauden thought it safest to return to the neighbourhood of London, taking the Jew with him. Ralph occupied an old house a few miles from the city, in a spot as wild and lonely as the Marches of Wales. Here Ezra remained his prisoner, resisting all his captor's attempts to induce him to consent to his designs, or reveal to him the place where his granddaughter was concealed. It is probable that he would have remained behind in England, and undergone the sentence of death as the penalty of so doing, but for Salone herself. She knew that her grandfather was De Gauden's prisoner, and the peril in which he was placed. When, therefore, the fatal First of November drew near, and there appeared no hope of his escape, she took the step of surrendering herself to De Gauden, on condition of his conveying her grandfather and herself to Tunis.

Greatly elated at the success of his manœuvres, De Gauden now arranged his final plans. Once on board the "Flower of Castile," both his prisoners were entirely in his power. If Ezra chose to give him his money, together with his granddaughter in marriage, and Salone consented to the arrangement, Ralph would

prefer that mode of settling the matter. If they continued obstinate, he had the means of compelling them, and would use them without hesitation. He caused them to be conveyed to the small cabin near the stern, appropriated to himself; and here, late in the night, he had a final interview with them.

The result exasperated him to the utmost. It is difficult to say whether the indignation which Ezra expressed at his lawless violence and infamous knavery, or the scorn and horror with which Salone shrank from his alliance, incensed him most. After some hours passed in unavailing remonstrances, and equally unavailing threats, Ralph ordered some of his men to keep watch over the prisoners that they did not escape, and then went on deck himself to regain his composure.

It was long before he could do this, and when at last the heat of passion passed away, it was succeeded by a dogged determination to have his revenge for the affront he had received. The night passed on, and it began to draw near morning, while he was still pondering over the best mode of accomplishing his purpose. The ship was now nearing the mouth of the Medway, and De Gauden could see, by the dim light, the long range of sand-flats, over which there was now only a few feet of water. The tide was fast ebbing, and in the course of another hour the greater part of the sand would be dry. Suddenly an idea seemed to suggest itself to him. There were at this time only two men on deck beside himself, the look-out man and the steersman. Taking the rudder himself, he despatched both the men below on different errands. He now

altered the course of the ship, making directly for the shoals, and presently a sudden shock gave warning that she had run upon a sandbank. Crew and passengers rushed on deck in alarm and astonishment. But Ralph quieted their fears, assuring them that, although he had mistaken his course in the doubtful light, no injury had been done. The vessel was, indeed, fast upon a bank, and could not be got off again until the flow of the tide; but the detention of a few hours was the worst they need anticipate. All parties were much relieved at this assurance—more particularly at the Captain's unusual complaisance. The greater part remained on deck, contemplating the scene before them, which now began to be illuminated by the rays of the rising sun.

The surrounding landscape was varied and lovely. To the right were seen the rich pastures of the Kentish coast, interspersed with forests, mainly of elm and oak; on the left was the broad river, the Essex shores fading dim and hazy into the distance. In front lay Sheppey, with its broken outline of lofty cliffs on the north, and its low marsh-lands on the southern side. A few miles to the south-east might be discerned the massive but crumbling walls of the ancient palace of the Saxon kings, known at this period as Cyningburgh, but afterwards named Queenborough by Edward III., in memory of his consort, Philippa. Close under the bows of the vessel there was now a stretch of sand, firm and hard, and extending for a considerable distance towards the shore, though it was everywhere cut off from it by deep channels of sea-water.

De Gauden now suggested to his passengers that they should relieve the monotony of their position by walking on the cool sands, and endeavouring to catch some of the crabs and lobsters which the receding tide had left exposed. The proposal was readily enough adopted, and before long, all on board excepting the crew, had quitted the ship. Salone and her grandfather were among the first to descend. It was their first opportunity of privacy since their re-union ; and it needs not to add, that they had much to say to one another. They retired to a long strip of sand at some distance, and were soon engaged in anxious converse. The hours passed away unheeded, until they were roused at last by a shout from the Captain, who summoned them to re-enter the vessel, which was now nearly afloat again.

“Stand aside,” shouted De Gauden to the throng of passengers gathered on the patch of sand immediately under the vessel's counter. “You would not take precedence of the lady ! Let her be lifted on board first.”

A rope was accordingly lowered, and Salone having been secured to it, was hoisted up and received by the Captain.

“You had better go below,” said De Gauden, addressing her as soon as she was safely on board ; “there will be great confusion on deck presently. Convey the lady to my cabin,” he added, to one or two of the men who stood by.

Salone accordingly followed her conductors ; and Ralph, turning away, began to busy himself with preparations for getting the ship off into deeper water,

—neither he nor his crew paying any heed to the crowd of Jews, who were calling out to the sailors to be quick in drawing them up, as the tide was fast rising. Ten minutes passed in this way, during which the flood came in so fast as to cover the spot on which the Jews were standing, some of them being over their shoes in water. Suddenly it seemed to occur to them that treachery was designed. Instead of simply entreating the sailors not to keep them longer waiting, they began earnestly to implore that their lives might be spared.

Still, no attention was paid them: the tide began to rise higher, and now covered their knees. Salome heard their cries, and endeavoured to rush on deck, but was restrained by two of De Gauden's men, who had stationed themselves at the cabin-door. She joined her screams to those of the unhappy sufferers, but both were alike disregarded. The crew of the "Flower of Castile," brutalized by many a scene of rapine and massacre, felt no more compassion for the sufferings of their victims, than the angler does for the worm that is writhing on his hook.

At length the vessel was found to be completely afloat. The sails were spread, and the helm put about; but before she swung out into deeper water, De Gauden stepped to the bulwarks, and calmly contemplated the cluster of unhappy wretches who, nearly up to their waists in water, were pleading in the anguish of their hearts for deliverance from the death now on the very point of swallowing them up.

"Wherefore do ye call upon me for help?" he inquired with a sneer. "I am not of your people.

Wherefore do ye not call upon Moses, who delivered your fathers from the Red Sea? Surely he will open a passage for you to the shore in answer to your prayers."

Even as he spoke the vessel glided out into the stream, and re-commenced its course down the river. Ralph and his companions were so absorbed in watching the struggles of their victims, as one after another they were sucked down by the rising waves, that they failed to notice the approach of a large galley, bearing the standard of the Mortimer at the mast-head, which for the last ten minutes had been making directly for them. The shock of the two ships striking against one another was the first warning they had of the presence of their pursuers; and it was then too late to attempt flight or resistance, if indeed either had been possible. Bertrand was the first to leap on deck, followed by Geoffry Woolstan, Piers Marley, and a dozen others. The crew of the "Flower of Castile," caught in the very act of flagitious murder, remained each man in his place, attempting neither defence nor entreaty.

The shrieks of the miserable Jews had by this time subsided into a few faint and inarticulate cries; but Salone still continued to pour forth her entreaties for mercy to her countrymen, distracted as she was by anguish and horror. Bertrand recognised her voice, and thrusting aside the men who were keeping guard at the cabin-door, rushed in to her rescue.

"It is I, Salone," he exclaimed, "it is I, your Bertrand. Lay aside your fears, you are safe now."

"Bertrand, Bertrand!" she exclaimed, in an agony of

mingled terror and delight. "If it is indeed you, save my grandfather, whom the wretch De Gauden has left to perish."

"Your grandfather, left to perish!" repeated Bertrand. "Where is he then? what mean you?"

"He is there, he is there!" said Salone, frantically pointing with her hand through the cabin window to the now distant shore of Sheppey. "De Gauden induced my countrymen on board this ship, to land on yonder sandbank, and then treacherously sailed away, leaving them to drown."

"The wretch!" exclaimed Bertrand, springing on deck, as the meaning of her words flashed upon him. "But there may yet be time to save some of them." A boat was instantly lowered, and Bertrand and half-a-dozen of the sailors of the "St. George," to whom he had hurriedly communicated the dreadful tale, sprang on board, and rowed for the shore. As they approached it, they could perceive here and there a head still above water, where a strong man had still contrived to keep his footing, or a stout swimmer was battling with the waves, though nearly exhausted. Some half-dozen, all men in the lusty vigour of life, were drawn into the boat and saved. But the aged, the women and the children, had all sunk helplessly beneath the tide. The corpses of most were recovered when the tide again sank, and were decently interred; but some were swept out to sea, and were never seen again. Among these last was that of Ezra Ben Hamuel.

Bertrand returned to the vessel with the few he had been enabled to rescue. He first compelled De Gauden

to restore to these the property which belonged to them, and then put them on board the first outward-bound ship that he encountered, and bade them farewell. His next step was to put Ralph de Gauden and his crew in irons, distributing them between the two ships, which returned to London together. Here he gave them into the custody of the city officers on charge of murder, and saw them safely lodged in prison. This accomplished, he sought an interview with Salone. She had been so overwhelmed with horror at the scene she had witnessed, and her distress was so great when she had been informed of Ezra's fate, that Bertrand had deemed it wiser to leave her entirely to herself during the homeward voyage. But when a day or two had passed, and it was reported that she had now somewhat regained her calmness, he was admitted to her presence.

She was sitting sadly on a low chair by the hearth, apparently buried in thought, when the young man entered. But she rose to welcome him, and a deep blush overspread her face as her eyes encountered his. Bertrand drew her towards him, and pressed her to his bosom. Both felt that the crisis of their fate had now come. Bertrand knew that great as his influence with the King might be, it would not avail for the protection of Salone, if she still continued determined in her rejection of Christianity. She would be compelled to leave England, at once and for ever, and be hopelessly lost to him. And yet could he hope that what Father Algar's arguments and entreaties during so many years had failed to effect, would be accomplished now in the one single interview, which alone would be possible?

But he must make the attempt, and at once, or even this opportunity would be lost. As he hesitated a moment, doubting in what words it would be best to begin his appeal, he noticed that she had an ornament hanging round her neck which she certainly had not worn on board the ship, or, to his knowledge, ever before. It was a small gold crucifix. He uttered a cry of delight, and bending forward, reverently kissed it.

"Oh, Salone," he exclaimed, "dost thou indeed wear this holy sign, in token that our faith is one?"

"Yes, my beloved," she answered in a low tone. "It has been one these five years past. The good Father Algar's words fell not unheeded on my ear. The creed of the Church seemed ever beautiful in mine eyes; but for a long time I could not accept it, because none who professed to hold it, appeared to me to practise it. But the good Father's example taught me that this was not so; and that which was the rule of his daily life, I learned to see might become mine also."

"It now only remains then," said Bertrand, "that thou shouldst be admitted by Baptism into the Church's fold."

"Neither is that necessary," returned Salone. "When I said I had been one in faith with thee for these five years past, I meant that I had been one not only in heart, but in fact. I told the good Father that my eyes were fully open to the truth, and that I was prepared to make public profession of my change of faith, if he thought such my duty. But I told him also that it would break my grandsire's heart, that he would feel himself bound to separate himself from me, and never behold my face

again. I spoke of the love and tenderness with which he had reared me, and the cheerless and solitary old age which must then be his portion. Father Algar hesitated long, and at last told me that he would grant me a dispensation from attending the services of the Church in public. He said that my conversion had been mainly caused by thy presence, Bertrand, in our house; and that thou knowest," she added with a blush, "is true enough."

Bertrand silently pressed his lips to her forehead, and she went on.

"The Father, therefore, said that he could not think that Ezra's good deed in rescuing and rearing the poor orphan child ought to recoil upon him, as it were, with penalties so heavy. I need not tell thee how I thanked and blessed him."

"And he baptized thee in secret, and continued so to minister to thee?" suggested Bertrand.

"Yes, and no one knew it, until the day when my grandfather was carried to prison. I would not suffer him to tell even thee, Bertrand, earnestly as I longed that thou shouldst know it, for fear the letter should meet other eyes than thine. I lived ever on the hope of thy speedy return."

"That hope has sustained me also," said Bertrand. "But now this matter must not be longer delayed. Hast thou any proof of thine admission to the Church?"

"I have Father Algar's attestation," said Salome; "he gave it me on the day before our flight to London, not knowing, as he said—and said, alas, only too truly—that we might ever meet again. I have carried it ever since

enclosed in a small bag, and have worn it, together with the crucifix—that also was the Father's gift—next my heart.”

“Give it to me,” said Bertrand; “and we will now go to Father Nicholas together.”

The rest of our tale may be told briefly enough. Father Nicholas, satisfied of the truth of Salone's statements, consented to celebrate a marriage between her and Bertrand, which took place in the presence of Sir Osborn Langford, Geoffry Woolstan, and several of Bertrand's brother squires, a few days afterwards. Then Bertrand was sent northwards to learn the King's pleasure respecting De Gauden, who was now lodged in one of the Royal prisons. The offence having been committed against aliens, and aliens, moreover, who had been formally banished from the King's dominions—the authorities scarcely knew how to deal with it, and agreed that it had better be referred to the King for his special judgment thereon. Bertrand accordingly set out, following the route of Edward, who with his consort was travelling slowly towards Scotland. He had not expected to overtake him south of the Tyne; but when he reached Lincoln, he learned that Edward had been detained there by the saddest sorrow of his life—the death of his beloved Eleanor. Bertrand found the King plunged in the deepest affliction, having suspended for the time his journey to Scotland,—all important as he had accounted it—and preparing to follow the body to its final resting-place in Westminster Abbey, as soon as the necessary preparations had been made.

But the King, even in the depth of his distress, did not neglect the duties of his station. He sent for Bertrand, as soon as he was apprised of his arrival, and listened to the details of his story. He then resolved that Bertrand should accompany him back to London, and that, immediately after the conclusion of the funeral ceremonies, Ralph de Gauden should be brought to trial to answer for his deed.

In a few days, accordingly, the melancholy cortége set out, travelling slowly from town to town on its way southward, and resting generally at some great monastery or cathedral church, where Mass for the dead was duly celebrated. At each of these places, thirteen in number, the sorrowing husband afterwards erected a cross of stone on the spot where the beloved corpse had rested. Three of these, the most exquisite memorials of all Church architecture, still remain—at Geddington, Northampton, and Waltham.

Arrived in London, Edward first saw due honour rendered to Eleanor's remains, and then applied himself to the affairs of the realm. One of his first orders was for the trial of Ralph de Gauden; and the crime with which he was charged having been proved against him by the evidence of several witnesses, he was condemned to death, and hanged at Smithfield. It having been proved that his debt to Ezra had never been discharged, De Gauden's house was declared to have been the property of Ezra, and was allowed, together with all his other possessions, to pass to Salone. Here she retired, while Bertrand, following his sovereign to

the Scottish wars, grew in renown and favour, and was finally knighted by the King's hand after the fall of Stirling. After the reduction of Scotland he returned to Warwickshire, and settled on his estate, where for many generations afterwards his descendants held a distinguished place in the records of the county.

MARK'S WEDDING.



“The bridal party stood silent with astonishment.”—(p. 238.)

MARK'S WEDDING,
OR
LOLLARDY:
A
TALE OF THE TIMES OF HENRY V.

Mark's Wedding, or Tollardy.

CHAPTER I.

A LARGE concourse had assembled near the village of Bromlegh in Kent, one fine autumn evening, in the year of grace 1413. The common land, in the days of which we write, extended from the top of Lewisham Hill, as far at least as the village of Farnborough; and the traveller, as he journeyed on his way to Canterbury, was gratified alike by the bright yellow hues, and the sweet scent of the countless patches of broom, with which the heaths were dotted, and whence the name of the village is derived. But Bromlegh Hill could boast of other beauties, also. On the northern side there was a lovely prospect of woodland scenery, extending from the heights of Shooter's Hill on the banks of the Thames on the one hand, to those of Chiselhurst on the other; the villages of Mottingham and Eltham occupying the middle ground. Here and there the turrets of some castellated mansion, the combination of fortress and dwelling-house, characteristic of that day, rose out of their screen of embowering trees; among which those of the royal palace, at present occupied by the newly-crowned Henry V., were most conspicuous.

The occasion which had brought the good folk of

Bromlegh and its neighbourhood together, was an archery match between the bowmen of the above-named village and those of Eltham; which, as the reader has heard, lay at a few miles distance. Complaints are continually made in the proclamations of the later Plantagenet Kings, of the neglect of archery, in favour of games at once of inferior interest, and of no national importance. But these must be taken *cum grano*. Their real meaning probably was, that the practice of the bow did not occupy the exclusive attention of the English peasantry; as, according to the ideas of the warlike sovereigns of those times, it ought to have done. At all events, no one who beheld the scene now under description, would have conceived the notion that the pastime had lost its prestige with the Kentish yeomen. All the shops had been closed for the day; the village street was well-nigh deserted; and the common was thronged by gaily-dressed men and women, gathering in many a joyous group under the ancient elms, which stretched in one continuous line along the summit of the hill. To be sure, there were other attractions beside those of the match itself. The fame of the contest had spread far, and brought together a host of persons, who then, as in our own times, made it their occupation to attend fairs and merry-makings, and rid the villagers of such cash as their slender purses might contain. Here a group of tymbesteres—dancing girls, that is to say,—whirled round in their uncouth and fantastic dance, to the clash of their tambourines; there the morris-dancers performed their more regular measures, accompanied

by pipe and tabor. Here were jugglers with their time-honoured tricks and oft-repeated jests, welcome as ever to the youthful portion of the audience; here, again, fortune-tellers proffered their wholesale assurances of success in love or war, or any enterprise in which their customers might be engaged. At some parts of the ground the quintain had been set up, or spaces enclosed by ropes, where games of various kinds might be played—kayles, a kind of ninepins at which a truncheon was thrown; cloishes, where a ball was substituted for the truncheon, being nearly the same as the skittles of our time; loggats, where bones were used instead of stick or ball—the latter, apparently, being the favourite amusement of the “idle apprentice” of the day. Less innocent diversions also were to be met with. In one corner a bear was chained to a post, to be baited by dogs, when a sufficient sum had been raised to remunerate the owner; in another, an unhappy cock had been fastened to a stake, as a mark for the missiles of all such as chose to pay for the entertainment; in a third, a crowd was gathered round some travelling gleeman, who rehearsed his tale of love or battle to a sympathising audience.

But, notwithstanding these manifold attractions, the main interest of the day was concentrated on the butts; which had been fixed on the long stretch of ground lying to the north-east of the village—nearly at the same spot on which the pious Warner, two centuries and a half afterwards, erected his noble hospital for clergy widows. So dense was the crowd here assembled, that it was only by continual remonstrances, en-

forced by sturdy blows from the butt-ends of halberts, that the space necessary for the free movements of the competitors could be kept clear ; and the interest of the people appeared to increase as the contest proceeded. Earlier in the day the trial had gone somewhat against Bromlegh—the men of Eltham, several of whom belonged to King Hal's own body-guard, having outshot their opponents by a dozen hits at the least. But this was only at the target practice, and the strength of the Bromlegh men had always lain in their butt-shooting. When this commenced, later in the afternoon, it was speedily discovered that the Eltham archers would gain no easy victory, even if they gained a victory at all. As the struggle proceeded, the score of the Bromlegh men continued to improve, every additional end giving them a better prospect of overtaking the lead of their antagonists.

Upon the edge of the practice-ground, on the side nearest to Farnborough, rose the wall enclosing the domains of the bishops of Rochester ; who had made Bromlegh their place of residence ever since the days of the early Saxon kings. The ancient palace, built by Gilbert de Glanville in the latter part of the twelfth century, replacing a still older structure, stood about a bowshot from the entrance of the park surrounding it, and might be distinctly seen from the archery-ground. The solid old walls seemed to be as firm as when they were erected, more than two hundred years before ; and they were destined still to last undisturbed for more than twice that period. On the north side of the palace, not far from the entrance gate, was the famous well of

St. Blaise, the patron saint of the town. The medicinal virtues of this spring were so highly celebrated in those days, that few travellers were wont to pass the spot without tasting its waters, and offering a prayer in the small chapel immediately adjoining. Just outside the entrance-gate, the houses which composed the straggling village began, extending down to the London road, and on either side of the latter for some little distance. Some few of these were built of stone; but the great majority were of the description usually known as "black and white," being composed of massive timber frames, intersected by diagonal beams, with the interstices filled with lath and plastering, sometimes worked into quaint patterns, gaily coloured and gilded.

At the other end of the archery-ground stood the hostelry of the "Crown," a long, low-windowed, many-gabled building, constructed of timber and plaster, like those just described, and having a huge wooden staircase in front, by which its upper rooms were approached. Under the stately elms, which extended along one face of the building, rustic seats and tables were arranged; while from one of the largest branches was suspended the landlord's sign, coloured anew for the occasion by some local artist. On one of these benches, placed at some distance from the rest of the company, three men were seated, all of them in the flower of their years, and dressed nearly alike, though the expression of their faces was very different. One of them, a tall and well-grown youth, of one-and-twenty or thereabouts, was watching with eager anxiety the progress of the match. Another, some three or four years

older, was a man of more powerful build, but the expression of his features was stern and saturnine, and he seemed to contemplate what was passing with a mixture of scorn and anger. The third, who was nearly of the same age as the one last named, and had an intelligent and handsome face, looked on calmly and sedately, apparently not entirely sharing the sentiments of either of his companions.

The first-mentioned of the three was too deeply absorbed in the issue of the struggle, to pay much heed to the different moods of his companions. Ever and anon he broke out into some sudden exclamation.

“Ha, a clout, a clout!” he cried on one of these occasions; “a clout, and in the very centre too, I make mine avow. Well done, Stephen Brand! Saw you that, Mark? Saw you that, Master Graves? That is the third stout Stephen hath got since we have been sitting here. Our village shall win after all, and the King’s men go back to Eltham with the cocks’ combs cut, which they carried so proudly this morning. Why, how now, neighbours; care ye not for the honour of our parish, that ye will not give worthy Stephen so much as a cheer?”

Mark started as he heard Hugh’s words, and looked hastily round. “Nay, Hugh,” he said, “I wish our village all success; but Jasper’s thoughts and mine, at the moment, were engrossed by a different matter.”

“Aye, indeed, and what see ye in the road out yonder, that should move ye, more than a stout stand-up battle, in which your own neighbours are engaged?”

“I see a sight which gives me but little pleasure,

Hugh Weaver," said Graves; "a sight, which verily is a shame and a reproach to a Christian land. Aye, there they go! It is even as good Master Lydell saith, the blind leading the blind, and deep is the ditch into which both have fallen."

Hugh rose from his seat, partly in surprise at his companion's words, and partly because he perceived that the curiosity of the bystanders generally was beginning to be attracted by some object which had just come into sight. A single glance explained everything. A cavalcade, consisting of some twenty or thirty riders, had surmounted the brow of the hill, and was advancing at a leisurely pace towards the hostelry. All present recognised their destination and purpose, and the more pious among the spectators crossed themselves, and muttered an "*ora pro nobis*" under their breath.

On they came, at what has been described as a leisurely pace—a snail's pace we should account it in these locomotive days; but the roads were deep in mire, and the horses of some of the party of the sorriest, and heavily weighted into the bargain; and as all made a point of keeping together throughout the pilgrimage, their rate of progress was necessarily that of the slowest of the company. On they came, the very counterpart of old Geoffry's description. One or two knights led the way—men of middle age, who had probably been ordered to repair to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury, to expiate some domestic scandal, or, perhaps, blood shed in a private quarrel. They were plainly, almost meanly dressed, in gipons of fustian, devoid of any ornament, and wore neither jewel nor

feather in their caps. Their steeds also were caparisoned like those of men of much lower rank. They were followed by their squires and yeomen, but the former, not being like their lords under penance, were resplendent in all the foppery of the day. Their doublets were of rich velvet, powdered with gold, having sleeves of an extravagant length, drooping almost to the ground. Their hose were of the gayest colours, elaborately embroidered; and their hats looped with precious stones, and surmounted by plumes of various colours. As for the yeomen, they wore the usual jerkin of Lincoln green, and the short sword girded to the belt—their weather-beaten faces exhibiting scars, which might be tokens of Shrewsbury or Homildon Hill. Immediately after these, who by general consent were regarded as leaders, came a motley throng of persons of all ages and callings. There were traders from London or the country towns, in their coats and hose of sober hue, their Flemish beavers, and stout leathern boots; ruminating perhaps, as they journeyed onwards, on certain sharp, but profitable, practices in the way of business, which had pressed uneasily on their consciences—damaged goods, it might be, passed off as new; short measures, doubtful weights, and the like. Of this burden they were about to relieve themselves at the shrine of good St. Thomas, whilst the solid profits, they comfortably reflected, would still remain with them. There were clerks, and nuns, and mendicant friars; some of the latter with their consignment of pardons for sale, which they might find an opportunity of profitably vending in the various towns through

which they passed, or in the city of Canterbury itself. There were franklins—country gentlemen as we should now style them—accompanied, in some instances, by their wives and daughters. The latter, for the most part, rode on side-saddles, after the fashion introduced not many years previously; but some stout dames and apple-cheeked damsels still adhered to the ancient English practice. There were scriveners, and leeches, and soldiers, serving-men, farm-labourers, and country wenches. Every rank and trade had its representative; whom custom or compulsion, the hope of quieting a troublesome conscience, or obtaining a larger amount of credit in the eyes of their neighbours, had sent forth on one common errand.

The news of their approach had hardly begun to circulate, when the host came bustling forth, scenting his prey, like a vulture, from a distance. Humbly he doffed his cap, and volubly he assured the noble knights and their fellow-pilgrims that the most excellent lodging for man and beast was afforded by the "Crown," sufficient to accommodate the whole of the holy pilgrims, if they would but honour him with their company. Not a week had passed throughout that summer, he said, in which there had not halted two or three such companies as the present at his hostelry, on their way to the shrine of the ever-blessed St. Thomas; to whom he himself contemplated the dedication of a candlestick of silver, if, through the good saint's intercession, the later part of the summer should be as profitable as the earlier part had proved.

The knights cut short the host's volubility by alighting from their steeds, and desiring him to shew the way

to the best chamber with which he could provide them. The yeomen led the horses to the inn stables ; while the remainder of the party, after disposing of their steeds in like fashion, dispersed in all directions. Some, and among these the squires were especially conspicuous, mingled with the throng, still watching with heightened interest the close of the archery-bout, which seemed to grow more doubtful with every shaft which was discharged. Delighted with the opportunity of displaying to advantage their gay dresses and fashionable manners, they flashed hither and thither, like butterflies in the light of the evening sun, followed by the admiring eyes of many a rustic beauty. Others among the pilgrims, more piously disposed, repaired to the holy spring, offering a thanksgiving to St. Blaise for the prosperity of their journey thus far, and a prayer for his continued protection.

Neither Hugh nor Mark had made any reply to Jasper's observation. The first-named, after contemplating for a minute or two the approach of the pilgrims, moved nearer to the scene of action, which was a matter of far greater interest in his eyes at the present moment, than all the pilgrimages which had ever been undertaken. Mark looked doubtfully, and somewhat sadly, at the throng of new-comers, but remained silent. Finding no inclination on the part of his companions to discuss the subject, Jasper also held his peace, and a quarter-of-an-hour or so perhaps passed, during which not a word was spoken. The silence was broken at last by the return of Hugh, radiant with delight. He saluted Mark with a joyous thump on the back.

“Our champions have won, lads,” he exclaimed; “what think ye of that? Old Stephen’s last arrow was a clout, the fourth he hath made to-day, and it hath turned the score in our favour. I promise you, the Eltham men will have faces as long as their own arrows, when they go home and tell their wives and sweethearts of the drubbing we have given them. Why, they say that the brave young King Hal himself gave charge to his men, when they set out this morning, that they were to be sure to bring home the bugle which our good Bishop gives as the prize of the day, or he would hold them cheap, and scarce worthy of the crests they wear. Why, what ails ye?” he resumed, after a moment’s pause; “what ails you in especial, Jasper Graves? Is it yonder company of holy pilgrims that causes you to look so sour? Why, man, it is a good work that they do. Father Simon says it is wholesome for body and soul alike. Nay, there is full absolution, and an indulgence for I know not how many days—”

“No one can forgive sins save God alone,” broke in Jasper Graves; “and as for indulgences, what man can give another indulgence to sin?”

“Nay, but think of Father Simon,” exclaimed Hugh, a good deal astounded at these bold words; “hath he not been our teacher and guide ever since we ran bare-legged on the heath yonder—yea, and for the matter of that, our fathers’ teacher too. Surely he is a good man and a wise. You, at least, think so, Mark?”

“I scarce know what to think,” answered Mark, sadly. “Doubtless, we have been brought up to love

and reverence Father Simon, who is a good man, and a kindly. But I know not. God is greater than man; and Jasper seems to me to say truly, that no man can give another licence to sin."

"Lackaday! who would have thought to hear you speak thus," exclaimed Hugh. "This comes now of hearkening to Master Lydell's teaching, whereof my father is wont to say, that it savours too much of fire and faggot for his taste."

"Master Lydell's teaching, which is that of pious John Wycliffe also," exclaimed Jasper, "may indeed bring a man to the fire and faggots, which ungodly persecutors set up for the trial of the faithful. To such an end did it bring the blessed martyrs, William Sautre and John Badby. To such an end, it may be, it will bring Jasper Graves, and many a worthier servant of Christ. Yet, Hugh Weaver, if it bring men to the fires of this world, it helpeth them to escape the fires of that which is to come; wherein they who now persecute the saints will themselves one day be tormented."

He raised his voice defiantly as he uttered these last words, and his vehemence attracted the attention of several of the bystanders,—among them one or two of the Friars, who had formed part of the company of pilgrims. Hugh Weaver hastened to offer a remonstrance.

"Softly, I pray you, Jasper," he exclaimed, lowering his voice as he spoke. "I am not learned in these questions, though, for the matter of that, I doubt I have as good means of understanding them as you have. But there be those present, who may chance to repeat these words to your hurt—yea, and to Mark's and mine

also. If a man is not to hearken to his own Priest, I pray you to whom is he to hearken—”

“And if he is not to obey his lawful sovereign,” interposed another voice, “whom is he to obey?”

Hugh started and looked round, and was somewhat relieved to find that the speaker was his father’s gossip, old Nicholas Allden, a shrewd and somewhat crabbed old man, who was known to regard the new opinions, as they were called, with more than common dislike.

“He is to hearken to those who teach the doctrines of Christ out of the Holy Scriptures,” answered Jasper, “and not the inventions of men—”

“And he is to obey our liege sovereign, Harry V.,” added Mark, “to whom all true men render obedience.”

“Say you?” exclaimed Hugh; “by my halidome, and I am glad to hear those words; for, I promise you, neither my father nor mother regard these new-fangled crotchets with any favour, and it would scarce help your suit with Lettice, were you to profess them.”

“I, too, rejoice to hear these words from Mark Fletcher,” said old Allden; “but, I trow, Jasper here will scarce affirm the same.”

“I uphold and respect all godly princes,” said Jasper, stoutly, “but none other. Natheless we care not for the things of this world, and do not seek to meddle with them.”

“Yet, methinks you are somewhat given to meddle with them, nevertheless,” said Allden. “It is scarce three years since Sir John Oldcastle, whom you all acknowledge as your leader,—it is scarce three years, I say, since he proposed in Parliament to deprive the

Bishops, Abbots, and Priors of their lands and temporal possessions, and therewith to pay fifteen earls, fifteen hundred knights, six thousand esquires, and endow a hundred almshouses. If that be not meddling with the things of this world, by St. Blaise I know not what is."

Mark was silent, but Jasper rejoined, "It was only because these lands and revenues were so shamelessly misused, that godly Sir John so sought to employ them."

"Aye, doubtless," cried Allden; "and it is because King Hal so shamelessly abuses his royal authority, I suppose, that you desire to relieve him of that, and so stir up rebellion against him."

"Nicholas Allden, we stir no rebellion," said Mark, "and it ill becomes you so to malign your neighbours. Sir John Oldcastle, of whom you have spoken, is a brave and loyal nobleman. I have heard that it was in no small sort through his aid that the crown sat safe on the head of Henry IV., our present King's father. Anyway, he is a tried and trusted friend of the King's; for whom he hath shed his blood in France, and on the Welsh marches, I know not how many years past. Yea, and the King loves him well."

"Think you so," said Nicholas. "Nay, then, we are better informed. It is but a short while since that the King sent for him, urging him to lay aside the rebellious spirit he manifests towards those set in authority over him in the Church. Yea, he reasoned with him with all possible mildness and forbearance. But the knight answered in terms so violent and rebellious, that the

good King refused to parley further with him. Call you that loyalty and obedience, my friends?"

"The obedience of a subject is only due in things temporal," retorted Graves.

"Doubtless, nor doth he claim it further," said Allden.

"But Sir John refuses it to those to whom it is due, to wit, the Bishops and Pastors of the Church."

"Tell me not of them," exclaimed Jasper, in a harsher tone than he had yet employed. "When men abuse the power entrusted to them, it ceases to be lawful. Look you there, gossip Allden," he continued, anxious perhaps to effect a diversion, as he felt himself to be somewhat involved in difficulty in the line of argument he had taken up, "look you yonder at that band of pilgrims, who are even now on their way to the shrine of him whom they profanely term St. Blaise—"

"Aye, to attend Vespers," interposed Allden, "as I myself propose presently to do, when the bell shall give its warning. Well, what of that? Methinks such an action well befits those engaged in a pious pilgrimage."

"A pious pilgrimage," repeated the Lollard scornfully. "Chief among these pious pilgrims is Sir James of Ar-mynne. He is the most notorious man for his debaucheries within the city walls; scarce one night in the week is there that his servants do not carry him to bed. And there by his side is the young Lord Fitzhugh, whose hand is red with the blood of one of his rakehelly companions, slain in some shameless quarrel. For these sins against God and man do the Priests command them to weep and pray, as would

Peter and Paul, yea, and our Master Himself, have done? Not so. They bid them mount their horses and ride at their leisure to Canterbury town, and there bow down and offer gifts at the shrine of a dead man, who in his life was no wit holier than themselves. And when they shall have offered these prayers and gifts, they are straightway assoilzied of their sins! See you yonder greybeard in the brown cloth doublet—that is Master Bilney, the most notorious usurer in London. Many a man hath he brought to his ruin. Many are the widows' tears and the orphans' cries, wherewith he is loaded. What matters that? The present of a golden candlestick or a jewelled pyx to him whom you call St. Thomas—costing, it may be, the hundredth part of the sum he hath wrung from his victims during the last twelvemonth only—shall wipe out his account with Heaven, and send him back to his desk free to open a new score. Call you that a holy pilgrimage? For my part, I esteem it rather a mockery of Heaven.”

“Heard ever man the like,” exclaimed Allden. “What! shall holy penances be condemned and thrown aside, because some few would thus misuse them? What holy thing is there that may not be abused? yet, shall its lawful use be therefore forbidden? And who art thou, that takest upon thyself to decide upon high things like these? St. Mary, but I can tell you a tale which may teach you the folly and danger of such presumption. Hearken.—

“It is more than forty years since,—ten years and more, as I judge, before you were born, and when I was

little more than twenty years of age. I had got into trouble, as young springalds are apt to do, and my confessor, worthy Sir Richard Markham, had sent me on this very pilgrimage, against which you are now railing. I remember there was a stout knight, Sir Thomas of Aldoun, no relative of mine, though he bears nearly the same name, who was one of the party."

"Aye, he belonged to this county, did he not?" interposed Hugh.

"He did," returned Allden; "he was our leader. Well, we had nearly reached the city of Canterbury, when we were overtaken by a party of horsemen, at the head of whom rode a grave and learned Prelate, in whom several of our party recognised Simon, Lord Bishop of London. He was on his way to Canterbury, as well as ourselves."

"Like enow," said Graves, scornfully. "What marvel that a living prelate should be ready to render idle and superstitious homage to a dead one?"

"You mistake, friend Jasper," said Allden. "We had no sooner beheld the Bishop, than we lighted from our horses, and went down on our knees entreating his blessing. But what said he? 'What!' he cried, 'be ye on your way to Canterbury to obtain remission of your sins; yea, and a plenary indulgence at the shrine of the holy St. Thomas? Be ye all assured that your errand will do ye no good; nor will any absolution or indulgence either profit ye, unless ye repent and forsake your sins.' What think you of that, Master Graves?"

"I think he said well," cried the Lollard. "Oh, that we had many such Bishops and Priests as he!"

"Tarry awhile," resumed the old man. "We were greatly amazed, and so were the crowd round us, to hear such words from one who should rather have commended and encouraged us, and some few muttered under their breath that it was shame to be so entreated. But Sir Thomas, he spake boldly out, 'What, my Lord Bishop,' he cried, 'do you this dishonour to the holy St. Thomas of Canterbury? Peril of my soul, but you shall die a shameful death for such words!' and the people who heard him shouted, 'Amen.'"

"I will be sworn they did," said the Lollard, bitterly. "When did the multitude ever fail to echo such a cry? But, I doubt not, the good Bishop would say, even as blessed Paul said of the Jews who reviled him, that it was a small thing that he was judged by them."

"Tarry yet awhile," persisted Allden. "I saw no more of my Lord Bishop for eleven years afterwards, when, one fine day in June, I was sent on an errand to the city. I crossed the Thames at Greenwich, and was on my way across Tower Hill, when there rushed forth a rabble from the gates of the Tower, armed with swords and poleaxes. They dragged along with them an old man wearing the vestments of a Bishop, whom I at once recognised, though I had seen him but once before. The mob dragged him to a block of wood, and held him down, while one of them hacked off his head with a rusty axe. I bethought me then of Sir Thomas Aldoun's words: 'If any man ever died a shameful death, it was my Lord Simon of Sudbury.'"

CHAPTER II.

JASPER GRAVES had listened with ill-suppressed impatience to Allden's story, and at its conclusion he would have broken out into some vehement reply, if Hugh Weaver had not at this moment interposed. "My masters," he said, "an ye will talk of such matters, let it be after supper, at all events. Hard words are but a poor substitute for beef and ale. And if we have much more of this discourse, we shall run a risk of missing the last named altogether."

"Hath the Vesper bell sounded, lad?" asked Allden, apparently somewhat surprised; "I heard it not."

"It hath ceased this ten minutes," answered Hugh; "it will be too late for you to attend Vespers now. My father, I doubt not, hath been expecting us, and with somewhat scant patience, this quarter-of-an-hour already. He doth not love the pasty to grow cold, or the ale turn flat, as methinks you yourself should know, Master Nicholas."

"I know it," answered Nicholas, taking his staff, and moving off. "I mislike cold viands and stale drink for the matter of that, as much as my gossip." Mark Fletcher followed him.

Hugh looked doubtfully at Jasper Graves. "I fear it will be vain to ask you to accompany us," he said; "but you shall be welcome if you will."

"I thank you," said Graves, curtly; "but I have other work in hand. Mark," he added, following the young man, and speaking in a voice which was inaudible to the others, "I have had no opportunity

of delivering you my message, which relates to matters nearly concerning the good and worthy Sir John. Can you not tarry awhile, and hearken to it?"

"I cannot remain now," said Mark, in the same guarded tone. "My kinsman expects us, and will be sore displeased if we loiter."

"Your kinsman," repeated Graves, sourly; "your kinswoman, you mean—Lettice Weaver, for whose sake you are prepared to overlook the needs and perils of your friend and benefactor. Well, go on your way, Mark Fletcher; you are but like the rest of the world, I trow, and would fain serve both God and mammon—only, if the two disagree, mammon carries the day."

"You are unjust," answered Mark. "I would do all that lies in my power for the good knight. If I have not heard your message, it has been your fault not mine, and I am ready to hear it, as soon as I leave Weaver's cottage, which will be within two hours at furthest."

"Two hours," repeated Jasper, in a somewhat milder tone. "Well, that may suffice. Where shall I meet you when the two hours are expired?"

"Under the wall of the churchyard, at the south-eastern corner," said Mark; "there we shall be free from interruption." He hurried after the others as he spoke, overtaking them just as they reached Miles's cottage.

In a few minutes they were all assembled round the well-polished oak table. The party consisted of seven—Miles himself, his wife, his daughter Lettice, his near kinswoman, Amabel Harradine, and the three new-comers. All the men were dressed nearly alike, in jerkins and hose,

and plain flat caps, all of the commonest cloth. This was not a matter of choice, so much as of necessity,—the artizans of that day, and for a long time afterwards being debarred from wearing any cloth that cost more than two shillings a yard. The laws regarding dress in those days, do indeed sound strangely in our ears. It was not journeymen and labourers alone who were subject to these restrictions, but their betters also. Men possessed of less than forty shillings a-year, were forbidden to ornament their doublets with fur, or to have them made of fustian or scarlet cloth; nor were they suffered to pad them out with stuffing. Their wives and daughters also were restrained from indulging themselves with the finery in general vogue, even though they should possess the means of gratifying their fancies. Probably, however, anyone who studies the costume of the great ladies of that day, will think that their sisters of lower rank lost but little by this prohibition. Certainly Dame Weaver in her comfortable gown of homespun, with its hood appended, and Lettice in her kirtle of green cloth and simple head-dress, contrasted favourably with the peaked or horned caps, and the robes overloaded with embroidery, which distinguished the high-born dames of King Henry's court.

The supper which Dame Weaver had provided in honour of the occasion, was, of course, better than the ordinary fare of the family, but it was a very humble imitation of the luxurious banquets in which the upper and middle classes were wont to indulge. It consisted of a larded capon, which was placed before the host, and a mutton pasty opposite to it. No vegetables appeared on the

table; but in their places were simple sauces or potages as they were called, consisting chiefly of figs or currants, mixed with cloves and ginger. The carver divided the food by the help of a stout knife, which he usually carried attached to his girdle. It was distributed to the company on wooden platters, and divided into small bits, partly by the help of the knife—which was not furnished to the guest, as in modern times, but with which every person provided himself as a matter of course—and partly by the fingers, the use of forks being wholly unknown till some two or three hundred years afterwards. A leathern jack of ale stood at the host's right hand, which was passed round several times during the meal, each partaking of it in turn.

No attempt was made, either by Alden or Mark, to renew the recent conversation. In truth, it would scarce have been acceptable to old Miles Weaver, who was a hearty and jovial character, by no means inclined to encourage ideas like those of Graves; and as for Mark, he found the society of Lettice sufficiently engrossing to exclude all other subjects. She was a good specimen of the comely English lass of the middle ages, ruddy of cheek and rosy of lip, her bright blue eye, chestnut hair, and ivory teeth setting off her naturally fair complexion, embrowned by exercise and country air. There was very little coquetry in her demeanour towards her lover, for whom she displayed a very evident admiration, laughing heartily at his attempts at wit whenever he essayed them. Mark himself was a handsome young fellow, and now that the uneasy expression had

vanished which had overclouded his features on the archery-ground, he seemed a youth who might well attract the regard of any maiden. The tone of the whole party was unusually jovial. Old Miles himself was especially pleased at the victory won over the royal archers, all the more welcome because so little anticipated. Dame Weaver and Mistress Harradine were pleased because the goodman was pleased. The lovers were in high spirits, old Miles having intimated that he saw no reason why the wedding should not take place on the Feast of St. Matthew next ensuing, if Father Simon, or Sir Simon Welford, as he was ordinarily called, raised no objection. Hugh shared his father's satisfaction at the result of the archery-bout, and was also rejoiced to have exchanged Jasper Graves's wearisome talk, for subjects more congenial to his taste. As for old Alden, he had picked up a piece of information from one of the royal household, who had been present at the match, and with whom he had an old acquaintance, which he designed to bring out when the food had been well disposed of, knowing that it would greatly excite and interest his audience.

Accordingly, he took advantage of a lull in the conversation, an hour or so after the commencement of the meal, and addressed his host in a tone which attracted the attention of all.

"Those were brave days, my gossip," he said, "when you and I were young, and good King Edward was winning his victories in France. You remember them, do you not?"

"Yea I remember them parlous well," said the old

man, rising readily to the bait ; " I remember when the gallant young Prince came home after Poitiers ; I was a lad of fifteen, and walked up to Southwark to see the show. The Prince and the King had landed at Sandwich, and rode up by easy stages to London ; where a train of a thousand citizens in their best attire came out to meet him, with the Lord Mayor at their head. They had thrown arches across the streets, and there were banners, and goodly tapestry, and shining armour hung up in every window. Presently, the Prince came up, dressed as plainly as any of his men-at-arms, and riding on a small pony, and there was the King of France on his cream-coloured charger, all scarlet and gold and jewels, from spur to helmet. You should have heard how the people shouted," continued the old man, his eye kindling at this stirring reminiscence of his youth. " Methinks I have never heard a lusty English cheer since then."

" You may chance to hear the like once more ere long," remarked Allden.

" I scarce think so," said Miles.

" Nay, there may be fighting in France yet again," said Allden oracularly.

" By my halidom," observed Hugh, " there is fighting enow already in France, if the half of what we hear be true. Report says that the Frenchmen do little else but cut one another's throats. But I see not wherefore we should cheer on that account."

" Nay, but there may be fighting between the French and ourselves," said Allden. " In plain parlance, our brave young King is minded to claim the inheritance

of his fathers; and if they refuse it him, he will cross the seas with as gallant a following, as ever the Black Prince led in the days of which you were speaking."

"What say you," interposed Amabel, "more French wars? Now our Lady forbid! Methinks English blood and English treasure enow were wasted in France in the days of our fathers, without reviving them in our own."

"Aye, say you so?" said Miles, more good-humouredly than might have been expected. "Well you lost a good husband in those wars; and it were hard to blame you for misliking them."

"As good a husband as ever put a ring on a woman's finger," said Amabel. "Truly, it was a black day when Sir John Chandos's troop lay one night at Higham Ferrars, on his way to the sea-coast, and took away I know not how many of the village lads, and my Simon among them, to fight the French, all along of his knowing how to handle his bow so deftly. We had scarce been wedded six months, and he told me he would come back with a capful of nobles, but alack, he never came back at all."

"Aye, the men of Higham Ferrars were skilful enough with the bow," said Miles. "If the Eltham lads had had some half-dozen of them in their company to-day, they would scarce have left the bugle behind them, as they have done. Well, I find no fault with you for upholding your native village, as you are wont to do. Have I not cause to praise it myself, seeing it was there that I fell in with Dame Weaver, who hath made a passable wife, as the times go. What, Mark lad, how now? Are you going thus early? It wanteth a quarter-of-an-

hour of curfew yet, and on a day like this it were hard indeed if one might not indulge a little."

"I crave your pardon, my kinsman," said Mark, "it would pleasure me much to stay; but I have a matter in hand which may not be postponed."

As if anxious to avoid further explanation, he took his cap from off the peg on which he had hung it, and vanished through the doorway.

"Matter in hand," muttered the old man, as he beheld him depart. "What matter should a man have in hand at this hour of the night? I trust the lad hath not gone to join the roysterers who are holding a drinking-bout at the 'Mitre,'" he added somewhat angrily. "An I thought he had—"

"No, neighbour, it is not that," said Alden. "The springald is mazed with these new teachers, and more especially with Jasper Graves, who came among us (as you know) some three months ago."

"Yea, I know him—know him right well," rejoined Miles testily. "He is the pestilent Lollard, against whom Father Simon warned our household last spring. St. Mary, he shall be no son-in-law of mine, who hath aught to do with him. Lettice, my girl, look to this. I had as lief that you should wed the Evil One himself, as one of these new-fangled rebels against Church and Crown, whom they call Lollards. Yet I will not believe it either," he added more calmly. "Mark's father was mine old comrade, and had nought to do with either traitors or heretics. Know you aught of this?" he continued, turning to Lettice, who had thrown her apron over her head, and was sobbing bitterly.

“Know you aught of it, I say?” he repeated more sharply, as he noticed her distress.

“Alas, father,” said Lettice, “it is all Master Graves’s doing. Mark was as true to his Church and King as you are yourself—”

“*Was* as true,” thundered the old man. “What! you mean he is true no longer. Then, by heavens, all shall be at an end between you and him, let who will say to the contrary.”

“Oh, father, be not hasty,” said Lettice. “Mark loves and honours you. Be sure he will pay heed to your words, if you will but have patience with him.”

“Patience, girl, with a heretic and a rebel! Methinks you should know your father better than to ask him that.”

The others now interposed with more judicious counsels, urging Miles to suspend his wrath until he had more certain assurance on the subject. With some difficulty the old man was induced to resume his seat at the board, from which he had started up in the plenitude of his indignation; and Alden returning to the topic he had started, old Miles’ equanimity was presently somewhat restored. Yet he did not betake himself to his rest that night, without having repeated to Lettice his solemn assurance, that unless the lad should altogether cast off the pestilent opinions, which, as it seemed, he had adopted—betrothal, or no betrothal,—he should be no husband of hers.

Meanwhile, Mark had been holding an interview of no very agreeable character with his new-made friend, Jasper Graves, in the retired corner of Bromlegh Heath, whither they had gone for greater secrecy.

"I could not speak to you on the archery-ground," began the latter; "but I have tidings for you from Master Lydell. He knows you to be a faithful friend to the good Sir John Oldcastle; to whom indeed I myself, if I mistake not, have heard you express both gratitude and affection."

"I doubt not you have heard me so speak," returned Mark; "I am deeply bound to Sir John, and he shall ever command my loyal service."

"It is well," said the other. "Master Lydell bids me inform you that the good knight is in great peril, and unless he be delivered therefrom with all speed, his freedom, nay, his life, can hardly be preserved."

"How," exclaimed Mark. "I know that the Archbishop beareth him no goodwill, and hath been concerting measures against him. But it was further said, that stout Sir John had withstood him without hurt. Summonses had indeed been issued, but he was so greatly beloved, that no man could be found to serve them on him."

"And you heard the truth," said Graves; "more than one of his somptnours have been sent from Lambeth, but when they came near Cowling, and learned the opinion of the folk thereabout, they straightway returned home, too wise to approach the Castle-gate. Also the notices have been affixed to the Cathedral-doors, but the people presently tore them down again."

"It was even that we heard," said Mark. "Hath aught occurred to diminish the affection wherewith the Commons regard him?"

"Not to our knowledge," answered Jasper; "but the

Archbishop hath so far prevailed with the King, that he is minded to despatch some of his own soldiers to compel Sir John's attendance at Lambeth."

"Are you sure of that?" inquired Mark. "I can scarce believe that our good King would so comport himself towards his old friend and brother-in-arms."

"Ah, you know not King Henry," said the Lollard. "I tell you he hath given himself up, body and soul, into the keeping of these Priests, even as his father did."

"Yet he loveth not the axe and stake," said Mark. "Would he not have saved good John Badby from burning, if he could?"

"If he could," retorted the other, scornfully. "What prevented him from saving Master Badby, had he been so minded? I was present myself on the day when that godly man sealed his testimony with his blood. After he had been bound to the stake, and the wood had been heaped round him, they brought him the pyx in great state,—twelve blazing torches being carried before it, after their idolatrous fashion,—and asked him what he esteemed it to be. Brave-hearted John answered, that it was hallowed bread, and nought else. Thereupon, the wood was set on fire, and presently the scorching heat caused him such agony, that he could not help crying aloud. The Prince, who chanced to be present, was so moved at his cries, that he bade them remove the faggots, and offered to set John at liberty, and even to settle a pension upon him, if he would recant the opinion he had just before expressed. Prince Henry could have done this, had he been so

mind, without demanding any such recantation. But when stout John refused to save his life on such terms, the Prince's mood changed, and he ordered the faggots to be replaced, and the butchery to proceed. I fear it will be so now. Doubtless, he will be unwilling that his early friend should undergo a doom so cruel; but if the Priests demand his blood, and Sir John prove as resolute as Badby, he will permit them to have their way. He hath made himself the slave of these ungodly men, and they will hold him fast, so that he cannot escape."

"I will not argue that," said Mark; "but if I can render the good knight any help, yea, even at my own risk, I will not fail to do so. But I see not how I could aid him."

"Master Lydell is of opinion that a messenger should straightway be despatched to Cowling Castle, to warn Sir John of the new peril which now threatens him, in order that he may take such steps as shall seem good to him to meet or evade it. It may be that he will think it wisest to obey the summons, when he knows all; it may be that he will think flight for the present the more judicious course; it may be, again, that he will be minded to resist the unholy decree."

"Resist," exclaimed Mark, "resist the King's command? that were downright treason!"

"Nay, it is scarce likely he would do that," said the Lollard hastily, perceiving that he had gone too far; "and even if such should be his resolve, he would take counsel with those who would guide him wisely. But, anyway, it is well that he should be warned of the peril in which he stands."

"And wherefore do not you yourself convey the message?" inquired Mark, somewhat doubtfully.

"I am well minded to do so," was the answer; "but there be difficulties in the way, or I had not sought your aid. I am unknown to any of the household of Cowling, indeed to Sir John himself. I should scarce gain admission to the knight's presence; and, even should I succeed in that, my story might not be credited. It might be thought that I had been sent with a false tale, to induce Sir John to give way, when he might otherwise safely stand out."

"Aye, that is likely enough," said Fletcher. "Such devices are not uncommon in these days."

"But you, Mark Fletcher," continued Graves, "are well known both to the Lord Cobham and his chief servants. You will obtain a ready admission and a trustful audience. For me, I am willing to share the dangers and difficulties of the journey, and am furnished with money to defray its cost."

Mark considered awhile. "I am well disposed to undertake anything in the worthy knight's behalf, nor doth the danger or the difficulty deter me. But Cowling, you know, lieth some thirty miles or more from hence, and in a quarter where I have no friends or relatives. What should take me such a distance from home? It would surely excite suspicion."

"That hath been cared for," said Jasper. "It is proposed that you and I journey so far as Maidstone in the disguise of pilgrims. Nay, start not. You know how I account of pilgrimages; but our purpose is a very different one from that of these benighted souls, who

think after such a fashion to please Heaven, or atone for sin. This fond vanity is so common in this age of ours, that it will readily be believed that you have been induced to fall in with it, without many questions being asked on the subject."

"That is true," said Mark, who thought, though with a somewhat uneasy conscience, that Lettice and old Miles would probably put their own interpretation upon the act, and possibly Father Simon also, and that such interpretation could not fail to be favourable to his own hopes. "But it is to save a good and pious man from cruel persecution," he thought, "and that must needs be a good work. He, too, whom they seek to persecute is my patron and benefactor, and it cannot but be my duty to aid him." "Have you the means of carrying out this purpose?" he added aloud. "You have the money for the journey, you say; but horses must be procured, and other necessaries, and permission asked to join their company. It may be inquiries will be made, and if they be not fully answered, suspicion may arise."

"Care not for that," said Jasper. "All this hath been arranged, and proper dresses provided, which will conceal us from prying eyes. You have but to give notice to your kinsfolk that you are setting out on this pilgrimage, and leave the rest to me."

Mark Fletcher's connection with Sir John Oldcastle, it should here be explained, dated from an occurrence some three or four years previously, which had produced a marked change in his character. He had been an unusually clever, but gay and careless youth, notorious

for his love of good fare and smart clothing—so much so, indeed, that old Miles, who was far from being particular himself, had forbidden his visits, misliking the attachment which appeared to be growing up between him and Lettice. It had chanced one day that, being engaged in a game at cloish at his favourite hostelry of the “Crown,” he had found himself opposed to some men-at-arms, who were on their way to the sea-coast, being part of a force which Henry had sent to assist the party of the Armagnacs. A quarrel arose, ending in a challenge to fight. Mark’s opponent had the worst of it—indeed, he was severely hurt. In revenge he accused Mark to his subaltern officer of being a supporter of King Richard’s faction, and of having spoken treasonable words against King Henry. The accusation was as deadly as it was malicious. There was at that time a very wide-spread belief that King Richard II. was still alive in Scotland. His name continued to be a watchword of treasonable discontent among the commons; and this fact occasioned the government so much alarm, that they had given orders to their subordinates to deal promptly and severely with all persons against whom such disaffection could be proved. Mark, in spite of his protestations of loyalty to King Henry, and his offers to bring evidence of it, would speedily have dangled from one of the boughs of the great elm in front of the hostelry, if a middle-aged knight, whose equipments and retinue shewed him to be a person of rank, had not at that moment appeared on the scene. This was Sir John Oldcastle, the commander-in-chief of the expedition. He had just arrived at Bromlegh with

the main body, his vanguard having preceded him a few hours previously. Mark broke from his executioners, and, seizing the knight's stirrup, entreated his protection. "Noble Sir John," he said, for Oldcastle's person was well known to all in Bromlegh, "men say that you love justice, and stand up for the rights of the commons. I am foully slandered, and shall be yet more foully murdered by these men, unless you lend me your aid."

Oldcastle drew his rein, and bade the youth take courage. "No Englishman," he said, "can be put to death except by course of law. I will inquire into your case. What charge bring ye against this man, Hawley?" he continued, addressing the officer, who with his men had followed the fugitive, and was now close by, looking somewhat embarrassed and uneasy.

"It hath been sworn before me that he hath spoken treason against our Lord the King," said the officer, "affirming that he is no lawful sovereign, but himself a traitor and an assassin."

"By my halidom, a heavy charge," said the knight; "and for which, if it be true, hanging is the rightful penalty."

"It is not true, noble sir," cried Fletcher; "I am well known for a peaceful and loyal subject. I besought these men that they would suffer me to summon my neighbours, men of worship and credit, who would have answered for me. But they would not hearken to me."

"Methinks that should not have been refused, Hawley," said Oldcastle, frowning.

The officer muttered something under his breath

of being straitened for time, and of having received orders to deal summarily with such cases.

"Doubtless," returned the knight; "yet not without proof. And if the witnesses live at too great a distance to be fetched, were there not others who overheard what passed? This took place, if I rightly understand, in the yard of the hostelry. Where be mine host and his tapsters, or, it may be, some of his customers who were at hand. Go you, Master Lydell," he added, addressing a grave-looking man who was riding a sober palfrey, at his side, "make inquiry if any witnessed the quarrel, and if so, bring them hither."

In the course of a few minutes Master Lydell returned with two or three persons, who had heard all that passed, but had stood in too much awe of the swashbucklers to attempt interference. The presence of the commander-in-chief, the crestfallen aspect of the subaltern, and above all, the knight's well-known character for justice and mercy, inspired them with courage. With one consent they testified that Mark Fletcher had been guilty of no more grievous offence than that of requiting with somewhat heavy interest a blow which he had received from one of the soldiers. "He had spoken no word of treason," they said, "against their good lord the King, and was as well known for a loyal lad, and a peaceful subject, as e'er a man in Kent."

"By my faith," said the knight, "and I believe ye, for he looks a likely youth and an honest. But ye knaves, what mean ye by uttering foul slander, and plotting the lives of worthy men? It were justice to hang

you up on yonder bough, from which ye would have suspended this good youth. See that ye attempt not aught of this kind in future, or a halter will be your speedy portion. Hawley, you, too, have to learn that haste and masterful violence misbeseem an officer. Get your men together, and straightway leave the village. Lydell, I leave it to you to see that this youth in no way suffers for what hath happened."

He rode on without waiting to receive the thanks and blessings, which not Mark only, but others of the bystanders poured forth. The knight's espousal of Mark's cause against his own soldiers, was the more generous, because, at that crisis, any man who befriended a presumed partisan of the late monarch, was exposed to suspicion and possible danger, however great might be his station, or approved his court favour. Mark was proportionately grateful; and when Master Lydell visited him at his cottage—as he several times did, in accordance with Oldcastle's instructions, to make sure that no harm had befallen him in consequence of the charge made against him—he received him with thankful reverence. Lydell, struck by his superiority to his fellow-villagers, was interested in him, and, after a time, began to speak to him on the subjects which lay nearest to his own heart. The young man listened attentively, and the effect was soon seen in the amended tone of his life and conversation. But along with his improvement in these respects, there were other changes, which Father Simon did not so much approve. He came to confession as seldom as could possibly be permitted; he avoided the priest's company, except when

he could not do so without the most flagrant disrespect ; and he was frequently seen in the society of persons notorious for holding what were accounted heretical opinions. Among these was Jasper Graves, who had resided only a month or two at Bromlegh, but had already attracted the notice of the authorities by his acrimonious and incessant attacks on the clergy. Father Simon, who had consented to the betrothal of the lovers on the strength of the young man's reformation, was half inclined to refuse his sanction to the actual marriage, but had as yet abstained from speaking to old Miles on the subject. So matters stood at the outset of the story.

CHAPTER III.

THE ancient city of Rochester, at the commencement of the fifteenth century, was a place of very considerable importance ; as was evidenced by its having been the scene of several encounters between the King and the Barons, in the generations immediately preceding. The Castle, now an imposing ruin, but in those days a stately embattled structure, overhung the waters of the Medway, a broad and peaceful stream, which flowed through a country whose fertile pastures and corn-fields had earned it the name of "the fertile Kent." it had been held for King John against the disaffected nobles, and only captured after a resolute defence. It was again besieged by Simon de Montfort in the ensuing reign, but this time without success.

Wat Tyler, in the reign of Richard II., was more fortunate in his attack upon it, and succeeded in rescuing many of his companions who were imprisoned within its walls. Almost immediately adjoining it, and to the east, the Cathedral,—built by Gundulph in 1080, on the ruins of a yet earlier structure,—reared on high its massive Norman towers, and large western window; which had recently been inserted, with the Perpendicular mullions and tracery of the period, among the more ancient stone-work.

The town stood on nearly the same spot as now, being most picturesquely placed on the banks of the Medway, or rather its estuary; which here, taking a sudden bend, encompasses it on three sides. The river in Henry the Fifth's reign, was crossed by a stone bridge of eleven arches, a gift to the town from the noble family of Cobham, whose estates lay nearly contiguous. There was one main street, intersected by several others of smaller size—all surrounded by walls which were accounted to be of great strength. The population was chiefly seafaring—fishermen, and sailors in the employ of merchants, concerned in the wool-trade carried on with continental Europe; the harbour affording a place of safety for ships from the attacks of the French and Dutch, so destructive to our merchantmen in the reigns of the Plantagenet Kings. These, together with the soldiers of the Castle garrison, the monks belonging to the noble priory founded by Bishop Gundulph, and a certain proportion of small tradesmen and handicraftsmen, made up the bulk of the inhabitants. The Bishops of Rochester, though their chief place of residence was

Bromlegh, had nevertheless a palace here, situated near the south-east corner of the Cathedral, at which they continued occasionally to reside, until the time of the Reformation.

In the forenoon of a September day, shortly after Mark's interview with Lydell, a good deal of excitement was caused in the town, by the presence of some persons of the highest rank, who had landed at one of the Kentish seaports on the previous evening, and had been the guests of the Bishop for the night. They were now setting forth on their way to visit the King at Eltham, some twenty miles distant, and the cavalcade presented an imposing appearance. The great nobles of that day affected much splendour, both in their own person and in those of their retainers; and as on the present occasion the personages journeying towards London had been sent on an errand from the King himself to the Duke of Burgundy (at that time the supreme ruler of France) almost royal magnificence was displayed. The envoys were three in number, Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, the Bishop of St. David's, and the Lord De la Zouch. Each of these was attended by twenty knights, together with sixty archers and men-at-arms. The procession made a gallant show, as it passed along the principal street, and over the long Gothic bridge beyond. Armour glittered, plumes waved, surcoats of scarlet, and green, and purple, made up an imposing *coup d'œil*. The two noblemen were conspicuous for the sumptuousness of their apparel; their gilded armour, and the rich housings of their steeds, rendering them prominent even in that gay and sparkling

throng. But the dress of the Churchman, Henry Chicheley, Bishop of St. David's,—a favourite counsellor of the young King, and a man of increasing eminence in the estimation of his countrymen,—was at least as gorgeous as that of his lay brethren. Nor was he less warmly greeted by the crowd than his two colleagues in office—if anything, the shouts raised in his honour were more general and enthusiastic. It was commonly believed, though upon what grounds it would perhaps be difficult to say, that Chicheley's policy tended to the renewal of the French wars, which had formed so brilliant an episode in the reign of King Edward III. The nation had never forgotten the triumphs of Crecy and Poitiers; and the failure of King Richard II. to satisfy its aspirations in this respect, had been probably one main cause of his downfall. The good citizens of Rochester accordingly bestowed a hearty welcome upon the Bishop, and even on his favourite Chaplain, John Forrester, who rode on his right hand,—a civility which they requited with much affability, bowing courteously as they advanced, and every now and then stopping to bestow their benediction on those who knelt to ask it.

The spectacle, though gorgeous, was short-lived. Before the spectators had half satisfied themselves with the show, it had passed away—the ringing of the hoofs, and the clash of arms falling more faintly every moment on the ear. A dull blank followed. The townspeople still lingered about the streets, too much engrossed by their recent excitement to resume their sober occupations. Presently, a new source of interest presented itself, though hardly one which afforded such general

satisfaction. Just at the end of the bridge, on its eastern side, there stood a wayside chantry, recently built by the Lord of Cobham for the use of travellers. In front of this was placed one of the huge stone blocks, designed for the accommodation of more timid equestrians. A man of a grave and somewhat stern appearance, attired in a long black gown, stained with the mark of recent travel, mounted on this eminence, and proceeded to address the multitude. He was unknown, apparently, to any of the spectators; but no one could doubt his occupation or purpose. It was at once conjectured that he was one of the preachers, whom Sir John Oldcastle, Lord of Cobham (as he was at this time styled in right of the heiress of that ancient family, whom he had married), maintained at his own cost, sending them forth into the three dioceses—Canterbury, Rochester, and Hereford, with which he was more directly connected—to preach against the false doctrines and vices of the clergy.

Whatever may have been the original meaning of the word "Lollardy"—whether derived from Walter Lollard, who was burnt for heresy at Cologne, in 1322*, or (as is more probable) from the German *lollen*, "to sing," the word being equivalent, in fact, to the modern "Psalm-singer,"—it was certainly used in England at this period to denote those persons who, following in the main the doctrine of John Wicliffe, were sorely dissatisfied, not only with the erroneous teaching of the clergy on many points, and the dissolute lives they led,

* It is probable that he was called "Walter *the* Lollard," deriving his name from the sect, not the sect theirs from him.

but also with the secular government in many particulars, and more especially the determined maintenance of Church authority by Henry IV. and his son. There was much in Lollardism that must needs command our sympathies. The corruption of doctrine, and the abuse of the office committed to them, by the clergy of that day, are unhappily beyond dispute. Many of the least defensible of the Romish dogmas, as for example indulgences, and the absolute power of the Pope in every detail of Church authority, attained a height then to which they had never risen before. For their opposition to these, the Lollards deserve our warm approval. There were minor points also, such as the perilous honour bestowed upon the saints, with the homage rendered to relics, and the regard in which pilgrimages were held, to which they took most reasonable exception. Thus the offerings made at the shrine of Thomas à Becket in one year amounted to many hundred pounds, while at that of our Lord not so much as a groat was offered. Again, the success of the English at the battle of Agincourt was ascribed to the intercession of John of Beverley, an ancient Archbishop of York, and holy oil was said to have flowed from his tomb, in token of the grace bestowed by him. This is gravely stated by Chicheley himself, and in a formal document. Facts like these sufficiently prove how well-founded were the complaints of the Lollards as regarded these abuses. If the cry for reform, which they raised, had been confined to matters like these, the verdict of posterity in their instance would have been one of very general respect and admiration. But there were impatient and unreasonable

spirits among them—as in truth there are in every great religious movement—who pushed their objections to an extravagant length, and insisted upon changes, which would have been more unwise and disastrous than the abuses they were to remedy. When they declared that no ordination was needed to authorise men to preach and perform ministerial functions, they sought to introduce not reformation, but anarchy, into the Church. When they maintained that the earth and all its riches belonged to those only whom they called “the Saints,” and that the whole of the revenues of the clergy were misapplied, and ought to be diverted to other uses, they preached, not reason, but fanaticism. In their denunciation of all war, again, and their demand that the state should suppress all trades, such as that of the armourer, which depended upon war for their support, they asked what it was absurd to expect that any government would grant—what no government, in fact, could grant, even were it willing to do so. Above all, their attempts to compel those in authority to accede to their demands by the employment of treasonable intrigue or open force, was a worse offence in them than it would have been in other men. A very mixed judgment will be formed respecting them by the thoughtful student of history. To use the popular phrase of the present day, there were Lollards and Lollards; some of them wise and pious men, the very salt of their age, to whose remonstrances the Heads of the Church would have done well to listen; some, narrow-minded and violent fanatics, whom the Heads of the Church would have done wisely to silence, though not by axe and faggot; some, again,

a compound of the two characters above described, of whom it is hard to say, whether their history most awakens our pity, our approval, or our condemnation.

The preacher who now presented himself to the assembled multitude in the streets of Rochester, would probably be reckoned by most sober-judging men as belonging to the third of the classes above named. He was in truth no other than our old acquaintance, Jasper Graves, who had arrived that morning in Rochester in company with Mark; and who had been so greatly stirred up by the military display he had just witnessed, by the evident pleasure with which the people regarded it, and above all, by the state affected by the Bishop of St. David's, as to be unable to restrain his indignation.

“Good people all,” he began; “ye have seen the pomp wherein these carnal-minded men do ride down our streets, robed in purple and fine linen, and compassed about by men in steel armour, and girded with sharp swords. Ye have seen it, and your throats have borne witness that ye also approve it. Doubtless it is pleasing to the fleshly eye to behold the like, yet I would have you remember what the Scripture saith of such men, and of their calling—how the Lord Himself declareth that ‘all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword.’ Yea, and holy Paul addeth, that ‘men should not war after the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly.’ To the like effect writeth John in the thirteenth chapter of the Revelation, ‘He that slayeth with sword, it behoveth him to be slain with sword.’”

“Wherefore we who desire not death, but life, will flee from such things, and will not ourselves handle the carnal weapons which God condemns, and will have nought to do with men of war and blood; yea, rather we will pray our rulers that they henceforth forbid these ungodly strifes, and require those who live by them, to fulfil, in place thereof, some peaceable and worthy calling.

“But ye saw among these riders, not men of war only, but one who professed to be a man of peace,—what do I say, a very preacher and apostle of peace; yet he rideth with these sons of perdition, hand-and-glove with them, as their trusty friend and companion! Surely such an one hath need to learn of what spirit he is. How shall he who thus breaketh the law of God teach it unto others? Saw you again how he was robed in scarlet, and gold, and jewels,—how the very saddle-cloth of his palfrey shone like a royal robe! What think you, my masters, of such successors as these to Peter the fisherman, and Paul the tent-maker? Come they into any peril, as did these? Nay, but they imperil the lives of other men with their pride and masterful violence! Do they endure toil and hardship? Nay, for living at their ease, while others work, there be none to be compared with them! Are they meek and lowly of heart? Nay, rather for arrogance and hardness of heart have they become a very proverb! Do they teach sound doctrine, such as the Apostles laid down their lives to uphold? Well-a-day! they have overlaid the simplicity of the Faith with their own inventions, so that a man can scarce discern a grain of truth, amid

the great heap of falsehood, wherewith they have intermingled it! Do they—”

“Hold your peace, foul railer,” exclaimed a man in a dark purple livery, who had just crossed the bridge, on his way, as it seemed, to the Bishop's palace, but who had halted to listen to the Lollard's discourse; “hold your peace, I say, or I will cut ye over the head, and so put a stop to your preaching. Do you insult my Lord the Bishop in his own cathedral city?”

“He may be your lord, but he is not mine,” returned Jasper Graves, undauntedly; “and, for this city being his, I know not who gave it him. I hold it to be the Lord's city, and not that of any man; even as the blessed Psalmist said: ‘Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.’ Ill methinks were it for the good folk of Rochester, were they under no better protection than that of a man no whit better or wiser than themselves. Yea, rather—”

“Out on it, neighbours, will ye suffer him thus openly to revile the good Bishop?” cried another man, who by his dress was a lay brother, probably from the neighbouring monastery. “Down with him, we have heard enow.”

“Aye, down with him,” cried another, “or we may have to give account of ourselves for permitting this.”

“Down with him, down with him,” shouted several of the mob, always ready to take part against anyone who is the object of popular dislike. One or two stout fellows climbed up the block, and seizing the preacher by either shoulder, endeavoured to drag him down;

but Jasper, used perhaps to such displays of violence, was no way disposed to yield to his assailants.

"Help, my masters," he cried; "help, I pray you, for the sake of the Word, and for the good Lord Cobham, in whose name I stand here to-day. Will ye see me torn down by these wolves of Rome, and do nought to aid me? It is your cause I plead, it is for your sakes that my life is imperilled."

His appeal was promptly responded to. The name of Lord Cobham, as has been already intimated, commanded much respect in Rochester, and independently of that, the opinions of the Lollards had by this time spread so widely among the commonalty, that a writer of that day declares "that a full half of them had become Lollards." The counter cries of "Down with the Priests," "No Romish bondage," "Strike for good Sir John," were raised on all sides. The Lollard's assailants were plucked down from the block, dragging however the preacher with them. A riot now was imminent. Stones began to fly; stout cudgels were seen waving in the air, and swords were freely drawn on either side. The parties appeared to be nearly evenly balanced in respect of numbers, each continually receiving fresh accessions, until the entire street exhibited a spectacle of torn doublets, angry faces, and clashing weapons. Serious loss of life would probably have ensued, if the Mayor of Rochester, to whose ears the tidings of the affray had been conveyed, had not promptly despatched a strong detachment of the city guard to restore order. They marched down the street with levelled halberts and drawn swords. The mob gave way before them,

as an English mob always does in the presence of lawful authority; and all resistance having been overcome, the officer in command of the party proceeded to make inquiry as to the origin of the disturbance. It might have gone hard with Jasper Graves now; for whatever the citizens generally might have thought on the subject, the town functionaries would certainly have accounted him to be the main cause of the uproar. But, luckily for himself, he was nowhere to be found. He had been hurled to the ground as the reader has heard, and a struggle for the possession of his person had ensued, fierce as that of the Greeks and Trojans round the body of Patroclus. But two men, one a stout country-built fellow of five-and-twenty or so, the other an older man, wearing the cap and jerkin of a citizen, had come to his rescue, and succeeded in wresting him, though with sore damage to his apparel, from the hands of his immediate assailants. Finding him unable to regain his feet, so sore bruised indeed as to be almost insensible, they conveyed him down an adjoining archway into a narrow lane, which ran behind the houses. Here the citizen opened a garden-door, and admitted them into a small summer-house.

"He had better rest here awhile," said the stranger. "Manfully, if not wisely, did he speak. And it would grieve me to see such an one brought to hurt. Is he your friend and comrade? Ye are both, as I think, strangers in this city."

"We are both comrades and strangers here," returned Mark. "In Master Graves's name I thank you for the help you have rendered. We arrived this morning in

Rochester, having accompanied, so far as Maidstone, a band of pilgrims, who are on their way to Canterbury."

"I marvel to hear you say so," said the other, whose name it presently appeared was Oldham. "For my part, I do not utterly condemn pilgrimages, for many who go on them do so with a pious purpose, which I doubt not Heaven approveth, though they whose shrines they visit can indeed do little to aid them. But I should have thought that you yourself, and still more your friend here, would have felt but small disposition—"

"Tarry, I pray you, good sir," interrupted Fletcher; "neither I, nor Master Graves here, have come on any such superstitious errand. We but joined the pilgrims for the convenience of travelling; the purpose of our journey is far other. But see, Master Graves is coming to himself again. How now, Jasper? how fare you?"

The Lollard opened his eyes, and looked doubtfully round him.

"Where are we?" he asked, in some confusion. "I remember a crowd, and a riot, and a hand-to-hand encounter—"

"From which this worthy man and myself rescued you with some difficulty," observed Mark. "I have just been rendering him our thanks for his aid. I think he will be a person to whom we may safely confide the object for which we have come, and ask the necessary information."

"You may indeed do so," said Oldham. "Your companion here proclaimed himself a friend of Sir John Oldcastle, Lord of Cobham; if so, be sure he is my friend also."

"It is on his account that we have come," said Fletcher. "We are charged with a message of serious import to him from his friends in London; and our object is to gain admission to his presence, that we may deliver it."

The expression of Oldham's face changed somewhat, and he looked suspiciously at the speaker.

"From which of Sir John Oldcastle's friends come ye?" he inquired. "The most part of them are well known to me—nay, all, I may say, who are men of any mark."

"It was from Master John Lydell," said Graves, taking the reply out of Mark's mouth, "a godly man and a true, whom I have known these many years past."

"Bring you no token from him?" continued the other in the same dry tone as before.

"I do," said Graves, thrusting his hand into the gipsire or pouch which he carried at his girdle. He drew forth a metal button, dulled and blackened, apparently by the action of some fire through which it had passed. "If you be a friend of John Lydell's, you will know this."

"Yea, I know it right well," said Oldham, taking the button, and gazing sadly on it; "John Lydell picked this from the ashes of the pile on which John Badby was burnt—a brave man and a good, whose memory all true men revere, for he died for conscience' sake. This sufficeth. I will conduct you to Cowling Castle, indeed to the presence of Sir John himself. He is a man whom I am proud to be permitted to

call friend, though it may be that I do not in all things hold with him."

"It needeth not that any present me to Sir John," said Mark. "I myself am well known to the good knight, and to the principal personages of his household. I did but wish to know the way to the Castle, which, as it chances, I have never visited; but if you will accompany us thither, we shall be still further beholden to you."

"I will gladly do so," said the citizen, "as soon as it is safe to leave the town; but that will scarcely be before dusk. I doubt not there be persons on the look-out for Master Graves here, as I think I heard you call him; and it would be at the peril of his liberty, if not of his life, if any of the mayor's guard should chance to see him. We can scarce do better than remain till evening in this summer-house here, where I will presently fetch you refreshments."

They seated themselves accordingly, and the conversation returned to the scene which had occurred in the street a short time previously.

"It was scarce wise of me to speak as I did," said Graves, "seeing I was engaged in a purpose which required secrecy for its success. But who could behold that Caiaphas, Henry Chicheley, tricked out in his pomp and splendour, and the people bowing down before him—who could behold this, I say, yet not take up his parable against him?"

"Henry Chicheley, the Bishop of St. David's," said Oldham. "Aye, I saw him, and I love not pomp and splendour in those, whose greatest boast should be

that they are ministers of the Gospel. Yet I know not that he in particular—”

“You think him no worse than the rest,” broke in Graves, impetuously; “aye, but he is. Others may be traitors to the Church, but he is a traitor to his own order also.”

“How mean you to his own order?” inquired Mark. “I understand you not.”

“I mean that he is not by birth one of the great ones of this land,” said Graves. “The present Archbishop and the one before him—bitter and cruel they were, God knoweth—but they were the sons of powerful barons, bred up from their cradles to hold the people cheap. Not so this Henry Chicheley—”

“Is he a man of mean birth?” asked Mark. “Good truth, I have scarce heard aught about him, until I beheld him to-day.”

“He is of birth no higher than thine own,” said Jasper. “His father was but a poor tailor in the village of Higham Ferrars in Northamptonshire; and he would have passed his life as his father hath done, in stitching hose and fashioning doublets, if it had not been that some great man, I know not whom, sent him at his own cost to be educated for the Romish Priesthood—”

“Aye, I have heard the tale,” interposed Oldham. “It was Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, a good man in his generation, and a pious. I would there were more like him.”

“Good men and pious are indeed sorely needed,” responded Jasper, somewhat thrown out by Oldham’s

remark; "but it is to be feared that, however well meant his bounty, he did but little service to Henry Chicheley. The same hath been advanced from one post to another, until he now hath attained the rank of Bishop of St. David's; and ever as he advances in the world, he shews a more marked disregard for those who were once his equals and companions."

"You surprise me," said Oldham. "I know not much of the Bishop; but with his brothers, who carry on the trade of grocers in the city of London, I have been long connected in business. Worthy and good men are they, at least, and do not forget the poor. Nor have I reason to think that their brother holds aloof from them, as unwilling to remember his humble origin. Nay, though, as I have already said, I love not pomp in any, and especially in those who should be patterns of humility, methought the Bishop's demeanour to-day was kindly and courteous towards the people, and it was for that reason that they so applauded."

"Priestcraft and worldly policy: nought else, my brother," exclaimed Graves. "Be not so deceived. I tell you, the time will come, aye, and before long, when Henry Chicheley, high as is his present place, will climb yet higher. The staff of power is about to fall from the grasp of Thomas Arundel; it will be Henry Chicheley's hand which will pick it up, and then it will be seen by all men of what spirit he is. I tell you that, heavy as hath been Arundel's yoke, that of Chicheley will be heavier still; if Arundel hath chastised the faithful with rods, Chicheley will chastise them with scorpions."

“Let us not speak further of him,” said Mark, who was a good deal impressed by Oldham’s kindly demeanour, and saw that Jasper’s remarks were not acceptable to him; “let us not speak further of the Bishop, who is of no present importance to us, at all events, but rather inquire of Master Oldham, how good Sir John Oldcastle bears himself under his present trials.”

“Right well and manfully,” said Oldham. “He knoweth that he hath deadly enemies, who would fain work him the most fatal mischief—yea, and it is to be feared that they will succeed but too well. Yet he abateth nothing of his dauntless zeal for the truth. He is willing to acknowledge the authority both of the King and of the Church in all things lawful; but in that which concerneth his own soul and God alone, he will suffer none to meddle.”

“He doth well,” said Jasper. “Who be these priests that they should stand between God and man, even as the curtain darkeneth the light, that would enter by the open casement? He doth well to refuse to appear before this priestly Herod, and render an account to him, which is due to no man. Our errand is to warn him that the King, who hath already been moved to employ all manner of argument and entreaty, if we are rightly informed—”

“You have heard the truth on that head,” said Oldham. “The King spoke long and kindly to his early friend and comrade, and deeply was Sir John moved by his words; but he said that he could not render to Cæsar that which was due only to God.”

“It was well answered,” said Mark; “but as Master

Jasper was about to say, we are charged to inform the Knight that the King hath now been persuaded to send some of his own guard to compel Sir John's attendance before the Archbishop. It is feared that, not being apprised of this, he may make resistance, and so be brought into peril, of which he wots not."

"I understand," said Oldham, "and it is meet that you see him as speedily as may be. And now methinks it is time for you to partake of the food, for which you must needs be hungering."

The commotion in the adjoining street had by this time subsided, and in another hour quiet was completely restored. The newly-made friends remained in their place of concealment, until the twilight had deepened sufficiently to shroud them from general observation. Hurrying down the back streets and over the bridge, a few minutes before the closing of the gate, they passed unquestioned out of the town. At first they took the road to Frindsbury, but soon turned aside into sequestered lanes, well known to Oldham, in which they scarcely met a single person throughout their walk. About nine o'clock they halted before the embattled gateway of Cowling Castle; where the sight of Oldham's face through the wicket procured them instant admission, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour.

"You are welcome, Master Oldham," said the porter, "my lord hath been sore uneasy respecting you. Some of the serving men, who returned a few hours since from Rochester, reported that there had been a riot

in the streets, in which you had taken part. He feared that you had been roughly handled, and was minded to send forth and inquire after you."

"I am unhurt I thank you and him," said Oldham. "Let us, I pray you, be straightway shewn to the Knight's presence. My companions here have tidings of grave moment for his ear."



CHAPTER IV.

COWLING CASTLE was built in the early part of the reign of Edward III., a period of our history when the cessation of the baronial wars, which had so long desolated the peace of English homes, began to be marked by the erection of castellated buildings, no longer designed wholly for defence, but for the comfort also and convenience of men's daily lives. Some of the grandest baronial structures, which still remain, either entire or in ruins, belong to this era of our history. Alnwick and Naworth, Kenilworth and Warwick, and not many years subsequently the palatial splendours of Windsor, still bear witness to the important change in English habits, which then took place. Not that the idea of making the houses strongholds, which it might be necessary to defend against the assaults of enemies,—which might possibly be required to sustain a protracted siege,—was by any means laid aside. The moat and the drawbridge, the lofty flanking towers with their machicolated battlements, the

massive crenellated outer walls, were still retained; nor did they disappear for nearly two centuries afterwards. But, on the interior sides of the quadrangles, there were lofty and spacious windows, equalling in magnificence the erections of subsequent ages; inferior to them indeed in no respect, except that of the dull and bounded view which they commanded.

Cowling Castle, the ruins of which still exist, was a fair specimen of the architecture of the day, though of course neither so strong, nor so imposing, as the great palatial structures above mentioned. It was of sufficient size to be the principal residence of the neighbourhood, and commanded for many miles round the awe, at once, and the attachment which the great feudatories of those days inspired. But Sir John Oldcastle, as has been already intimated, owed at least as much to the influence of his personal character, as to the baronial power, to which, in right of his wife, he had succeeded. He exercised hospitality on the grand scale of those days; but it was rather to persons of his own special shade of opinion, than indiscriminately to any who might desire his help, or claim his acquaintance. All those who were in danger of oppression from the clergy, by reason of their opposition to the tenets of Rome, found a ready shelter at Cowling. Young men, who were anxious to be instructed in the new opinions, as they were deemed, or to qualify themselves for the office of preacher of the Gospel, were ever welcome to take up their abode with him, and derive knowledge and wisdom alike, from the instruction of the many learned and pious

men whom his bounty maintained. Thither also came from abroad the first Apostles of the Reformation (if they may be so called) the companions and disciples of John Huss, and Jerome of Prague, who were already kindling the flame among the Teutonic nations, which burst forth in a devouring fire a century afterwards. All these were gladly welcomed; protected, if threatened with danger; aided and supported, so far as the means of the Knight extended. It is no wonder that Arundel regarded with equal alarm and dislike so formidable an enemy to his office and person, as Sir John Oldcastle.

When Oldham's message reached him, he was still seated in his place at the head of his board, though the supper had for some considerable time been concluded, and the viands removed.

"I am right glad to hear it," was his exclamation, when the tidings of Oldham's arrival was conveyed to him. "Bedwin, give notice to the men that their errand is nought. The good man hath come out of the riot uninjured. But how say you," he continued,— "he hath strangers with him, who desire to converse with me on matters of moment? Nay, I can hardly think there is aught that I would keep secret from these my worthy and trusty counsellors. Bid them hither, Bedwin. But first let food and wine be served to them in the oaken chamber—that is if, as I suppose is the case, they have returned fasting. We will hear what tidings there may be, when they have partaken of refreshment."

In about a quarter of an hour accordingly, Oldham,

Jasper, and Fletcher, were introduced. Mark was much impressed by the grand appearance of the hall as he entered. It was indeed a noble apartment, resembling the halls of some of the newly-built colleges of the day,—sixty or seventy feet in length, and fully thirty in height, with a row of arched windows occupying one entire side, some fourteen feet from the floor. Beneath these the walls were panelled with dark oak, the cornices being quaintly carved, and here and there ornamented by coats-of-arms coloured in relief. About half-way up the hall, on one side, was the huge chimney with its brazen dogs, the mantelpiece above it being elaborately chiselled to represent some scene from Scripture history. A long oaken table extended from the entrance-screen to the foot of the dais, which rose one step about ten or twelve feet from the upper end. This table was daily crowded by the household of the knight, and by the guests of inferior quality—retainers of his more distinguished visitors; house-bailiffs and tenants; artisans, who might be employed for any purpose about the castle; messengers who had arrived on various errands, or suitors who came to solicit the knight's protection or assistance. All these made up a goodly muster, for whose entertainment some half-a-dozen oxen, and as many sheep, were daily slaughtered. The dais itself was occupied by a table of similar construction, though somewhat handsomer in appearance. This, too, was seldom without its full complement of guests. In the centre was the massive chair which had been occupied by the lords of Cowling for many a generation past,—a huge structure of oak, rudely

carved, and blackened by age. The burly figure of the Knight, as he occupied this seat, had the appearance of a goodly picture in its appropriate frame. Stately and dignified, he dispensed his courtesies to all, reserving his more private conversation for the two or three persons of higher quality who filled the seats nearest to him. Among these were Sir Roger Acton, Sir Richard Story, and Sir Thomas Lattimer, as well as one or two foreign ecclesiastics, and citizens of distinction. When Oldham entered, Sir John rose from his chair, and advancing a step or two to meet him, requested him to assume a vacant seat not far from his own. "Welcome," he said, "Master Oldham, ever welcome to my poor house, but doubly so to-day. From the rumours which have reached me, I feared that you had been hurt severely, if not to death. And these your companions, who be they? Are their tidings of so private a nature, that they may not be discussed in the presence of my noble and trusty guests here?"

"Their names are Jasper Graves, and Mark Fletcher," said Oldham; "the latter, as I think, already known to you."

"Ha, Mark," exclaimed Oldcastle, "I greet you well. I recognised you not by this light. I am well assured that whatever tidings you bring may be relied on, and have a friendly purpose. You need not fear to utter them in this presence. I pray you let me hear them."

Mark obeyed, and though somewhat abashed and awkward in company to which he was so little used,

he yet contrived to deliver himself of his errand clearly and accurately.

The Knight heard him to the end without interruption, and then replied, "I thank you, good fellow, and your comrade also, for the service ye have rendered me; the more so as ye have encountered difficulty and danger in performing it. I am thankful also to worthy John Lydell, who is thus zealous for my safety. It behoves us to consider how we shall comport ourselves under these altered circumstances. How say ye, my friends? If the Archbishop's somptnour journey hither accompanied by some of the King's soldiers, what answer shall I make to the summons? What say you, Sir Roger Acton?"

"Were I in your place, Sir John," answered Acton, "I would greet the King's men with all courtesy, and entertain them with such hospitality as lay in my power. For the Archbishop's messenger, an he dared to present his citation to me in my own castle, I would make him eat it, seal and all, as many a stout baron has done in the olden times."

"And," added one of the younger gentlemen, "if there should be any fear that it would prove a morsel difficult of digestion, I would hand him over to the serving-men; who might straightway place him under the castle pump, to relieve his stomach thereof."

These suggestions met with approval from some of the more hot-headed among the guests, but they failed to provoke even a smile on the faces of the more distinguished personages. Among these Oldham was conspicuous. Sir John himself seemed discomposed.

"I have no thought of offering an affront to any who may bear a message to my house," he said gravely. "My only doubt is, whether or not I am bound to obey the summons. What say you on that head, Master Oldham? You have oftentimes given me counsel, and it has ever been wise and faithful."

"If the King summons you for whatsoever purpose," answered Oldham, "methinks it is your duty, as his liege subject, to obey. There are indeed certain things wherein not even sovereign princes are to be heeded; as, for instance, if they required any to renounce the Faith, or do that which Scripture hath forbidden to be done."

"That which this Archbishop commandeth *doth* deny the Faith, and *is* unlawful," observed Story.

"It may be," replied Oldham; "and if such demand be made upon him, Sir John, to my thought, would do well to refuse compliance, whatever might be the penalty of refusal. But it is no way unlawful for him to appear in the Archbishop's presence, and it is the King's command that he should do so. Therefore, though he might, and did, rightfully refuse to attend Archbishop Arundel at Leeds Castle, a few days ago, at the Archbishop's own summons, he cannot lawfully refuse to do so at the summons of the King."

There was a murmur of assent from many of the elder guests. Sir John himself was of the same opinion.

"Ye say well," he observed, "and I am even so minded myself. When King Harry besought me, by our ancient friendship, that I submitted myself to the Archbishop in this matter, I told him plainly that I

would yield unto the Emperor the things that be the Emperor's, as John Wicliffe hath it in his translation, but unto God only would I render the things which be God's. He hath a right to require the attendance of his liege subjects wheresoever he may please, and he shall be obeyed. How I may comport myself before the Archbishop, is a different matter. Know ye how soon we may look for these visitors?" he continued, again turning to Fletcher and Graves.

"Master Lydell told me," said Jasper, "that he had learnt privately, but from a sure source, that the citation was already prepared, and that within two or three days, at furthest, they would set forth on their errand."

"Then we must expect them to-morrow or the day following, I presume," said Oldcastle. "I will see that all needful preparations are made for journeying up to London in the company of these men, should the King require it of me. You, Mark, and your friend had better remain at Cowling, until I am able to send you up to London by water. After what hath happened to-day in Rochester, it may be perilous for you to be seen abroad in this neighbourhood ; but the way to the banks of the Thames is safe and unfrequented.

On the following day, accordingly, orders were sent to the persons in charge of the galley, in which the Knight was at times accustomed to make the voyage to London, requiring them to get it ready for a passage thither. This mode of travelling was, in truth, as expeditious, and in general more safe, in those troublous times, than that by road. Mark and Jasper therefore remained at the Castle as Sir John's guests, while Mas-

ter Oldham returned to Rochester. The latter, however, paid frequent visits to Cowling, and had long and interesting conversations with young Fletcher. The two had in truth taken a great liking to one another. Oldham saw in Mark a youth intelligent and thoughtful beyond his years, and withal honestly desirous of learning the truth on the various topics which at this time were stirring the depths of so many bosoms. The gay and careless temper of mind, which some few years before had distinguished him, had long since given way to a spirit of anxious inquiry after the truth, and a determination to adhere to it, when found. But circumstances, of which the reader has heard, had brought him within the influence of the more extreme teachers of the Lollard party, and he had in consequence adopted, to some extent at all events, some of the wild and extravagant tenets which so grievously marred their utility. These he now saw reason first to question, and then to modify; retaining at the same time what was sound and wholesome in the Lollard creed. He perceived that whatever might be the vices of persons in power, it was not his business to correct them; and though others might hold erroneous doctrines, this did not prevent him from maintaining his own faith in purity and simplicity; and unless he should be called upon openly to deny what was true, or profess what was false, it was his duty in life to remain quiet.

On the third day after their arrival at the Castle, the party expected from London made its appearance. It consisted of the Archbishop's somptnour and attendants, together with a subaltern officer belonging to the guard

of Sir Robert Morley, the Lieutenant of the Tower, and despatched by the King's own special command. Sir John expressed his readiness to place himself in the hands of the Lieutenant, in accordance with the royal order; and further declared his intention of journeying up to London for that purpose. Satisfied with this answer, the officer remained Sir John's guest at the Castle. During the time of his visit, however, there was some quarrelling between Morley's followers and those of Oldcastle. In particular, an affray took place between Mark and one Giles Fabyan, a stout soldier, but somewhat sullen-tempered. It was with difficulty that the bystanders parted them without bloodshed; and Fabyan, who had only been restrained by force from drawing upon Fletcher, took his departure in great dudgeon, muttering vengeance against the heretic, as he called Mark, should he again cross his path.

Early on the next day Sir John set off for London in company with Morley's men; while Mark and Jasper sailed up the Thames, arriving the same afternoon off Greenwich, where Mark was landed to make his way homeward to Bromlegh. He had parted in the morning from Sir John Oldcastle with much emotion, assuring him once more of his gratitude and loyalty, as well as his readiness to encounter toil or danger in his behalf, should his services again be needed.

It was late in the afternoon when he stepped ashore, but there still remained several hours of daylight. Mark reckoned that it would scarcely take him more than two hours to reach his home, even by the circuitous forest paths, which it was his intention to follow. He was

unwilling to encounter any of his neighbours, until he should have learnt whether the true history of his absence was known, and if it was not, what construction had been put upon it. He resolved to seek an interview with Lettice, from whom alone he could learn everything, without risking his life or liberty. But he was aware that he might have some difficulty in obtaining this. Dame Weaver in general kept her daughter pretty closely within doors; and if old Miles had taken serious umbrage at his proceedings, a stricter watch than usual would be kept over her. He resolved to hang about in the coppice immediately opposite Weaver's house, and take the chance of the damsel coming forth on some domestic errand.

Fortune, however, favoured him. As he threaded the path winding through the forest, which overspread the whole of Lewisham Hill, he saw, somewhat in advance, a slight figure habited in a green kirtle, the fashion of which was familiar to him. It was Lettice, returning from a visit to Father Simon. She was walking slowly, and apparently in much distress. At the sound of Mark's footsteps behind her, she turned round, and uttered an exclamation of surprise and joy.

"Oh, Mark!" she exclaimed; "then it is not true."

"What is not true, Lettice?" asked the young man, after the lover's greetings had been exchanged.

"It was rumoured," said Lettice, "that both you and Jasper Graves had been arrested by order of the Lord Bishop, or (as some said) of the Primate himself, for publicly decrying holy pilgrimages, and uttering slanders against the clergy. It was said that you had been

secretly conveyed away, and lodged in one of the London prisons. Your aunt and myself were sore distressed, as you may well believe; but both my father and Hugh said, it would be no wonder if the report was true, and unless you learned to control your speech, you would soon find yourself in some such place. But it cannot be so, or you would not have been so soon released."

"No, Lettice, it is not true," said Fletcher; "nor do I know that I have said aught likely to bring me into such peril. As for the London prisons, my journey hath lain in quite the opposite direction."

"The opposite direction?" repeated Lettice; "then it is possible Hawkins's story may be true after all,—impossible as we all thought it. He persisted in saying, that you had requested him to deliver a message to my father, telling him it was your purpose to join the company of holy pilgrims on their way to Canterbury; and that he even saw you, and Master Graves also, depart in their company. But we all thought it one of the idle jests, in which Hawkins is wont to indulge."

"He spake truly, nevertheless," said Mark; "I did journey with the pilgrims, and am but now returned."

"Oh, Mark, then you have repented of your rash words, and have journeyed to the shrine of the holy St. Thomas, and have obtained absolution! And now you will be one with us in all things, as you were wont to be, before these new teachers filled your head with strange fancies. Oh, Mark, I am so glad! And Mistress Amabel will rejoice as much as I do. My father, and mother too—"

"Prithee stop, Lettice," exclaimed Mark, who, though sorely unwilling to interrupt her raptures, felt bound to undeceive her. "I have not been to the shrine of him whom you call St. Thomas, nor should I have much faith in the absolution which is bestowed there."

"You have not been to Canterbury?" repeated Lettice; "where then has your journey lain?"

"That I may not tell," said Fletcher. "But be sure I have done nothing which renders me unworthy of your affection, or of your father's esteem."

"But they say," said Lettice, dropping her lover's hand, which had hitherto been clasped within her own; "they say that if you continue to reject the teaching of Holy Church, and to despise lordship,—those were Father Simon's own words, Mark—it will be my duty to break off all between us. My father, too, protests roundly, that he would as lief his daughter should marry a Turk, or a downright heathen, as a Lollard."

"And you are willing to obey them!" exclaimed Mark bitterly; "and that is all that your love is worth! We have been betrothed to one another, Lettice, these three years past; and our parents and neighbours made us over to one another, so to speak, for I know not how many years before that—almost from the very days when we were children. During all those years I have never given you an unkind word, or cherished a disloyal thought. Yet you are willing to believe all manner of evil of me, and cast me off because I would fain worship God according to my conscience!"

"Oh, Mark," said Lettice, down whose cheeks the tears were streaming, "the Blessed Saints know that

I would not willingly believe anything but good of you ; and if we should be parted, it will only be because they have commanded it, whom I cannot disobey."

"Heaven bless you for that, Lettice," exclaimed Mark ; "if you will but remain true to me, all will go well. Look you, I cannot profess what I do not believe. But I have thought much of these things of late, and have taken counsel with one who is wiser than myself in such matters—"

"With Jasper Graves, perhaps," exclaimed Lettice ; "he is but an ill counsellor, I trow."

"No, not with him," returned Mark. "Since I have been more in his company, I have heard and seen much that I may not approve ; and we have parted in displeasure, nor are we like to meet again."

"That is so far well," said the damsel, in a less constrained tone ; "but will you attend the Services of Holy Church, and follow the teaching of good Father Simon?"

"Surely, I will attend the Church Services," said Mark. "It is God's House, none can doubt that, and prayer is offered to Him there, in which every Christian man may truly join. One may partake, too, of the Blessed Sacrament, without believing the wafer to be God Himself." This last sentence he spoke rather to himself than to Lettice. "Yes, Lettice," he added in a louder tone, "I mean to attend church, and the ministry of Father Simon, who assuredly is a good man and a friendly."

"Now Heaven be praised for this blessed change," exclaimed Lettice. "Methinks my father will be his

own man again when he hears it; which, good wot, he hath not been these many days past. As for Mistress Amabel, she will be well-nigh distraught for joy. She loves you, Mark, as though you had been her own son."

"I am beholden to her," said Mark; "but we must now bid each other good-bye, Lettice. I wish to return to mine own home, and take to my work again, before meeting any of the neighbours, who might ask me questions, which it would not be welcome for me to answer. I mean to keep quiet for a few days, trusting that the tongues, which by your account have been wagging somewhat freely respecting me, will cease of their own accord."

They parted, Mark following a path which led through the wood to his own cottage, and Lettice moving homewards with a joyful step—a curious contrast to her languid pace half-an-hour or so previously.

Meanwhile Sir John Oldcastle and his followers had arrived at his lodging in London, and in accordance with the pledge he had given, surrendered himself to the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Robert Morley. It is proper at this point of the story to state briefly the main facts in his previous history. He was born in the reign of Edward III., and consequently, in that of Henry V., must have been a man of at least middle age. But, as we find him taking a leading part in public affairs during the troubled times of Richard II., it is probable that he was advanced in life at the present period. He is reported to have been one of the roystering associates of Henry, when Prince of Wales—the original, in fact, of that *chef d'œuvre* of Shakespeare's

comic creations, Sir John Falstaff. But as the entire story of Henry's early follies rests on no sufficient authority, it would be hard indeed to charge Sir John Oldcastle with the vices of the Prince's stage companions. He was, however, undoubtedly a fast friend and supporter of Henry Bolingbroke, and shewed himself a stout and able soldier both in Wales and France. At what time he espoused the opinions of John Wycliffe, is not with any certainty known. Probably, the change in his views was one of slow growth; but in 1410, he took the decided step of proposing in Parliament the confiscation of the temporalities belonging to the Bishops and Convents. He is further accredited with having endeavoured to intimidate the Archbishop and his colleagues, by fixing notices to the doors of the London churches, threatening to raise an insurrection with 100,000 men, if any persecution of the Lollards should be attempted. He maintained also, at his own expense, a number of unlicensed preachers, as the reader has already heard, whom he sent out to disseminate his own opinions.

It is no wonder that Arundel felt the necessity of putting some check upon proceedings so dangerous to the cause he had at heart. But for a long time Oldcastle's wealth and rank, and especially his personal friendship with Henry V., rendered the Archbishop unwilling to attack him. When at last he felt compelled to do so, it was in the first instance indirectly. He caused twelve inquisitors of heresy to be appointed to inquire into the new opinions afloat in the Church. They reported not only that erroneous tenets were openly

and widely professed, but named some persons who were the main promoters of the movement, and who, for the safety of the Church, ought to be restrained. Chief among these was the Lord Cobham.

When this was reported to the King, who had then just succeeded to the throne, he requested that before any steps were taken against Oldcastle, he might himself try what his personal influence with the accused might effect. This was acceded to, and an interview followed, in which Henry urged Sir John, as a dutiful son of the Church, to accept the doctrines which Bishops, and Doctors, and learned men had deduced from Scripture, and the traditions of past generations had sanctioned. Oldcastle replied in language dutiful and submissive, so far as the King was concerned; but which is said to have been so harsh and violent towards the Bishops, and especially towards the Pope, as to alarm Henry, who thenceforth refused to hold any intercourse with him.

Cobham now retired to his country seat, and trusting to his popularity with his neighbours, set the Archbishop at defiance. The latter sent several citations requiring him to appear before him, and affixed them to the doors of Rochester Cathedral. But the somptnours were afraid to serve the first, and the populace tore down the second as soon as they were put up. At length the King was prevailed on to order his arrest by a military force, and the Lieutenant's men were sent, as related above.

Finding that his opponents were determined to prosecute the matter against him to the uttermost, Sir John,

on his arrival in London, drew up an answer to the Archbishop's charges, which he carried to the King, praying him to give the document his careful consideration. But Henry refused to receive it, handing it over to the judges who had been appointed to try the case. Oldcastle then claimed permission to purge himself from heresy according to ancient law—by the oaths of a hundred knights and squires, who would appear and swear to his orthodoxy before the King. This being refused, he next proposed to defend himself by wager of battle, offering to fight to the death with any man living, Christian or heathen, in proof of his innocence. This was a somewhat strange proposal from a Lollard, who professed to hold fighting in detestation. But his third demand, when the second had been rejected, was stranger still, being nothing else than an appeal from the Archbishop to the Pope. This proceeding seems to have disgusted his judges, as much as it has perplexed posterity. The prevalent opinion seems to be, that his object was simply to gain time, in order to prosecute the rebellious designs he is believed even then to have been contemplating. But of this there is no evidence, and it is more probable that his motive was to escape being tried by the Archbishop personally. It is plain he believed that Arundel entertained a private animosity against him, independently of his official condemnation of Lollard opinions; and he may have thought that no judge whom the Pope could appoint, would be so prejudiced against him as the Archbishop. It must not be forgotten that Wycliffe did the same.

But whatever may have been his reason for making

this demand, it was indignantly rejected, and Oldcastle had to appear before Arundel and his assessors in St. Paul's Cathedral, on the 23rd of September. The particulars of his trial are too well known to need repetition in these pages, nor would they be repeated to any good purpose. The main point was the mysterious presence of Christ in the consecrated elements, Arundel insisting on the gross and carnal doctrine of the Church in those days, with the inflexible dogmatism which is born of presumptuous ignorance; and Oldcastle exposing without much difficulty the weak points of his adversary's case, but less happy when he proceeded to dogmatise himself. His theology was unquestionably sounder than that of his opponents, but his language was needlessly irreverent and offensive, little likely to conciliate men already grievously offended. He was condemned, and on his refusal to retract, excommunicated, and handed over to the secular power for execution as a heretic.

The sentence usual under such circumstances would doubtless at once have been carried out, had not the King, still influenced by some lingering regard for his early friend, urged that a delay of forty days should be allowed, during which there would still remain a hope that the offender might submit himself to the authority of the Church. The royal intercession was of course successful. Sir John was informed that nearly six weeks would be allowed him for retractation; but after that, if he still continued obstinate, the sentence of the law would, without fail, be carried out.

CHAPTER V.

THE late October sun was pleasantly lighting up the green slopes of Martin's Hill, and the long stretch of forest, gay with autumnal tints, extending in those days to the heights of Penge, which the Crystal Palace now crowns with its dome and lofty towers. Mark Fletcher, who was carrying home a sheaf of arrows to a customer in Beckenham, could not help pausing for a few minutes to contemplate the beauty of the scene. He leaned against the wall of Bromlegh churchyard, wrapped in thought. Several weeks had now elapsed since his return from Cowling, during which time he had carried out his resolution, adopted, as the reader has heard, during his absence from Bromlegh. He had shunned observation as much as possible, working at his trade, at which he was unusually skilful, and avoiding not only the company of suspected persons, but all places of public resort. He had been chary of visiting even Weaver's cottage, until the old man, hearing of his amended demeanour, had sent him a message, inviting his company. He had now paid two or three visits there, and had almost regained his old footing. He had hopes that before many weeks had passed old Miles might be induced to allow the day of the wedding to be fixed. So far all was well; but the proceedings taken against Sir John Oldcastle, and the terrible doom impending over him, had caused Mark sore grief and trouble. He could not help feeling himself half a traitor in thus standing by, and allowing his beloved patron and

benefactor to be subjected to a cruel death, without, as it were, raising so much as a finger in his behalf. He had said to himself a hundred times, that he could do nought for the good knight's deliverance, even though he were willing to yield up his own life for him. There was also a very general belief abroad, that when it came to the actual execution of the sentence, the King would never suffer the ancient companion of his battles to undergo so shameful and terrible a doom. But these thoughts only half satisfied Mark's scruples. He seemed to himself to be like a man who, standing on the sea-shore, sees another on the point of drowning, but whom he cannot rescue even at the risk of his own life, and who looks anxiously round for some skilful swimmer, to render the help which he cannot himself bestow. After half-an-hour of melancholy reverie, he roused himself to pursue his journey; but just as he leaped over the first gate at the entrance of the wood, a man wrapped in a cloak, in which he had also muffled his face, came out from under the cover of the trees, and invited him to stop.

"Mark Fletcher," he said, "I pray you a word. You have been absent from the places where I was wont to meet you for this many a day past; and there be those that scruple not to say that the fear of what man can do unto you, has induced you to look back after setting your hand to the plough."

"They must e'en say what pleases them," said Mark, who was not greatly gratified at the re-appearance of Jasper Graves, whom he had learned to distrust; "I live not in their report. If you have nought more welcome

to say, I pray you to let me pass on, I have business in hand."

"Aye, the business of this world," said Graves scornfully, "which I fear me you have learnt to prefer to that of your true Mastet."

"I am not accountable to you anyway," answered Fletcher indignantly, "nor do I desire to hear more concerning you."

He endeavoured to push past him as he spoke, but Graves put himself directly in his way.

"You desire to hear nought more of me, nor of the friend and patron, for whom you have often expressed so much gratitude and affection? Do I so understand you, Mark Fletcher?"

Mark stopped, and laid his bundle on the ground. "No," he said, "Jasper Graves, if you bring me tidings of Sir John, I will hear you with all willingness."

"It is on his account that I am here, and because he needeth your help sorely. I remember when you parted from him last, it was with the assurance that should he need your loyal service you would willingly render it, at whatever peril to yourself."

"I did so," said Mark, "and stand prepared to make good my words. How does the knight bear himself?"

"Bravely, even like himself," said Jasper. "He is not as one of the waves of the sea driven hither and thither by every blast of man's displeasure,—rather as the landlocked pool, which the winds may ruffle, but not lash to fury."

"Doubtless he feels the arm of Heaven extended over him," said Mark, "I cannot even now believe

that harm will befall him. There are so many that love him, yea even among those whom the world dreads and honours, that they will surely secure his safety,—the King, to wit. He hath already interposed in his behalf. Doubtless he will interpose again.”

“Trust not to that,” said the Lollard. “Saith not the Scriptures, ‘Trust not in princes.’ It is true that the King would not of his own mind give him over to stake and gibbet. But alas, every day maketh it plainer that these priests have gained the dominion over his heart and conscience. Small hope for the good Knight from him.”

“Alas for him then,” said Mark. “There is no one now high in place, like the great Duke of Lancaster in King Richard’s time, who dares oppose these proud men. So then, there is indeed no hope?”

“Not so,” said Graves. “There is hope, and bold and true hearts may make it certainty. Vain indeed would it be to attempt to procure remission of the sentence, but we may yet deliver the man himself from the hands of his enemies.”

“How? mean you by force?” exclaimed Mark in surprise: “would you raise the commons, and pluck him by the strong hand from the grasp of Sir Robert Morley? Nay, consider the matter, Jasper Graves. There are indeed hundreds, doubtless thousands, who love the worthy Lord Cobham well enough to adventure their lives in his behalf. But the Tower with its high and massive walls, its strong and warlike garrison, its brave and experienced lieutenant,—what hope could there be of capturing such a stronghold, either by sur-

prise or assault? The very moment that such an attempt was made, execution would, I doubt not, be done, and the Knight's head exhibited on the topmost pinnacle. We should but hasten,"—

"Tarry, I pray you, Master Fletcher," said Graves, "you are altogether wide of the mark. We have no thought of attacking the Tower. But it may be that Sir John has friends among the warders, or, there may be those who, for whatever reason, do not desire that the Archbishop's sentence should be carried out, or—in short, there is a prospect that if the Lord Cobham's friends are secret, skilful and courageous, they may accomplish his deliverance."

"Pray Heaven the attempt may prosper," said Mark, "I would give five years of my life to hear that he had safely escaped from the hands of the enemies who seek his blood."

"I knew such to be your feeling," said the Lollard, "and therefore have I sought you to-day. We shall require the help of five men—four, that is, beside myself. They must be all strong, brave, and trusty, and I know you to be all three. Our plan is this. It is dark now by seven o'clock, and at the middle of next week, there will be no moon. About nine o'clock we shall lie off the Tower in a boat, hiding as well as we may in the angle of the Water-gate. Sir John's chamber is in one of the central towers, but means will be found to release him from this, and enable him to climb the battlemented walls overhanging the river; from whence he may be lowered by a rope to the boat. The chief danger arises from the sentinels

along the battlements. One of these must be seized, gagged and bound, or he will most certainly give the alarm. Now this must be done from the inside. Whoever it may be that releases Sir John from his chamber, will have nothing to do with any further proceedings. It is impossible indeed that he should—”

“Ha, methinks I conceive you,” said Mark; “He may be of too high quality to take part in such a matter.”

“On that point it is better to be silent,” said the other: “I told you that five men would be required, three to manage the boat, and two to secure the warder and lower the Knight from the battlements.”

“And you want me to be one of the last, I apprehend?” said Mark.

“Even so,” said Jasper, “stout Geoffrey Glover will be the other—you know him?”

“Right well,” said Mark, “none better fitted for such an enterprise. But how, supposing me willing to undertake this, am I to gain admittance and escape notice?”

“That has been provided for,” said Jasper. “You and Geoffrey will be provided each with one of the dresses worn by the warders, and will enter in the dusk of the evening, just before the closing of the gate. A man will be loitering about in the entrance court wrapped in a cloak. Him you will follow. He will convey you into a chamber opening on the battlements immediately adjoining the place where the warder, whom you will have to secure, is stationed. You will find the gag and some stout cord in the chamber, and your plan will be to drag the warder in thither, bind him fast to some strong staples in the wall, and there leave

him. When Sir John shall have safely reached the boat, you must climb down yourselves, or make a leap for it into the river, as you may choose. This is what hath to be done. Will you undertake it? I seek not to disguise that it is full of peril; yet remember it will be incurred in behalf of one whom you love and honour. I am authorized also to say that the reward"—

"I think not of that," said Mark. "But for the sake of the man who saved me from death, to his own loss of court favour, and out of sheer good will and love of justice—I will encounter the danger."

"You have well said," said Graves. "It were better that we now part, and be not seen together until the day arrives. Hold yourself in readiness to be summoned early in the course of next week. Till then, I need not say, be stout of heart, and secret."

They parted, and Mark resuming his journey, pursued the forest paths to Beckenham, buried in deep, and not very pleasant, thoughts. It was not fear of approaching danger that oppressed him. He was braver than most men, and willing to incur even a greater hazard than the one he was about to run for the sake of his benefactor. But he could not but be sensible that, even if he escaped uninjured and undiscovered, it was still not unlikely that suspicion might attach to him, as having been concerned in the enterprise; and that such suspicion would be quite sufficient to defer, or possibly break off altogether, his union with Lettice, which, he had hoped, was now near at hand. There was no help for it, however. He could only, as Jasper had said, "Be stout of heart, and secret."

Some ten days subsequently to this conversation, the startling news was received of the escape of Lord Cobham from the Tower. By what means it had been accomplished was a mystery, and the inquiries made by the Lieutenant threw no light upon it. It appeared that Sir John had been visited by the warder as usual on the evening before his escape, and that he had left him with the door securely locked and barred on the outside. In the morning it was found locked, just as it had been on the previous night, but the prisoner was gone.

Nothing else was talked of in the village during the whole of that day. Old Miles Weaver, accompanied by Hugh, looked in at Mark's cottage, when work for the day was over, to inquire whether he had learned aught respecting it. They found the young man engaged in his usual employment, fastening the steel heads on some cloth yard shafts, but with a face somewhat haggard and weary. Old Miles rallied him on his looks.

"Why Mark, lad," he said, "I thought to have found you as merry as a cricket. Here is your friend, by whom you swear,—if so staid a youth as you are ever sweareth at all,—here hath he escaped, not only from prison, but from what is more unpleasant still, from axe and faggot, and you look as though you had just heard of execution being done upon him. What ails you, lad, and how have you hurt your hand?" he continued. "That is an ugly gash, and done, as I should think, by some sharp weapon. Have you been fighting with any man, or what has happened?"

"It is nought," said Mark, hastily, "a mere accident. And so Sir John has escaped! I am right glad to hear of it. When did the news arrive? I have seen no one to-day."

"The news was brought by some half-dozen men-at-arms, whom the Lieutenant of the Tower had sent this morning along the road to Dover. It was thought that Sir John would make an attempt to cross the sea. They stopped to bait their horses, and told mine host of the 'Crown' the whole tale."

"If you have heard nought about it, you will be anxious to hear the particulars, methinks," said Hugh who was full of the excitement of the affair himself, and anxious for the opportunity of venting a little of it. "Shall I tell you the tale?"

"I shall be much beholden to you," said Mark.

"Well, then," said Hugh, "it happened thus. John Ditchley—that's the name of the warder who attended on Sir John—he swears that last night, when he visited the prisoners, he left the Knight safe in his chamber, and that he locked and barred the outer door. Sir John could not have escaped by the windows; for they are only two narrow slits, through which an infant could not have crept, not to say a large and lusty man like Sir John. The bolts did not appear to have been tampered with, and besides, the door was fast locked. But though the prison remained the same, the prisoner was gone. Search was made everywhere through the fortress, and presently one of the warders, Giles Fabyan by name, was found in one of the small chambers open-

ing to the outer wall, fast bound and gagged. Being released, he affirmed that, shortly before midnight, he heard steps approaching, and saw another warder coming towards him, as he supposed, with some message. Finding that he did not speak, he commanded him to stand. The man made no reply, but clutched his halbert with both hands. Fabyan endeavoured to wrest it from him, but at the same moment was seized from behind, and gagged before he could call out. He was then dragged into the chamber where he was found, and secured to a staple in the wall."

"Did he know the men who seized him?" asked Mark.

"He says he is sure he had seen one of them before, the one who clutched his halbert, but he cannot recollect where. He is assured also that he wounded him with his dagger, for there was blood on the edge of it when he was released, but that is all he can say."

"That does not seem to me to explain how the good Knight escaped," observed Mark, "and still less whither he is gone."

"No, and they do not know anything certain upon either head," said Hugh. "A boat was seen rowing down the river in the early grey of the morning, with four rowers, and two men seated in the stern. The Lieutenant's barge was sent in pursuit as soon as the news was received, but no trace of the boat could be found."

"Is any one in the Tower suspected?" inquired Mark.

"I cannot learn that there is," said Hugh. "The only thing that seems certain is, that Sir John has made his escape."

"Well, there might be worse news than that," said old Weaver. "For my part, I am a faithful subject and a loyal Churchman, and I do not love these Lollards. But I love still less to see an Englishman tied to a stake, like a cock that the lads are going to throw at, and then burnt alive. That is worse, I trow, than heresy itself. It is a good job, to my thought, that Sir John hath escaped, I trust he may go beyond the seas, and we hear no more of him."

All the rest of the party acquiescing, the subject dropped. Mark accompanied his visitors home to supper, where he recovered his spirits so completely, that the old man, who attributed the change in him wholly to Lettice's influence, made him the subject of more than one broad jest, which Mark took in good part, and the evening passed pleasantly away. Mark had now almost entirely regained his former favour with the Weavers; but old Miles nevertheless would not consent for a long time to the day of the marriage being fixed. Father Simon, when consulted on the subject, shook his head. The Lollards were still giving the heads of the Church a great deal of trouble, and he was not sure that Mark had entirely broken with them. News arrived two or three weeks later, that Sir John Oldcastle had escaped into Wales, and was living there among the fastnesses, which at that time were almost inaccessible to the officers of the law. All sorts of rumours reached London and its neighbourhood re-

specting his proceedings, each more alarming than the last. He was reported to be levying an armed force—some said twenty thousand, some five-and-twenty thousand men. With this he was to march upon London, seize the person of the King, and hold him in captivity. He was then to put to the sword those who had instigated the measures against the Lollards, confiscate the property of the Church, and make himself Protector of the realm. Father Simon was of opinion that the greater part of these rumours were untrue; but, nevertheless, where there was so much smoke, there was probably some fire. The country, he thought, would never be at peace till the Lollards were effectually put down; and this could only be accomplished by inflicting some signal chastisement on the arch-heretic, Oldcastle.

“My daughter,” he said to Lettice one day, when she had urged his intercession with her father on behalf of Mark, “you know what the Scripture saith about fleeing the company of evil doers, and none to my thought do worse evil, than they who stir up others to discontent and rebellion. If you were to become the wife of a rebel—”

“Father!” exclaimed Lettice, earnestly, “Mark is no rebel. He would die sooner than lift his sword against his anointed sovereign. I have heard him say so, many a time; and you know he ever speaks the truth, and he is so clever, as I have often heard you say—”

“Aye, he is clever,” said the Priest, “it may be somewhat too clever; and for the other matter, there are rebels against the Church, as well as against King, and who shall assure me that he is not such a rebel?”

“He would never raise his hand against you, Father, nor against the good Bishop here,” said Lettice; “and if he hath spoken rash words against the Primate, or his Holiness the Pope, I am assured that he regrets them, and will not so offend again.”

“I would gladly think so,” said Father Simon. “But methinks we ought to have some more certain warrant for that, before we can trust you to him.”

“What assurance do you ask?” inquired Lettice; “Mark attends the services of Holy Church, as you know, and stands aloof from Jasper Graves, and his associates—”

“Aye, indeed, doth he?” said the Priest; “and how long, I pray you, hath he done so?”

“Ever since the day of the archery-match,” said Lettice; “since the day of his return to Bromlegh, that is.”

“And that is scarce two months since,” said Father Simon; “a short space methinks, from which to draw so grave a conclusion. No, Lettice, I cannot give the assent you ask. Yet I would not be hard with you. If by the Feast of the Blessed Nativity nought hath been heard to Mark’s disparagement, I will agree that the day shall be fixed. The wedding may come off on the 8th of January if you will: that was the marriage-day of your father and mother, some thirty years ago. I remember it well. They were among the earliest couples, between whom I celebrated the holy Sacrament of wedlock. It would pleasure me much to do the like for you, Lettice, and pray that your marriage may be blessed, as that of your parents hath been.”

"You are ever kind, Father," said Lettice, her cheeks crimson, and her eyes filled with tears. "We will submit ourselves to you in this, as in all things else."

The remaining weeks of autumn, and those of early winter passed by, without bringing anything of importance to the chief personages of our tale. The rumours relative to Sir John Oldcastle, in his Welsh retreat, continued to be received; but many of them were so wild and improbable, that wise men placed no belief in them. Other rumours there were, however, of equal interest, but which were more widely credited. The Primate was a man already far advanced in years, and his health was visibly failing. In all likelihood, before many months had passed, a new Archbishop would have to be selected. Such an appointment was in those days a matter of importance in the eyes of all men, very different from what is felt now. The names of probable candidates for the office were widely canvassed among all classes of the community, with the most anxious eagerness. The success of the Lollards, in their attempted reformation of the Church, would, it might almost certainly be predicted, mainly depend on the temper and ability of the new Archbishop. If he should be a man inclined to peace, or at all events averse to severe measures, or if his ability should not be equal to carrying out any determined scheme of repression, Lollardy would almost inevitably triumph. And there were few men then in England capable of filling such a post as that of the Primacy, with the wisdom and vigour which alone could command success. In expectation, as it were, of the appearance of this new

champion, all parties seemed for awhile to suspend hostilities.

Christmas arrived, and nothing having occurred to throw any doubt on the genuineness of Mark's Churchmanship, Father Simon made good his promise, and the wedding-day was fixed, as he had originally proposed, for the 8th of January next ensuing. Old Weaver, who from the first had been well-inclined to Mark, and had only yielded to the representations of his parish priest, was so elated at the near prospect of the marriage, that he seemed to grow young again from sheer enjoyment. He caused a feast to be prepared for the occasion, befitting the nuptials of an alderman, at the least, and invited so goodly a company of guests, that it was commonly said in the village, that he must need ask Sir Simon for the use of the parish church, since no other building could be found large enough to accommodate them all. The other members of the family were not behindhand in their friendly offices. Dame Weaver, assisted by a troop of volunteers, toiled over the toothsome dishes wherewith the wedding-table was to be garnished, the cost of which was like to make a considerable hole in Miles's savings. There was bruce to be prepared as sauce for the boar's-head larded, which a distant kinsman, a flesher in London, had presented—there was charlet that was served with the capons, and browet with the mallards,—there were flampoynts, and raffyolies, and cockagrys, and crustades,—all of them now unknown to English cookery; together with some dishes which would hardly be relished in the present day, such as roasted squirrels and fried hedgehogs.

The good dame had determined to convince her neighbours that she had not forgotten how the table of a man of worship should be served, though nine-and-twenty years had elapsed since she left Sir Richard of Altringham's service, to become Miles's wife. Nor did Mistress Amabel labour with less zeal at her loom, to provide the young couple with the luxury of sheets and pillows, — a rare one among the peasantry of that day. Gifts of all kinds, articles of household furniture, drinking-cups, and kitchen utensils were made by neighbours in such abundance, that the cottage in which Mark had hitherto led a rather comfortless bachelor life, promised to become one of the most amply furnished in the whole village.

Mark had a pleasant time of it in the week which intervened between Christmas and Epiphany, every day paying long visits to his betrothed, now so soon to become his wife. It was accounted somewhat strange that on the evening of the last-named Feast he did not appear at the Church service, or at old Miles's house afterwards; nor was he to be found anywhere during the whole of the ensuing day. Hugh made his absence at such a time the theme of some broad banter, declaring that Mark had, at the last moment, repented of his bargain, and had betaken himself beyond the seas, for fear he should be compelled to keep to it. Lettice, though in secret somewhat inclined to be affronted, discreetly held her peace, assured that whatever might be the cause of her lover's absence, he would not fail to be in his place at her side on the morrow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE morning of the 8th of January was bright, clear, and frosty—a genuine winter's day of the olden time—the times when summer was warm and winter cold, as in these modern times they seem altogether to have ceased to be. All Bromlegh appeared to be taking a holiday. Early in the forenoon gay groups were seen mounting Martin's Hill on the one side, and threading the lanes from Widmore on the other, or tripping merrily among the patches of broom that dotted the long common on the road to Farnborough. The men had put on their Sunday jerkins and hose; the women had donned their gayest kirtles and head-gear. All wore bridal favours on conspicuous parts of their dress. Before the hour for the ceremony had arrived, the churchyard almost resembled a fair, from their number and the gaiety.

The Church of Bromlegh, in the fifteenth century, was an ancient and venerable pile. A considerable part of it had been rebuilt in the previous century, and presented all the features of that noblest age of English Church architecture. But the east end consisted mainly of the Norman work, which in a much earlier age had replaced the wooden structure of Saxon times. It was dedicated to the Cappadocian Bishop Blasius, being one of the four churches that had him for their patron Saint; and an annual fair was held in his honour on the 3rd day of February. With so great esteem does this Saint appear to have been regarded in early times, that servile labour on his day was forbidden by the Council

of Oxford in 1222. It is melancholy to have to record, that this noble building, with the exception of the tower, was entirely destroyed by the barbarians of the first half of the nineteenth century; who in 1829 erected the present architectural abomination on the ancient foundations.

It looked its very best on the bright January morning. The ancient porch had been wreathed with evergreens, the holly berries being formed into numberless quaint wedding devices, and many an eye was cast in the direction whence the bridal procession was expected shortly to appear. Even the strange and startling news which had arrived that morning from London, which at any other time would have filled men's thoughts to the exclusion of all other topics, could hardly drive the business of the day from their minds. They did, however, talk somewhat respecting it as they stood under the churchyard elms, with their eyes fixed on the Widmore road.

"I can scarce believe it, neighbour," said an elderly man, in the dress of a farm-labourer (who had doubtless obtained a holiday for the day from the bailiff of the estate) to his gossip, a man of nearly the same age and employment. "What! seize our gracious King in his own palace! Heard ever man the like?"

"Nay, neighbour," said the man addressed, lowering his voice so as not to be overheard, "I can recollect when a king was not only seized in his palace, but deprived of his kingdom, and if men said true, of his life to boot."

"Aye, thou meanest King Richard," said the first speaker, in the same guarded tone. "But, I trow, he was

a different sort of king from our present Sovereign. King Richard, I have been told, never led an army into the field; and Harry, his cousin, held him in such slight esteem, that he scarce troubled himself to put on his armour when he went to seize him. But Harry of Monmouth is altogether a different sort of person from that. When he puts on sword and armour, there are but few, I am told, that can stand before him! Methinks they who went to seize him, would have done well to think twice of the errand on which they had set out."

"It may be," said the other, in a louder tone, "yet nevertheless they did propose such an errand to themselves. It was their purpose to have seized him in his palace at Eltham, and thrown him into prison. All those whom they account their enemies, the Dukes of Bedford and Gloucester, the Earl of Warwick, the Lord Archbishop, and others, they would have put to the sword, and have made Sir John Oldcastle himself Protector of the realm. But the King had early intelligence, from Wales, of what was brewing in London, and straightway set himself to defeat their wickedness. He summoned his guards, and rode straight up to London."

"Aye, that is certainly true," said another man who was standing by listening, "for I myself chanced to be crossing the heath when a strong force of men-at-arms, with the royal standard displayed, passed me on their way to London Bridge. I thought, too, that I could discern the King's figure in the midst."

"Well," resumed the former speaker, "as soon as

he reached London, he sent for my Lord Mayor, and bade him, I suppose, take order with the rebels, who were gathering in large numbers on the outskirts of the city—”

“Aye, in St. Giles’s Fields,” said another. “Rumour saith they have been holding their meetings there for many weeks past. Is it not so, Master Stidolph?”

“They may, for anything I know,” said the old man. “Anyway they were holding one last night. But the soldiers came upon them before the appointed hour of meeting, and there were by consequence but few present. Nevertheless there were some seized, and many more made their escape.”

“I trust they will shew no further mercy to these Lollards,” said one of the bystanders, by name Greenwood. “Methinks the more mercy that is shewn them, the more rampant and insolent they become. If it had not been for the King’s special intercession, whereby a delay of six weeks was allowed him for repentance, the arch-heretic Oldcastle would ere this have met his doom. Worthily did the Knight requite his mercy by breaking prison, and never ceasing from that day to this to plot the life of the good King, who had taken pity on him.”

“That was a strange business,” said old Stidolph, shaking his head. “No one ever knew how he escaped from the Tower, and many believe it was by the help of the devil himself that he got free. They say one of the warders declared that he could produce without fail the man who seized and gagged him, if time and help were given him. But he was never encouraged, or even permitted to do so.”

"It is all the King's goodness of heart," said Greenwood. "Sir John was his old companion in arms, and he hoped he would return to a better frame of mind. But methinks he will by this have learned that mercy is thrown away on such an one as he."

"Nay, that he has done," said another. "There is a reward of five hundred marks offered for Sir John's capture, dead or alive. I have spoken with a man who arrived from London an hour since: the pursuivants are searching everywhere, high and low, for the rebels. They say Sir Roger Acton is caught already."

"It will go hard with him," said Greenwood, "and with Tom Talbot and Parson Drayton too, if they are made prisoners. The King's Chaplains will not have to blame the King again for excess of lenity towards them."

The conversation was here interrupted by the appearance in the distance of the marriage party, the bride leaning on the arm of her father, and Mark and his friends following, dressed in their best apparel, and receiving the hearty good wishes of the crowd through which they had to make their way. But the bystanders remarked, as the simple procession passed by, that the bridegroom looked worn and anxious; and it was whispered among some few, who regarded the Lollards with especial dislike, that he was anxious lest Father Simon should publicly question him as to his belief on certain points of the Christian Faith; and unless he should receive satisfactory answers, even now refuse to proceed with the ceremony. Perhaps some such idea may have occurred to Mark himself. He looked nervously round him as he entered the churchyard, hastily thrusting

his left hand into the breast of his doublet. But a glance seemed to re-assure him. In the western doorway of the church stood the venerable figure of Father Simon, in his priestly vestments, with a smile on his face, which shewed plainly enough that he entertained no feeling but one of good-will to all present.

Mark stepped firmly forward, and taking Lettice's hand in his own, stood with her under the Norman doorway of the tower, swearing to take her for better for worse, according to the rite of the English Church in all ages; and hearing Lettice on her part promise to be "bonair and buxum in bedde and at borde," as the quaint language of the woman's vow phrased it in those days. But as the Priest was on the point of demanding the ring from the bridegroom, in further prosecution of the rite, he was suddenly interrupted by a loud cry raised in the further skirts of the crowd. The spectators gave way to the right and left, and a dozen soldiers belonging to the guard of the Lieutenant of the Tower, who had dismounted from their horses, were seen advancing along the path through the churchyard. The bridal party stood silent with astonishment. Lettice cast a hasty glance at Mark, and turned deadly pale when she saw the expression of his face. The party, which was headed by a pursuivant, moved on until they had arrived within a few steps of the church door, when they halted, and the pursuivant, bowing his head, saluted Father Simon with the respect still universally shewn to the secular clergy of that day.

"Benedicite, my sons," said the Priest; - "on what errand are ye come?"

"That of arresting a traitor to our gracious lord the King," answered the Pursuivant. As he spoke, he laid his hand on Mark's shoulder.

"Stay, good Master Pursuivant," said Father Simon; "surely here is a mistake. This youth is Mark Fletcher, a peaceable inhabitant of this village, in which we harbour no traitors against our liege lord, and gracious King."

"I grieve to hear that he is one of your flock, holy Father; and I fear that that will scarce assoilzie him of treason. Stand forth, Giles Fabyan, and say whether this be the man whom you accuse."

One of the soldiers, a middle-aged man, whose face was marked with several scars, advanced from the ranks. "That is the man, I will swear," he said, "whom I now behold for the fourth time. I am prepared to take any oath to the fact."

"Proceed," said the Pursuivant. "What be the three occasions on which you have seen him before?"

"The first time was in the castle belonging to the traitorous heretic, Sir John Oldcastle," said Fabyan. "He took offence at certain words which I spake against the Lollards, and we went to fight it out in the courtyard; but they forced us apart before the quarrel was settled. I got this scar"—he pointed to a wound on his cheek as he spoke—"in the encounter. I am scarce like to forget him, I trow."

"That was the first time," said the Pursuivant. "Now let us hear the second."

"The second was when I was keeping guard on the battlements of the Tower, on the night of the 26th of

October last. The guard was changed at midnight, and it was scarce ten minutes afterwards, when I heard footsteps, and saw a man, in the dress of one of the warders, advancing towards me. I challenged him, when he suddenly seized my halbert, and endeavoured to wrest it from me. While we were struggling I was seized by another man from behind, and overpowered. But before they could master me, I struck the first man, I feel assured, a blow with my dagger, on the back of his left hand. The night was very dark, but the stars gave me light enough to distinguish his features; they were those of the man, with whom I had well-nigh fought at Cowling. But I pray you let him put forth his left hand, and shew whether there be the scar of the wound, or no."

"Stretch forth your hand, my son," said Father Simon, "and confute this calumny."

Mark obeyed, though slowly and reluctantly. There was the mark of a dagger cut, not long healed, on the hand plainly enough to be discerned. Lettice turned paler still as she saw the scar, and leaned on Hugh's arm for support.

"Now for the third time," said the Pursuivant.

"The third time was in the Ficket Field, at the back of St. Giles', last night," said the soldier. "You know that a little after midnight the gates of the city were closed, by the orders of the King, to prevent the rebels in the city from joining those outside the walls. We were then marched down to St. Giles', to seize the others."

"Aye," said the Pursuivant. "But as ill-luck would

have it, they had got news of our coming, and had gone home again—all but a few, that is.”

“True,” said Fabyan, “but this man was one of the few. While the main body was being surrounded by our force, I and about two dozen others were sent to arrest a smaller knot of the conspirators, who were stationed under the wall of St. Giles’s churchyard, about a hundred paces off. They did not see us until we were close upon them, being, as I guess, engaged in watching what was passing in Ficket Field. The moment they perceived us, they took to their heels in all directions, and we could only catch one or two. But I saw the face of yonder man by the light of the cressets, as plainly as I see it now.”

“Speak, my son,” said the Priest, addressing Mark, who stood silent. “What answer make you to this charge?”

“He speaks the truth,” said Mark. “I quarrelled with him at Cowling, even as he said. He spoke words that I could not brook. He saw me on the walls of the Tower. I went thither to help in the rescue of my benefactor and friend; whom, then at least, I did not believe to be a traitor. He saw me also at the back of St. Giles’s churchyard last night, but I went thither for no disloyal purpose. I received a message, entreating all who loved Sir John to repair to Ficket Field, there to concert measures for petitioning the King for his pardon. If treason was designed against my lord the King, whom God preserve, I knew it not.”

“You mouth it parlous well,” said the Pursuivant, “and are, as I judge, a cunning rogue; yet methinks your story will hardly pass current.”

“Nay,” said the Priest, “that must be for the judge to determine. Doubtless he must answer it, but—”

“Doubtless, holy Father,” said the Pursuivant, interrupting; “and there is no need to parley further. Nor can we spare the time, having other rebels, at Halstead and at Sevenoaks, to arrest. Tie his hands, and secure him behind one of the men. He can sit behind Gilbert there.”

“Tarry,” said Father Simon. “If ye be bound for Sevenoaks, ye will scarce return before nightfall.”

“We do not propose returning at all to-night,” said the Pursuivant. “We can scarce hope to light upon all those of whom we are sent in quest, before to-morrow at sunset; and it may be that it will take us still longer.”

“In that case, a prisoner will but encumber you,” said the Priest. “If you will leave him in my charge, I will hold myself accountable for him. You will halt at Bromlegh on your return homeward, I presume, and he will then be ready to accompany you.”

The Pursuivant looked irresolute. “Father,” he said, “I do not distrust your word, but how can I be sure that he will not escape your hands; and were he to do so, my Lord the Lieutenant would be sorely displeased. Our gracious young King is roused to greater wrath at the thanklessness of these rebels, than I have ever beheld him. Especially is his anger kindled against Sir John Oldcastle, who hath twice grievously abused his forbearance; who, if report say true, hath even sought his benefactor's life. Besides, I should miss a round reward, which has been offered for this man's apprehen-

sion. I would fain pleasure you, but it can only be at mine own personal risk, and probable loss."

"I will be bound for him," said old Miles Weaver, "and will forfeit an hundred marks if he be not delivered to thee in safe custody on thy return. See here," he continued, producing the gipsire or purse usually carried by the artisans of the day. "This was the sum that I was about to bestow on my son-in-law that was to have been; I will pledge it now in his behalf. Examine its contents if you will. Look, I hand it over to the good Father here, who will deliver it to you, if Mark be not ready to attend you on your return."

"It needs not," said the Pursuivant. "The good Father's word should surely suffice. But we must tarry no longer; it is hard upon noon, and we have eight miles to ride ere we again draw rein." He turned off as he spoke, and the party, re-mounting their horses, were soon lost to sight.

"Mark Fletcher," said the Priest somewhat severely—for though he had been anxious to gain time, so as to consider how best to help him, he was both vexed and angry at the young man's folly,—“Mark Fletcher, you will do well to accompany me to mine house. I conclude you will give me your promise to make no attempt at escape. Unless you do—”

"Father," said Mark reproachfully, "have I fallen thus low in your account, that you think me capable of so requiting your kindness. Place me where you will, I will not stir from the spot until this man returns to claim me."

"It is well," said the Priest. "Miles, you will do

wisely to take your daughter home. I will visit her shortly, and give her what comfort I may. Return to your homes, good friends. Our merrymaking hath had a grievous interruption: I trust this matter may not have a still more grievous end."

He walked off slowly as he spoke, closely followed by Mark, whose downcast looks and drooping figure presented a sad contrast to his demeanour scarcely more than an hour before. Old Miles, in accordance with the Priest's advice, took Lettice's hand, and bidding Hugh and the others follow him, hurried along the least-frequented path he could find towards his own dwelling. The crowd slowly dispersed, some lamenting the interruption to their promised day of enjoyment—some venting their wrath on the traitors who had so nearly succeeded in their murderous designs against the brave young King; some pitying Miles Weaver and his lovely daughter; but all agreeing in the imminent peril into which the rash lad, Mark Fletcher, had brought his neck by his unadvised proceedings.

Several days elapsed before the Pursuivant's return, and when he did pass through Bromlegh on his homeward route, he had no time to delay even for half-an-hour in the village. He had unexpectedly succeeded in arresting a prisoner of great importance, and it was not impossible that a rescue might be attempted, unless he were conveyed with all possible speed to London. He only halted a moment to send a message to Sir Simon, telling him that his prisoner must be committed to the custody of the headborough of the village, until he could despatch some messengers to convey him to

prison. Mark was accordingly handed over to Martin Stockdale, a worthy man, who was a blacksmith by trade, and, though an old friend of both Miles Weaver and Mark himself, by no means disposed to incur any personal danger by the possible escape of the prisoner. He took the precaution not only of shutting him up in a strong room, the doors and windows of which were secured by iron bars, but of riveting an iron ring round his leg, and fastening it by a chain to a staple in the wall. Nor would he suffer any one to have access to the prisoner, unless while he was present himself. Notwithstanding these precautions, Martin was considerably embarrassed by the responsibility imposed upon him, and every day trusted to receive a visit from the soldiers, who would relieve him of his unwelcome charge; but his hope was not fulfilled. The remaining weeks of January passed away, and February succeeded, and February gave way to March, and still the expected messengers did not arrive. News of great importance was circulated during the interval. Sir Roger Acton, an intimate associate of Oldcastle, was tried, convicted, and executed for his share in the outbreak. Many others, also of rank and position, underwent the same fate. Large sums were paid for the arrest of traitors, and still larger ones promised for the capture of the head of the conspiracy; who had fled, it was supposed, from St. Giles's Fields, as soon as the approach of the royal troops was perceived, and was believed to have returned to his former place of retreat.

In the month of February also arrived the intelligence of Archbishop Arundel's death. He had been attacked

by inflammation of the throat (probably quinsy), and had died of suffocation. The Lollards attributed the ulceration of his tongue, consequent upon the disease, to the vengeance of Heaven upon him, for the sentences which that member had pronounced against the Lollards—with what reason, every reader will best judge for himself. There was great anxiety felt as to who would be his successor. Several names were in men's mouths as those of probable occupants of the vacant throne; but the King himself had probably fixed upon Arundel's successor, even before the vacancy occurred. He issued his *congé d'élire* to the Chapter at Canterbury, requiring them to elect Chicheley, Bishop of St. David's. The Chapter of Canterbury for once willingly complied. Chicheley himself does not appear to have desired the honour; if what is told by his biographers is true, his reluctance to undertake the office was with great difficulty overcome. This, however, is a very difficult matter to determine, especially in the history of those days, when such reluctance was regarded as being no more than the befitting modesty to be looked for in all who succeeded to so high an office.

By the great mass of the nation the appointment was hailed with satisfaction; and this is remarkable, considering that Chicheley was known to be a man of resolute character, and quite as determined as his predecessor to put down the professors of the new school, which was daily becoming more formidable to the power of the hierarchy. But such certainly seems to have been the fact. Possibly they felt that in times so critical, it would be better to have a man of nerve and

ability at the helm, even though his opinions did not entirely accord with their own, than a waverer or a trimmer.

The very day after the announcement of Chicheley's election, arrived the long-expected order for the transmission of Mark Fletcher to the dungeons of the Tower. He was given into the custody of Giles Fabyan, who chanced to be the leader of the party sent for the purpose; and the latter received Mark—so he at least fancied—with a malicious satisfaction, anticipating Mark's speedy elevation to the gallows, on which so many accused of the same offence had already suffered. Old Miles and Hugh took a sad leave of their relative, little hoping, if the truth were told, ever to behold him in life again, unless perchance it might be on the day of his execution.

“There is no help for it, neighbour, I fear,” said old Nicholas Allden that evening. “The lad has been led astray by these crazy preachers, and has recovered his senses too late. Until he met with Jasper Graves, he was as little given to heresy, or rebellion either—”

“He meant no rebellion,” said Lettice, earnestly. “You heard him say as much himself.”

“Why aye, lass, so I did,” said Nicholas, “and I doubt not he will tell the judge the same. But if they only were to be convicted who admitted their own naught, the gibbets would have few customers, I trow. Say what he will, I fear me there be ugly facts against him, and it profits nothing denying them. By his own confession he aided and abetted in the escape of the arch-traitor Cobham. That, I fear me, by itself is hang-

ing matter ; and when you add to that, that he went up to meet the traitor ; who was, even then, on his way with arms in his hand to seize the person of our gracious sovereign, if not to slay him outright,—there needs no more to convict any man that ever lived. I cannot see how he can escape the sentence, though, Heaven knows, I would pay down a round sum to deliver him, if I could."

"It may be you are right," said Lettice. "But even if Mark should be condemned, it is in the power of the King to pardon him."

"You are right, lass," said Allden. "Therein lies your best chance. The King doth not love axe and cord much better than he loves fire and faggot. If ye could prevail on some great man to speak in Mark's behalf, who would also go bail for the lad's future good behaviour, methinks his life might yet be saved."

"Oh, then let us go!" exclaimed Lettice, starting up—"let us go this minute, and make entreaty. There are surely those in King Henry's court who might be induced to take pity on the unfortunate! You will go with me anyway, Mistress Amabel," she added, as she noticed the blank expression that overspread the faces of her male relatives. "You will not suffer Mark's life to be forfeit, for lack of a few urgent words."

"Hold your peace, and be reasonable, Lettice," said Miles. "We would none of us spare our entreaties were there any shade of hope that they would avail. But I, for my part, know nought of great men, or great ladies either. To be sure, there is our Bishop—"

"He would not plead for a Lollard," said Nicholas. "Count not on his intercession."

"And there is the Earl of Warwick," said Mistress Harradine. "You have forgotten him, Miles. Mark's father was one of his body-servants not so many years ago."

"The Earl of Warwick," repeated Alden. "Richard Beauchamp; I fear me that will avail little better. The Earl is said to be a fast friend of this new Primate, who is like to take harsher measures with these Lollards, than even the old Archbishop did."

"Good neighbour," said Amabel, "it skills not reckoning the chances against us after this fashion. If we entreat my Lord of Warwick to lend us his aid, my nephew may be saved. If we ask him not, he will of a certainty be done to death. Let us go up and fall on our knees before Richard Beauchamp, and entreat him with what arguments we may. What say you, Miles Weaver?"

"I will go with you," said the old man; "we will all go, for the matter of that; but it is you who must speak in behalf of the others. As I said before, I know nought of courts and princes, and could not shape my tongue to their courtly phrases."

"It is well," said Amabel. "We will all go up tomorrow, and entreat the Earl. I chanced to hear this morning that he is even now in London."

CHAPTER VII.

ON the day after Mark's removal to London, a group of nobles and ecclesiastics of the highest rank were seated in one of the chambers in the Bishop of London's palace. This stood in those days at the north-western corner of St. Paul's churchyard, and was built, like all great houses of that epoch, as much for defence as for residence. The windows looking out on the streets were little better than loopholes cut in the massive and solid stone walls. The gateway was flanked by two strong towers, and the oaken door, thickly studded with large nails, might have resisted any force that could be brought against it in a street so narrow, except perhaps that of fire. The chamber itself was large and splendid, according to the taste of that day; though in the present generation it would probably be accounted dark, ill-proportioned, and scantily furnished. It was wainscoted with oak, black with age, the panels being filled with tapestry, representing the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. The ceiling was divided into compartments by oaken beams intersecting one another, each compartment being occupied by some heraldic emblazonment. The row of arched windows, each of which was divided by a stone mullion, with tracery in the upper part, was filled with glass; but the latter consisted of very small fragments, so that half the space at least intended for light was occupied by the lead-work. But glass was at this time so rare in dwelling-houses, that these windows were accounted

a great advance in civilization. One side of the room, spacious as it was, was almost occupied by the chimney-piece, which had been carved by some artist of the day with considerable skill, to represent the enthronement of Mellitus, the first Bishop of London. Against the walls there stood a huge cabinet, and one or two chests or coffers, while the middle of the room was occupied by a table of solid oak, round which were ranged a number of chairs of the same material, elaborately carved, having cushions of Utrecht velvet, fringed with cloth of gold. The floor had been freshly strewn with rushes and early spring-flowers, diffusing a pleasant fragrance through the apartment.

Seven or eight personages were seated round the table, all richly dressed, for that was an age when great importance was attached to externals. But their attire denoted that they belonged to different professions, indeed to different ranks of society. The central seat was of course filled by the Bishop of London. He wore his rich episcopal robe, which in those days was rarely laid aside except in strict domestic privacy. There were two other bishops present—those of St. Davids and Winchester—similarly attired, and sitting on either side of the host. The latter, Henry Beaufort, held at present the office of Chancellor, and is the same who is better known in subsequent history as Cardinal Beaufort; the other, Henry Chicheley, had been recently nominated Archbishop of Canterbury. Next to the last-named were the Earl of Salisbury and Sir John Cheyne, both of them veteran warriors, who had won renown in the Welsh borders, as well

as in France. The seat next to Beaufort was filled by the Earl of Warwick, also a tried and trusted counsellor of the King, and that again next to him by Sir Robert Morley, Lieutenant of the Tower. The three remaining personages occupied chairs somewhat lower than the rest. One of them was John Forrest or Forrester, the new archbishop's confidential chaplain; the dress of the other two shewed them to be citizens. One of these was a man somewhere about fifty years of age, bearing a marked resemblance to the Archbishop. He was in fact his elder brother, Sir Robert Chicheley, alderman and twice Lord Mayor; he was a grocer by trade, and had amassed a large fortune; which, to his honour be it spoken, he afterwards bequeathed to charitable and pious purposes.

His near connection with the Primate probably caused him to be chosen one of the representatives of the city at the council. The other, a man of about the same age or somewhat older, was a still more remarkable personage. He wore his fur livery gown, with his collar of office over it; for he too had already held twice, or as some say three times, the highest dignity of the city. This was Whittington, the well-known hero of the nursery tale; whose true history strangely enough has been accounted fiction, while so many fictions of those times have been accounted history. His features, transmitted to us in more than one portrait, expressed the benevolence at once and the sagacity which distinguished his character, rendering him one of the noblest ornaments of the great city, not only in the times in which he lived, but

throughout its entire history. The respect paid him, even by the personages of the highest rank, in whose company he now found himself, were, in themselves, the strongest testimony to his worth.

They had evidently been discussing some question not only of great interest to all present, but involving great difficulty also. It was easy to see that, although Chicheley assumed a position no higher than the rest, he was the person to whom they chiefly looked for guidance in its determination.

"You think then, my Lord," said the Bishop of London, after a pause in the conversation, "that the King is so set on prosecuting this claim, that it would be difficult to divert him from it, even though the opinions of his counsellors should be unfavourable to it."

"Scarcely that," said Chicheley, "for he is anxious to ascertain as nearly as he may, what are the sentiments of all ranks of the people respecting it. For himself, doubtless he believes, in the first place, that his claim to the throne of France is just. He is the great grandson of Edward III., whose right ought not to have been disputed; and though it is true that the young Earl of Mortimer is King Edward's nearest male heir, yet all the rights possessed by King Richard II.—this therefore along with the rest—were formally ceded by him to the House of Lancaster, and the same has been ratified by Mortimer's tacit assent.

Chicheley paused as he spoke, and looked keenly into the faces of the other counsellors, more particularly those of the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick. But these two experienced courtiers remained silent,

too wary to shew any sign of dissent, even if they felt any ; and Chicheley proceeded.

“Satisfied therefore of his right to the inheritance of the French crown, the King further thinks that it is his plain duty to assert and maintain it by force of arms, if need be. France has long been the scene of lawless bloodshed and rapine, which disgrace humanity. A powerful hand is needed to repress disorders, which are converting that unhappy land into a desert. And nowhere can such a hand be found, excepting his own. Such is the King’s mind on the subject. But he would fain learn the opinions of all classes of his countrymen, and be assured that, if he undertake the enterprise, they would go heart and soul with him in it. How say you then of the spirituality, my Lords of Winchester and London?”

“I say it is a good work,” said Beaufort, “and one which will doubtless have the blessing of Heaven. Let my Lord the King go forth with a good heart, for the prayers and blessings of the Church will go along with him.”

“And ye, my Lords and valiant Sirs,” pursued Chicheley, addressing himself to the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick, and the two Knights, “who are worthy representatives of the nobility and knighthood of England, what counsel give ye in this matter?”

“By my faith,” said Salisbury bluntly, “we soldiers are scarce likely to object to the war which the good King proposes. It is hard enough to keep our followers in meat and clothing, in these inactive times. The ransom of a few French prisoners would replenish our coffers nobly.”

"Yea," added Sir John Cheyne, "and would find better employment for them, than they now find for themselves. Good truth, they are sore discontent for lack of employ, insomuch that if we have no Frenchmen to fight, we should soon be in sore danger of coming to loggerheads with one another."

"Good, my Lords," said Chicheley. "These words, methinks, will be welcome in the King's ears. And yet once more, what say ye, Master Whittington, and my brother Robert? Should this war be undertaken, the King will look largely for your aid, in supplying the needful subsidies for his campaign. Could he count on the support of the good citizens, think you, should he need it?"

"Be sure, my good Lord, it will not be wanting," said Whittington. "Heavily hath the city suffered from the lawless state of France, where peaceable men, engaged in their honest business, may not traverse the land without violence and plunder. Greatly to our advantage will it be, if France can be brought to the same orderly tranquillity which this realm happily enjoys. Much, too, has our commerce with more distant lands been injured by French vessels, which destroy and plunder our ships upon the high seas. To these outrages, a strong arm, such as that of our gracious Lord, can alone put a period. Trust me, we of the city will not be wanting in lending it the power to strike."

"Bravely and loyally spoken," said Chicheley. "Gladly will I convey your sentiments to our gracious Master, assured that they will be right welcome to him. And now, my Lord," he continued, addressing the

Bishop of London, the hour approaches when the King has commanded my attendance at his palace at Kenyngton. I will therefore crave permission to take my leave. You too, my Lord of Warwick, if I mistake not, are bound for the King's private chamber."

"Even so, my Lord," said the Earl. "And I will gladly ride thither in your company."

The Council accordingly broke up, Chicheley and Warwick repairing to the court-yard, where their trains were already in attendance.

They passed out into St. Paul's churchyard, down Paul's Chain, and along Thames-street, to the ancient bridge, the only one by which the Thames could in those days be crossed. It was a solid and massive structure, the huge piers occupying fully as much space as the river-way between them, and surmounted on either side by rows of houses, which left but a narrow passage between them for horsemen or pedestrians. The river crossed, they entered on the fields bordering on the village of Bermondsey, with its ancient monastery, (recently erected into an abbey by King Richard II.) and thence to Newington, the most famous archery-ground in the neighbourhood of London at that time. The roads, notwithstanding that they led to what was occasionally, at least, a royal residence, were little better than tracks across the common, and were fetlock deep in mud. At this point they were obliged to proceed in somewhat different order, Warwick riding a little in advance, and Chicheley and his Chaplain following. The last two were sufficiently out of earshot of the rest of the party, to venture on confidential talk.

"You are determined then to encourage this French war," said Forrest; "yet I think in your heart you can hardly approve it."

"Where there are two evils, John, one or other of which is inevitable," said Chicheley with a sedate smile, "the wise man chooses the lesser of the two. Much more will he so do, when there are many evils on the one hand, and but one on the other."

"You think this French war an evil then?" rejoined the other.

"Why aye, to you I do not hesitate to avow as much," said the Archbishop designate. "The war will impoverish the King's exchequer, exhaust the best blood of England, bring sorrow to many a homestead, and cannot in the end advantage the realm of England."

"If that be one side of the account," remarked the Chaplain, "methinks there should be heavy items on the other, to overbalance it."

"True, but there are," returned Chicheley. "There is civil war on the other side, and religious strife; it may be the downfall of the Church itself."

"Civil war," repeated Forrest, "that might be, were the young Earl of Mortimer other than he is. But as things stand—"

"It depends little on him," interposed Chicheley; "if the King were less brave, wise, and popular, there would be plenty of claimants, who could make out a colourable case in their favour. And, notwithstanding that Henry is at present the idol of all hearts, unless the unquiet spirits of these times find an outlet in foreign war, they will inevitably find one at home."

"It may be," said Forrest; "I, at least, can scarce gainsay it. But the downfall of the Church, my Lord—surely there cannot be danger of that."

"That is your opinion?" asked the Archbishop. "I would I thought so. To my mind the attack may be defeated now, and staved off for a generation or so to come; but the time is not far distant, when a heavy and determined blow will be aimed at the Church, which Heaven send she may have power to ward off. But though it may be averted for the present, it can only be by the determined exercise of authority on the one hand, and by turning the energies of the nation, at present perilously enlisted on the side of these Lollards, to a wholly different subject of interest. Ha, what now," he added, drawing his rein, as he saw, somewhat in advance of him, a party of some three or four persons, who had been waiting at a corner of the road, come forward and fall on their knees in the middle of the pathway. "Inquire who these be, John, and what they want."

"They are suppliants to my Lord of Warwick, it would seem," said the Chaplain. "But if we ride up, we can hear what passes."

Meanwhile the Earl also had paused, and inquired of the new comers with what purpose they sought him.

"We come to entreat your favour in behalf of our relative, Mark Fletcher, who is now in great peril of his life, unless you are pleased to aid him," said Mistress Amabel, who, as the reader has heard, had been constituted spokeswoman. "He is the son of your former

body-servant, John Fletcher, whom in old days you were wont to regard with favour."

"John Fletcher," repeated the Earl. "Yea, I remember him well, a stout knave and a trusty. What has befallen his son?"

Dame Amabel replied as briefly as she could, relating how in earlier days Mark had been rescued from death by Sir John Oldcastle, and had esteemed himself bound to him ever afterwards. How, actuated by gratitude alone, he had aided in the liberation of the knight from the Tower. How, again, on the 7th of January last, he had received a message, as he supposed, from Sir John, requesting his attendance in St. Giles's Fields, but not for any treasonable purpose; how, in consequence, he had been confounded with traitors, who had taken up arms, and risen in rebellion."

"Say you he helped the traitor Oldcastle to break prison?" inquired the Earl.

"He did," faltered Amabel, "but he meant no treason."

"And he was present at the meeting in Ficket Field, in company with the rebel Lollards?" pursued Warwick, frowning. "Methinks you are overbold to thrust yourself into my presence with a tale like this. Who has ever known Warwick espouse the cause of heretics and traitors?"

"Cease, Amabel," said Miles, interfering. "I told you your cake was dough. I pray you pardon Mistress Harradine," he continued, turning to the Earl. "She is so bent on pleading her nephew's cause, that she would not be gainsayed."

Amabel rose slowly from her kneeling posture, and moved out of the Earl's way, who rode on without further remark. But Chicheley, who had listened attentively to what passed, did not at first seem inclined to follow.

"Amabel," "Harradine," he repeated; "those, me thinks, are names familiar to mine ear. There is something in her face, too, that I seem to recall." He called up one of his attendants, and bade him follow the party, who were now wearily and sadly making their way homewards, and bid them accompany him to his episcopal palace, where he would give them audience on his return from Kenyngton.

That evening, accordingly, they were admitted to his presence, much wondering at the summons, and, perhaps, somewhat afraid that it might bode no good to their own safety. Chicheley's manner, however, was kind and re-assuring.

"Good dame," he said, "I heard the supplication you addressed to the Earl of Warwick, and I would not that any should suffer for offences of which they are not most clearly guilty. I have therefore sent for you to learn from your own lips the whole of this matter. But first, what is your name, and place of birth?"

"I am called Amabel Harradine, my gracious Lord," she answered; "and I was born at Higham Ferrars in Northamptonshire, where my father was the village blacksmith."

"Aye, indeed," said the Archbishop, with something of a sigh; "was that your birthplace? And who may have been your nearest neighbours, when you resided there?"

“On the one side old John Fletcher,” answered Amabel, at once surprised and delighted at the strange interest with which the Primate seemed to regard her. “Old John Fletcher, whose name was famous for the arrows he made for many a mile round. He married my sister, so please you.”

“He was your neighbour on the one side,” pursued her questioner; “and who on the other?”

“On the other lived one Thomas Chicheley, most reverend Father,” said Mistress Harradine. “He was at that time the village tailor. He left the village, when I was a girl, but he hath since prospered in the world, I have heard, and hath bought land, and—”

“Enough,” said the Archbishop somewhat sadly. “You speak of things which happened long ago; nor have I leisure to hear more. Now tell me the particulars of your nephew’s case. He is, I suppose, the son of the John Fletcher of whom you were speaking?”

“Even so, your Grace,” returned Amabel. Nothing loth, she then proceeded to relate the history of Mark’s arrest, repeatedly assuring her hearer that the King had no more loyal subject than the unlucky lad in question, who had been induced by gratitude to his friend Sir John Oldcastle to commit acts, with which otherwise he would have had nought to do, nay, would himself have condemned and resisted.

Chicheley heard her to the end with unusual mildness; and then dismissed her, with an assurance that her nephew’s case should receive all possible consideration, though there could be but little hope that offences of so grave a character would be overlooked.

The party accordingly withdrew, somewhat abashed, somewhat encouraged, but more than all, astonished by the demeanour of the Primate.

"Methinks your Grace seems strangely interested by this woman's pleading," remarked Forrest, when the door had closed behind the suppliants.

"It may be that I was, John," said the Archbishop thoughtfully. "You heard her name the place where she was born?"

"I did so," answered the Chaplain. "It was Higham Ferrars, in the county of Northants; and now, I be-think me, that village was your Grace's birthplace also. It may be that you account of her as your fellow-villager."

"More than that, John; as my earliest playfellow. Harken! She and I were playing in the meadows on the banks of the Nene, the last time I saw her. I was scarce eight years of age, she not seven; the sister of whom she spoke was a baby in her cradle. I remember it all, as though it had happened but yesterday. We were engaged in some childish sport, when we were accosted by a man of grave and reverend aspect, who was taking his afternoon walk across the fields from Northampton Castle. He stopped, and watched our game for a time with a kindly smile; then he called us to him, patted Amabel on the head, and asked some questions of me. Can you guess who he was, Forrest?"

"No, my Lord, unless it was your Grace's first patron, the saintly Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester."

"Right," said the Archbishop. "It was that good

and holy man. He was pleased, it seemed, with my replies, and the next day sent his servant to make further inquiries. By his favour I was placed in the College at Winchester, which his piety was even then engaged in founding. Thus did he plant my foot on the lowest round of the ladder, by which I have mounted thus high, yea, higher than the good Wykeham himself—all unworthy as I am to be named with him. But on Amabel, my playfellow, he bestowed no more than his simple blessing at parting. Such are the chances of life. For this world, as for the next, oftentimes one is taken and another left.”

He leaned his head on his hand, and relapsed into silence, which was presently broken by Forrest. “I can well understand,” he said, “your Grace’s interest in this youth. It is pity, but I should fear his case was beyond hope, even on Mistress Harradine’s shewing.”

“I scarce know that,” said Chicheley. “To abet the escape of a condemned heretic and traitor from the Tower, and to band with a company of armed rebels whose object was to seize the King’s person, are doubtless acts of treason, for which there could be no penalty but death, and the sentence of the court must needs go against him. But the King is ever merciful, and were he assured that the youth was really misled as to the purpose of the traitors in Ficket Field, he might be prevailed on to grant a pardon.”

“It may be,” returned Forrest. “But methinks the youth was not misled in the other matter,—the helping an attainted traitor to break out of the King’s prison.”

"True, John," said the Archbishop, smiling mysteriously; "but it may be that the youth had accomplices in that matter, of whom we wot little."

"I do not understand your Grace," said Forrest.

"There is no need that you should," said the Archbishop, who was sensible that he had spoken somewhat unadvisedly. "And, in truth," he muttered to himself, "the King would hardly like that plea to be brought forward. I fear you are right, John," he added, after a few minutes more thought. "I would give much to save the nephew of my old playmate from death, the more so as I am convinced of his innocence of treason or rebellion. But I know not how it may be done."

"The best hope would consist in putting off his trial awhile," said Forrest. "That may be contrived without difficulty. There are prisoners enow to occupy the judges for many a day to come. And it may be that when a large proportion of the offenders have undergone their punishment, it will be thought that atonement has been made, and mercy will be shewn to the rest."

"You are right, John," said the Archbishop. "Such lenity will certainly be accorded. It was but this very day that the King, who is ever averse to spilling blood in peace, little as he thinks of it in war, spake to me of granting an amnesty to all who would sue for pardon. Both Warwick and I told him that the time had not yet come when such a step could be taken with any safety, and that an example must be made of men who had openly defied the authority both of Church and Crown. But the time for granting it will come, doubtless, and

that before the close of this present month. It may be that this youth need not be brought to trial at all. Go you down to the worthy Lieutenant of the Tower, mine approved friend, in whose custody this Fletcher is, and request that he remit him to me for more especial examination. See that he is lodged safely in the prison at Lambeth, for he must not be permitted to escape. We shall doubtless be able to find some reason for deferring his trial."

Meanwhile, Mark lay in his dungeon in the Tower, fully persuaded that he had taken his last leave of Lettice, indeed of this life altogether. He was quite sensible that, however innocent he might be of any treason against his liege Lord the King, it would be almost impossible for him to prove such innocence before his judges. He blamed himself, indeed, for his folly in hearkening to Graves's representations respecting the meeting in Ficket Fields. Enough had transpired since the flight of Sir John Oldcastle from the Tower, to shew that however sincere his loyalty to King Henry might have been previously to his imprisonment, he was now all but an avowed rebel. Under these circumstances, Mark felt that he ought to have refused to hearken to Jasper's insidious assertions. Yet what did it matter after all, he thought. There was the other business, which could not be explained away, and that was quite enough to hang him by itself.

On the second day in the forenoon, when the jailer entered his prison, informing him that he had been summoned before the Archbishop, he expected nothing

less than a short examination, and a still shorter shrift. He was a good deal surprised when he found himself committed to a chamber at Lambeth, strongly secured indeed, but otherwise greatly more commodious than his dungeon at the Tower had been. His surprise grew greater as day after day passed on, and the intended examination by the Archbishop was still delayed. He was frequently visited by the Archbishop's chaplain, who treated him with a kindness, as unexpected as it was welcome. Mark ventured to ask of him one day, how it was that the Archbishop had not fulfilled his intention of examining into his case. The Chaplain informed him that the Archbishop had not yet been confirmed in his office by the bestowal of the royal assent, and until this was done, the Primate elect would perform no official act. The assent, however, had been given that day, and therefore he might now very shortly expect to be cited.

Two or three days afterwards accordingly, on the 28th day of March, Mark was conducted by his jailers into the Primate's presence, but only to be informed that the King of his great mercy had been pleased to promise a pardon to all who should humbly and dutifully sue for it, with promises of loyal obedience for the future. Therefore, Mark was told, if he chose to avail himself of this, no further proceedings would be necessary.

It needs not to add, that the poor lad was only too thankful to escape by such submission from the terrible fate that had so long been staring him in the face. He immediately made the required submission,

and received his pardon; returning to Bromlegh, to the great delight of Mistress Amabel; who, however, had but small notion of what it was that had really procured Mark's unlooked-for liberation. They were all in truth much too happy to trouble themselves with further inquiries. Mark's wedding took place a week or two afterwards, and was celebrated with even greater rejoicings than those which had ushered in the original bridal day. The young couple settled down in the cottage which Mark had got ready for the event, and in the happiness of his married life, Mark soon forgot the previous weeks of suffering.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE years in truth passed peacefully and quietly enough with Mark and his bride. He heard no more of Jasper Graves, who, it was currently believed, had accompanied Sir John Oldcastle in his flight into Wales, and continued in personal attendance upon him. The severe measures taken against the Lollards previous to the amnesty, had the effect also of preventing for a long time to come any meetings of persons of that persuasion in the neighbourhood of Bromlegh, so that temptation was removed from Mark to involve himself again in their proceedings, even had he been so inclined. Sir Roger Acton, a knight of good estate, together with a preacher named Beverley, and several others, were hanged for treason, and a law was enacted

that all judges and magistrates should be authorised to arrest persons suspected of holding heretical opinions, and if convicted, such persons should forfeit their lands and property of whatsoever kind, the same penalty, in fact, as enforced against cases of felony. As for Oldcastle, a bill of attainder was brought into Parliament and passed: a reward of a thousand marks was offered to any one who could secure him dead or alive, and a further perpetual exemption from taxes was promised to any town in which he should be arrested.

It was fully expected that these measures would be successful, and that Cobham would speedily be seized and brought to judgment; but such did not prove to be the case. The country forming the border-land between Wales and England, was at that time in a state so unsettled, that nothing but an armed force of considerable strength could venture within it without peril to life and liberty. This Sir John had made the place of his retreat; and here he found many to give him shelter, and warn him of the approach of danger, should any threaten him. There can be no doubt that, whatever may have been his fidelity to Henry in the time previous to his imprisonment, he now altogether cast off his allegiance. From his place of concealment, emissaries were continually despatched to endeavour to stir up such elements of discontent as existed in various parts of the country. Nor does there appear to be any reason for doubting that he opened negotiations with the Scots, the avowed enemies of England, offering to help them in their projected in-

vasion. For some months after his second escape from St. Giles's Fields, rumours were continually in circulation as to the plots he was supposed to be hatching.

But in the following year, the public interest was engrossed by matters of another description. In the spring of 1415 Henry put in his claim to the crown of France, and on its rejection by the French nation, prepared to cross the Channel at the head of an English army to enforce it. The sympathies of all classes were heartily with him. The clergy promised him their prayers and blessings; the Commons voted him the most liberal supplies; the knights and nobles flocked to his standard. In the middle of August he embarked at Southampton with fifteen hundred vessels, and arrived in safety on the French coast.

News travelled tardily in those days. It was not until the middle of September that any tidings arrived, and then no more important intelligence than the surrender of Harfleur was announced. But a few weeks afterwards the report of the great victory of Agincourt, the most astonishing triumph, perhaps, to be found in the annals of any nation, rang like the note of a trumpet through the land. A week or two afterwards the hero of this memorable day returned to England, and was received with an enthusiasm by his subjects, which exceeded all precedent. They are related to have rushed into the sea when his boat approached, and seizing him in their arms, to have borne him through the surf to the shore.

Mark and Lettice joined a party from Bromlegh, which repaired to Blackheath to witness his triumphant arrival.

The scene was splendid and gorgeous in the extreme. The whole country seemed to have been converted into a fair. At every turn of the road triumphal arches had been erected, flanked by towers hung with flags and tapestry, from which youths and maidens dropped wreaths of laurel and chaplets of flowers on the head of the conqueror as he passed by. Twenty thousand citizens, with the banners and ensigns of their guilds, received him at Blackheath, and accompanied him to London, where a solemn Te Deum was sung at St. Paul's. Still larger supplies than had been granted for the previous expedition were now voted, and some even settled upon Henry for life.

After a brief sojourn in England, the King again departed for France, and again the interest of the nation was concentrated in the foreign news, which continued from time to time to be received. The whole people remained, as it were, on the tiptoe of expectation, hoping to hear of a second victory, as complete and splendid as that of Agincourt had been. Not in the castles of the nobles only, but in the dwellings of the trader, in the cottage of the mechanic and the labourer, hardly any other topic was discussed. For the time, the opinions of the Lollards, and the measures taken against them, scarcely occupied the attention of the people at all.

But Chicheley, who had been appointed head of the Council during the King's absence, and thereby invested with authority scarcely less than that of the Regent Bedford himself, was careful to pursue the policy which he had proposed to himself when he assumed the Pri-

macy, and put down heretical teaching without mercy. Persons convicted of treason against the King were frequently pardoned by the royal clemency, but no such indulgence was shewn by the Archbishop. In August, 1415, one John Claydon, by trade a furrier, was cited before him in St. Paul's Church, charged with propagating heresy, by causing books to be written, at his own cost, full of heretical teaching. Extracts from the book were read aloud, and are still preserved. They are fair specimens of the opinions ordinarily held by the Lollards, containing some things with which we in the present day would very heartily sympathise, such as the unprofitableness of indulgences, and the unlawfulness of bowing the knee to images; other things, which are fair matters of opinion; and others, again, the folly and danger of which must be obvious to all. Claydon did not deny the charges made against him. He was condemned as Sautre had been, as a relapsed heretic, and underwent the same fate in Smithfield shortly afterwards. Along with him was burnt one Turmin, a baker, for the same offence.

These executions would seem to have had their effect. During the following year, we hear of no persons being charged with heretical or treasonable opinions. But this was not to last. In 1417 a diversion was attempted by the Scotch in favour of the French King. The Duke of Albany and the Earl of Douglas advanced with an armed force into England, hoping thereby to compel Henry to withdraw from Normandy. A general levée was held to raise an army sufficient to repel the invasion. Among others of the youths of Bromlegh who

joined the standard of the Dukes of Bedford and Exeter, were Hugh Weaver, and old Allden's son, Robert. They had left Bromlegh about a week or ten days, and Lettice was still congratulating herself that her husband had not been included among those ordered to march northwards, when they received a visitor, whose presence was as unwelcome as it was unexpected.

Mark had just laid aside his tools for the day, and was about to accompany his wife for a short stroll through the Bromlegh woods, now wearing the rich livery of late autumn, when a figure muffled in a cloak, which the wearer had carefully folded round his face also, reminding Mark in no pleasant manner of a former interview, advanced from the cover of the trees, and besought Mark to follow him, informing him that he had news for his private ear of the deepest importance.

Mark did not at first make any answer. The figure was carefully disguised, but the voice was familiar. He was half-disposed to comply with the summons, but Lettice laid her hand imploringly on his shoulder. "Oh, Mark," she said, "do not go!"

"Hinder him not," cried the fanatic—for it was indeed Jasper Graves. "It is in the Name of the Lord that I come,—in the Name of the Lord," he added, seeing that Mark still hesitated, "and of your own early friend and patron, the godly Sir John Oldcastle."

"Oh, Mark!" again exclaimed Lettice, "do not hearken to him. Bid him leave us. Let us quit the spot ourselves, if he will not go. You have suffered

enough, methinks, for that traitor against our Lord the King, without incurring further peril."

"Woman, forbear," exclaimed Graves, "and let your husband judge for himself. It were better that you left us, but be careful that you say nought of my presence here, or it may indeed endanger your husband's safety." Lettice looked imploringly at Mark, who had hitherto stood silent, in evident perplexity. He now spoke.

"Lettice," he said, "it will be better that you should leave us. I cannot refuse to receive a message from one to whom I owe my life, and who may once more be in danger of his. But fear not, I will do nothing rash. Leave us, and I will rejoin you shortly."

Lettice obeyed. She withdrew reluctantly into the cottage, and Mark, in compliance with his visitor's request, proceeded some way into the forest, until an open glade was reached, where his companion paused.

"I thank you that you have so far complied with my entreaty," he said. "Sir John knows well that you love him. And never did man more need the love of his friends than he doth now."

"Where is he, and what has he been doing this many a day?" inquired Mark. "I trust not all that men's tongues have spoken concerning him—"

"Trust not men's tongues at all," interposed Graves; "and especially trust not what they say against God's saints, for it is nought but calumny and falsehood."

"I would fain believe so," said Mark. "I cannot credit what hath been currently reported, that Sir John hath banded not only with rebels against our liege lord

the King, but with the enemies of England herself, with the false Scotch, and the rebel French—”

“Sir John is the servant of the Lord,” interrupted the Lollard, “and careth not for any distinction between man and man, such as those you speak of. If they are on the Lord’s side, he is at one with them; if they are against the Lord, he is against them. I trust that you, Mark Fletcher, are still among the faithful, for all that men have said respecting you.”

“I know not what men may have said respecting me,” retorted Mark, “nor whom you call faithful. But, methinks they who break their oath of allegiance to their rightful sovereign, and band with the enemies of their country, but ill deserve the name.”

“Sovereign, country,” repeated Jasper, scornfully; “what words are these? There is but one Sovereign to whom fealty is due; there is but one country of which Christian men are citizens. Will you take His service upon you, Mark? will you acknowledge that citizenship?”

“I do not understand your meaning,” said Mark. “Tell me plainly what doth Sir John Oldcastle ask of me. I will not refuse even now to aid him in his extremity, provided I can do so lawfully. But I cannot forget that you, Jasper Graves, once before deceived me in Sir John’s name, and I give you plainly to understand that I will have nought to do with treason.”

“Treason! treason again,” exclaimed the Lollard. “What I seek of you is treason perhaps to an earthly King, but it is none to the King of Heaven, Whose

reign on earth Sir John,—his eyes being now fully open—seeketh to establish. Come with me to St. Albans, and bear your part in that blessed work. Few we are in number, but what reck of that? Is not the Lord on our side, and in His cause shall not one man chase a thousand? Come with me. We will snatch the staff of power from the hands of these men of blood and rapine, who do but profane it—we will strip these proud and carnal-minded Priests of the wealth they so misuse, and of the titles and offices whereby they work on men's fears. We will allow no sway to prevail in England but that of the saints, and chief among them shall be John Oldcastle, the chosen captain of the Lord."

"I understand you now well enough," answered Mark, "and answer plainly I will have nought to do with it. If Sir John hath so far forgotten what he once so plainly professed, and has turned open traitor, I may indeed grieve for him, but will not abet him. Nor will I believe that it can be right to break God's laws, though they may be broken in God's name. It were best for you to depart, Jasper. I will not betray you, though many might deem it my duty to do so. Begone, and if you are wise, withdraw your hand from the evil work you have taken on you."

"Farewell, false and feeble heart," exclaimed Graves, in a tone of the bitterest contempt. He was turning to depart, when Hugh, accompanied by Allden, and followed by Lettice, appeared on the scene.

"Ha, there is the traitor," cried Hugh. "He has not escaped as I had feared. Throw down your arms, Jasper, and yield yourself prisoner, or you die on the spot."

"Never," exclaimed the Lollard, drawing his sword, and standing on his defence. "Yield you rather, before the anger of the Lord overtake you. I speak in the name of Sir John Oldcastle."

"Deceive not yourself," said Allden, "your cause is hopelessly lost. We had marched but a few miles northwards, when tidings arrived from the royal Dukes, telling us that the Scots had fled back to their own land when they heard of their approach; and we were ordered to march eastward to seize Sir John Oldcastle, who was said to be at St. Albans with a numerous following."

"Aye," said Jasper, "with a following against which they will find it hopeless to strive!"

"Not so," continued Allden; "when we approached St. Albans, we found the whole rebel force slain, scattered, or prisoners. The arch traitor himself had fled again into Wales; but the tidings have this morning arrived that he hath been seized by the Lord Powis, and will be brought up to London, where he will speedily receive the just reward of his treasons."

"I will not believe it," exclaimed Jasper; "and even were I assured that it were true, I would not surrender myself your prisoner. I know what tender mercies I may expect at the hands of the butcher Bedford, and the apostate Chicheley, and will rather die sword in hand than undergo them."

"Then die in your treason," exclaimed Hugh, advancing on him. The Lollard resisted fiercely, his great strength enabled him to cope for awhile with both his antagonists; nor was it until he had inflicted

several severe wounds on his opponents, that he was at length struck down and slain.

"That is well," said Allden, as he contemplated the stern features of the Lollard, defiant even in death. "A bitter enemy he was to Church and King alike, nor would aught but death itself have restrained him. Mark, you did wisely to refuse his offers. Small mercy will be shewn to Sir John this time."

Allden's words were soon verified. Having taken shelter once more in the marches of Wales, Oldcastle was at once pursued by Sir Edward Charlton, a retainer of Lord Powis, with an armed force, and overtaken. Turning to bay he made a desperate resistance, and probably would not have surrendered, if a woman had not broken both his legs by a blow with a stool.

Being unable to ride, he was conveyed up to London in a horse-litter, and was carried before the Regent Bedford, by whom he was asked in the usual form, why the sentence already pronounced upon him should not be carried out. He answered in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." He then proceeded to set forth his own views, in behalf of which he had taken up arms,—adding, somewhat inconsistently, that it was the duty of rulers to forgive, and not to punish. The Duke of Bedford interposed at length, desiring him to answer directly to the question asked him; and Oldcastle then replied that he did not acknowledge the authority of the court before which he was arraigned, since his true liege lord, Richard II., was still alive in Scotland. This seems to have put

a stop to further consideration of his case, and he was ordered for immediate execution, — St. Giles's Fields being chosen as the fittest place for the carrying out of the sentence. It is also stated by some that as soon as his sentence was pronounced, he assured those present that it would be in vain that they put him to death, for that he would certainly rise again on the third day. But it may be doubted whether this is not a calumny, or at all events a misapprehension of his words.

It has been denied by more than one writer that Cobham was condemned for treason. Southey has even gone so far as to say that his indictment for treason is a forgery; but the records of Parliament directly contradict him. "Sir John Oldcastle of Cowl-*ing*," they state, "on Tuesday, December 13th, having been outlawed in the King's Bench, and excommunicated before the Archbishop of Canterbury for heresy, was brought before the Lords, and having heard his said convictions, answered not thereto in his excuse. Upon which record and process it was adjudged, that he should be taken *as a traitor to the King in the realm*; that he should be carried to the Tower of London, and from thence drawn through London unto the new gallows in St. Giles's without Temple-bar, and there be hanged, and burned hanging." Nor did any one ever doubt his treason, until the times of Bale and Fox.

Mark heard with a saddened heart of the approaching fate of his former patron and friend. A great many of the Bromlegh folk, in whose eyes Sir John Oldcastle

had been an object of interest for many years past, went up, on the cold December day which ushered in his execution, to behold the scene. They told on their return the melancholy history of that day,—how Sir John was led forth from the Tower, with his arms bound behind his back, but shewing a very cheerful countenance. He was placed upon a hurdle, as was ordinarily the case with traitors, and drawn through the city to St. Giles's Fields, which lay outside the city walls, and where a new gallows had been set up. When this spot was reached, he was taken from the hurdle, and is said straightway to have "fallen upon his knees" in prayer; though this statement seems inconsistent with the fact alleged by the same historians, that his legs had been broken a short while before. He is also said to have "stood up" and exhorted the people to make the Scriptures their rule of life, and beware of the false teachers, whose lives were contrary to the doctrine and example of Christ. We are further told, that the ecclesiastics present pronounced a curse upon him, and commanded the people not to pray for him, because he died in rebellion against Holy Church. But these statements are either not made at all by the historians of the times, or only by writers whose partisanship too evidently colours their narrative.

It is, however, certain that he underwent the dreadful fate allotted to him,—he was hung by the middle in chains from the gallows, and a fire was kindled under him, by which his body was burnt to ashes. All seem to be agreed also that he endured the agonies he underwent with resignation and courage.

"Husband," said Lettice, as they sat together on the bench in front of their cottage, on the evening after Hugh's return from London with the report of the Knight's last hours—"husband, methinks you lament too much over Sir John's death. If he once saved your life, he twice brought it into imminent peril, nor was it any fault of his that he did not so endanger it a third time."

"It is not the recollection of the kindness he did me that makes me sad," returned he.

"Nay, then what is it, Mark?" asked Hugh. "You cannot deny that he was a rebel to his King, a traitor to his country, and a despiser of his Church. His sentence was just, if ever man's sentence was."

"It may be, Hugh," said Mark; "I do not uphold what he did. But it grieves me, nevertheless, to see men tortured and killed for what is, after all, their honest belief. I am persuaded that never by such means will they be convinced of their errors; nay, that they will be only the more confirmed in them. I myself once held with poor Sir John, and if I ceased to follow him, it was not from any fear of the gallows or the stake. It was because I met with one, in the first instance, who, approving the Knight's opinions in many things, pointed out to me the mistake and danger of other parts of his belief; and afterwards, because I saw plainly for myself, how greatly his zeal was leading him astray."

"Would you then have heresy allowed to spread itself unchecked?" asked Lettice, surprised.

"Surely not," said Mark; "but it should be combated by wise argument and holy example, not by stern

threats and excommunications ; it should be overcome by patience and forbearance, not by sword and fire. Sir John himself was a faithful subject to his King, and was not at least an avowed rebel to the Church, until he was driven by merciless severity either to yield himself up as the very bondsman of the Archbishop, or openly reject his authority. The choice which he made, be sure, other Englishmen will make also. You may browbeat Frenchmen, or wear them out by imprisoning, and torturing, and burning them. You may wear *them* out, or Germans or Italians either, for anything I know. But Englishmen are not to be crushed after that fashion, I trow. You will only rouse them to more determined resistance. These Lollards, to my thought, will never be put down by force ; yea, rather, if this goes on, they who so use it, will be themselves put down."

Mark was only a humble craftsman, but a man, as the reader has seen, of intelligence beyond his age and calling. We need not to be told how fully his prediction has been accomplished, coinciding, as it did, so strangely with that of the Archbishop himself, though formed on different grounds. Chicheley's policy did indeed prevail for the present. The excitement of the French wars, and the stern measures he pursued without scruple or faltering, kept the evil in abeyance during his Primacy. In the next generation the wars of the Roses so entirely occupied men's thoughts, that the religious questions of the day attracted little attention. But in the generation after that, the smouldering fire burst forth with a fury all the greater for having been so long kept under. That which might have been a mild and bene-

ficent reform, became a sweeping revolution ; and though the Church came out of her fiery trial with her faith, in the main, unimpaired, she nevertheless lost much which she has never regained—much, it is to be feared, which she will never regain hereafter.

THE WHITE ROSE OF LYNDEN.



"It is only a gentleman who has been hurt."—(p. 302.)

THE WHITE ROSE OF LYNDEN,
OR
THE MONKS AND THE BIBLE:
A
TALE OF THE TIMES OF RICHARD III.

The White Rose of Lynden, or The Monks and the Bible.

CHAPTER I.

IN the latter part of the fifteenth century the road between the towns of Abingdon and Oxford was singularly picturesque. Bagley Wood, wilder in those days, more extensive, and abounding in large game, which has now disappeared, covered the whole of the high land between Radley and Hinksey: and when the turn in the road was reached where the broad valley of the Thames opened on the view, and "Oxford with its crown of towers" rose amid its environing woods and waters, it never failed to enchant the eye of the spectator. It was, in truth, no way inferior to the landscape of the present day. If some of the finer architectural gems of the scene, as it now exists, were wanting—if the stately splendours of Christ Church, the dome of the Radcliffe, and, above all, the glorious tower of Wolsey, had not then sprung into being—yet there were striking objects which have now disappeared. There was Oseney Abbey, for instance, with its massy walls and triple-storied tower, and in the distance behind it the splendid Convent of Godstowe. Nor was the prospect deformed by the hideous suburbs, which have been the growth mainly of the last half century. The ancient

city walls, with their flanking towers and Gothic gateways, surrounded it on every side—a fitting frame for so goodly a picture; the quaint old houses, with their peaked gables and mullioned windows, grouping harmoniously with the more pretentious buildings at their side.

It was the afternoon of a spring day in the year 1485, when a party, consisting of four horsemen, drew rein at the spot above described. Two were youths, of perhaps twenty years of age, wearing the riding-suits of men of rank; the other two serving-men—all well mounted and armed. The condition of the horses and accoutrements shewed that the travellers had ridden a considerable distance that morning.

“Here, then, we take leave of you, John Truby,” said one of the youths; “you will return to Newbury with what speed you may, and inform my father, Sir Marmaduke, that we have accomplished our journey in safety. Lance will accompany us into Oxford, and tarry till he can carry back the Principal’s answer. Fare well, worthy John; bear my humble duty to my father, and my sister, when you see her.”

“Hold me also remembered to the ‘White Rose of Lynden,’ good John,” added the other youth; “say we hope to behold her again ere the barley yellows.”

The man addressed as John Truby, a stout soldierly fellow, whose face bore traces of more than one wound, souvenirs, it might be, of the battle-fields of Towton or Tewkesbury, made no reply to this speech; but saluting his young master reverentially, and the other gentleman more slightly, he wheeled his horse short round, and rode off.

"Why, how now, Cuthbert?" said the youth who had first spoken. "Said either of us aught to anger old John, that he cuts so short his adieux?"

"Nought that I know of, Antony," returned Cuthbert with a laugh; "unless my mention of your sister as the 'White Rose' displeased him. He is so zealous a Yorkist, that he has never forgiven our family for having taken what he accounts the wrong side, some twenty years since. I much fear he deems a Lancastrian traitor like me all unworthy of—"

"Peace, Bredon," interposed Antony, in a tone of displeasure, "that is but an ill jest. You are, I trust, no Lancastrian. Were you indeed one—"

"Nay," said Cuthbert, breaking in in his turn, though in a good-humoured tone. "You take this matter too gravely, Antony. True, your father and mine fought on opposite sides some twenty years ago—for all I know, they may have crossed swords in actual battle. But half England was arrayed then against the other half, and neighbours were everywhere engaged in cutting each other's throats. But all that has passed away, aye, before you and I had well learned our Paternosters and Aves. I am assured you do not wish to revive it."

"I desire nothing less," said Hemynge; "but your party—"

"Our party came by the worst of it," resumed Bredon. "My grandfather was killed by Warwick's side at Barnet, and my father had to surrender to King Richard—he was Duke of Gloucester then—at Tewkesbury, or he would have been knocked on the head too. All honour to his memory! He was fain to take Edward of York

for his King, seeing that there remained no one to contest the crown with him."

"He did wisely," said Antony; "and you will do well methinks to follow his example, and forego the name of a Lancastrian."

"I do not understand you," rejoined Cuthbert. "Since the day of Tewkesbury field, there has been peace in England."

"Yea, but peace may be broken," said Hemynge; "and much I fear me, it will. There be ill rumours abroad. It is openly declared that the bastard, Henry Tudor—"

It was now Bredon's turn to exhibit emotion.

"Hold, Hemynge," he cried; "I permit not this. I have no wish to see civil war rekindled in this realm, unless men should be driven to it by intolerable wrong. But I will not suffer the honoured head of the princely House of Lancaster to be so unworthily described—"

"I was wrong," said Hemynge, recovering himself; "pray you—"

"I tell you," continued Cuthbert, in the heat of his anger paying no heed to Antony's remark, "I tell you the Earl of Richmond is no bastard. More. Were he indeed to appear in arms, and claim his right—"

"Do not complete your sentence," broke in Antony. "Too much has been said already, and the fault has, in the main, been mine. We will hope that peace may not be broken,—in any case, that we may never be arrayed in battle against one another."

"It is a bargain," said Bredon, frankly extending his hand, which the other warmly grasped. "But it is time,

methinks," he added, "that we made our way homeward, or the city gates may be closed, and we be called upon to give an account of our delay."

They began the descent accordingly, having paused for one moment, almost involuntarily, to take another look at the scene beneath them. From the height at which they were standing, Oxford was spread out like a map before them, the crosses and steeples of the various convents and churches crowding together in picturesque confusion. Quite on the further side, beyond the Bocardo Gate, they could distinguish, on the one hand, the outline of Balliol College, associated in all Oxford men's minds with the great theologian, whose doctrines were every year gaining a greater hold on men's thoughts. On the other lay the remains of the Beaumont Palace, more recently a Carmelite convent, with the wide playing-fields immediately adjoining, where the students were wont to divert themselves with archery and football. It was now almost deserted—a circumstance which caused the young men some surprise, as the afternoon was the usual time for these recreations, and there still remained a good half-hour, at the least, before the closing of the gates.

They had no time, however, to speculate on the subject, being anxious to reach the shelter of their Hall in time for supper. They began the descent, therefore, making their way with difficulty along the road through the Hinksey meadows, which, like the meadows themselves, was almost one continuous swamp. The river's bank, in fact, could only be reached by

passing along a long causeway of forty arches. At the end of this the Thames was crossed by an ancient bridge, occupying the same site as the present Folly Bridge. Here stood the tower traditionally known as that of Friar Bacon, forming part of a Franciscan convent, built on the edge of the Oxfordshire shore. Crossing the bridge, they proceeded along the narrow road crowded with hostels and almshouses, to the South Gate of the city, which stood a little below the walls of St. Frideswide's convent. Having passed through without challenge, they alighted from their horses, and gave them into Lance's charge; after which they proceeded up St. Aldate's on foot, intending to turn down the narrow alley now known as Bear-lane; which would bring them, in a few minutes, to Peckwater Hall, to which they both belonged.

But at this point their progress was interrupted. Sounds were audible, which told plainly enough to their experienced ears that a disturbance of some kind was in progress,—probably a fracas between the students and citizens. The bell of St. Martin's Church was heard ringing loudly, and was presently answered by the deeper notes of St. Mary's. From the narrow lanes intervening between the High-street and St. Frideswide's shouts and screams came in quick succession, intermingled with the clash of weapons.

A riot had indeed broken out, which threatened to become serious. In one of the taverns in School-street,—the ordinary resort, not only of the more dissipated among the students, but of certain roysterers belonging to the

town also,—a quarrel had taken place about half-an-hour previously, which had gradually increased in violence, until it reached its present dimensions.

Half-a-dozen students, belonging principally to Queen Philippa's College, had been discoursing freely over their sack on the topics of the day, and had forgotten the presence in the tavern of any but their own party. The conversation had turned chiefly on the marriage, which King Richard, then recently a widower, was currently believed to be contemplating with his niece, Elizabeth of York. The subject, it will readily be believed, was not handled with any great amount of delicacy or respect. On a sudden the gownsmen were startled by the appearance of Ralph Lambert, a ruffling young mercer of the High-street, who, followed by several others, strode up to the table round which the young men were seated, struck his fist upon it, and swore he would not suffer the Royalty of England to be so defamed in his presence.

His words seemed to be addressed to Norman Wulford, a tall, dark, and powerfully-built youth, notorious for his reckless daring. He sprang instantly up, and retorted the citizen's challenge with at least equal acrimony.

"If our conversation likes you not, flatcap," he said, "you can leave the room; and you will do well to do so, or you may come by a broken head."

"Leave the room! not we, in faith," cried another of the citizens, a butcher by trade, as the pole-axe in his hand denoted; "rather is it for you to leave it. 'Broken head' said you? There may be worse damage in

store for you than broken heads, if you depart not speedily."

"Begone, knave," shouted Simon Langham, a portionist of Merton, who was WOLFORD'S bosom friend, "or I will fell you like one of your own oxen."

He seized his cudgel and aimed a blow at the butcher, which the latter parried with some difficulty. The fray now became general, and at first much to the detriment of the gownsmen, who were cooped in one corner of the room, and closely pressed by superior numbers.

"Make for the door, Langham," shouted WOLFORD. "They are too many for us here, but we shall find plenty to help us outside."

He made a rush, seconded by Langham and the others, dashed aside or overturned his immediate assailants, and succeeded in forcing his way into the street. Once outside, the case of the students was greatly bettered. Several gownsmen, who had issued a few minutes before from the gateway of Magdalen College, caught sight of the fray, and rushed up to the rescue. Tidings of what was passing soon circulated through the adjoining colleges and hostels, and presently such large numbers had joined WOLFORD and his friends, that the town were forced to beat a retreat. Then the bell of St. Martin's, Carfax, was rung, drawing forth a swarm of apprentices and shopmen, before whom the University men in their turn began to give way. They were gradually forced backwards into the narrow passages, which led from the upper parts of the High-street to St. Frideswide's, continuing to retreat before the press of numbers, until

they finally issued, as the reader has heard, into the broad thoroughfare of St. Aldate's.

"There is a row with the townsmen, Antony," said Cuthbert, as his ear caught the sound of the encounter; "and the flatcaps seem to be mustering in great force. How say you, shall we make for Peckwater Hall, or take a turn at what is going on?"

"It were best we betook ourselves to our lodging," answered Hemyng. "We have our swords with us, and were the Proctors to see us using them, we might be heavily fined, or, it may be, worse dealt with."

"They could not fine us," said Cuthbert, "we are returning from a distant journey, on which occasions it is lawful to carry cold steel."

"True," said Antony, "yet not into a fray, unless we should be ourselves attacked; which, of course, would be a different matter."

"I suppose you are right," said Cuthbert reluctantly; "yet it seems sore pity not to use our rapiers when we chance to have them; and these rascal townsmen are craving to be let blood. But your advice is good. We will turn down yonder lane, and so straight home."

He had hardly spoken, when the rush already described took place. The crowd of students poured into St. Aldate's, driven by twice the number of citizens, and making vain efforts to retaliate on their opponents the blows so liberally bestowed on them.

"Ha, Antony," again shouted Bredon, "we must take some order with these rascals, or our friends, if not ourselves, will be roughly handled. See where Colet of Magdalen is set upon by two huge fellows with

clubs; and by St. Cuthbert, yonder lad—he is scarce fourteen, I judge—will be murdered outright by that lurdane with the pole-axe! Let us draw, and strike in! Do you help Colet, while I handle the fellow from the slaughter-house!”

Antony complied readily enough now. He unsheathed his rapier, and attacked one of Colet's assailants, no other than Ralph Lambert, the prime mover of the fray,—while Cuthbert engaged the townsman with the pole-axe. The citizens now found that they had more formidable opponents to deal with, the young men being notably skilful in the use of their weapons. Antony's antagonist received a cut on the head, which laid him prostrate in the dust, while the butcher was run through the shoulder, and dropping his pole-axe, betook himself to flight, before worse came of it. The discomfiture of the foremost champions of the town-party caused an immediate change in the aspect of affairs. The mob first abated somewhat of their forwardness, and then began to retreat. The tide of fight rolled down Bear-lane, until the corner of Oriel College was reached. Here Antony would have withdrawn from the *melée*, and endeavoured to persuade Colet and his friend to accompany him to his rooms, until the streets were again quiet. But the blood of the students, and more particularly of Bredon, had been heated by the encounter; they could not forbear following up their advantage. They pressed closely on their adversaries, driving them along under the walls of Oriel, and the venerable tower of Merton—venerable even then—until the citizens were compelled to fly,

with what speed they might, through an open postern in the city wall, into the broken ground, overgrown with underwood and beset by marshes, which ran down to the junction of the Isis and the Cherwell.

The students now paused. It would not be safe to pursue the fugitives into their place of retreat, especially as the evening was fast closing in. They sheathed their weapons, and were on the point of taking leave of one another with mutual thanks and congratulations, when they were startled by a fresh outburst of uproar, and a mob of citizens came surging round the corner of Oriel-street. It was ascertained afterwards, that when Master Lambert, the man wounded by Antony, had been carried home bleeding and insensible, the indignation of the neighbours was roused to such an extent, that the whole street poured out, armed with sword and battle-axe, to avenge the outrage. Their numbers were too great to allow of resistance being offered; and it was doubtful whether, in their present frame of mind, they would spare the lives of any among their opponents, should they offer to surrender.

Antony and Cuthbert cast a hurried look round them, to ascertain whether it would be possible for them to slip out through the same postern by which their recent antagonists had escaped. But to do this, they must have gained the corner of the lane leading to the river, and between it and them the great mass of the enemy intervened.

“Come with me,” cried Colet. “The East Gate is still open, and we can get shelter within the walls

of Magdalen, where the mob will not venture to follow us."

There was no time for deliberation. Even while Colet was speaking there came a fresh rush of townsmen down the narrow alley, now known as Logic-lane, threatening them in a fresh quarter. Without further parley they took to their heels, hurrying past the ancient Hall of Robert de Albano, into the High-street, and being fortunate enough to find the East Gate still standing open, they streamed tumultuously out into the open ground under the city walls.

"Follow me," cried Colet. "These fellows are close at our heels; it will not do to enter by the college gate." He hurried along the roadway which ran between the walls of Magdalen on the one side, and the Jews' cemetery on the other, until he reached the edge of the Cherwell. Scrambling along the shallow bank, which lay under the windows of the college kitchen, he presently reached a point where the wall was low enough to be scaled, and climbed up, followed by his companions. In a few minutes more the party were safely sheltered in his rooms, which were situated in what is now called the kitchen staircase. They were small, but had the advantage of being appropriated to only one occupant.

"I have to thank you, Sir," said the young lad, of whom mention has been made a few pages back, addressing Bredon,— "I have to thank you, Master Bredon, so I hear you are called, for your rescue of me from the clutch of Mark Wollaton, the butcher of the Turl, who, report says, thirsts for the blood of us

students: good wot, he was well-nigh having mine! But, thanks to your good sword, he will not wield that pole-axe of his for many a day yet to come!"

"Aye, Wolsey," said Colet, "I saw your strait; and would have helped you, but that my own at the moment was as bad as yours. That reminds me that I have not yet rendered my own acknowledgments to my deliverer. But how is this? He is not here, is he?"

"No," answered Cuthbert, glancing round the room, "but I know not what can have become of him. Saw you aught of him, Woford?" he continued, turning to the late ringleader of the riot.

"I can tell you nothing about him," answered Woford shortly.

"Ah, but I can," said Wolsey. "Hemynge, of Peckwater Hall, was with us until the townsmen made the rush down Logic-lane. He would have accompanied us hither, but that he stumbled over a stone, or was struck down by one of the mob—"

"And has fallen into their hands!" exclaimed Bredon, starting up; "this must not be. We must forth to his rescue."

He caught up his hat, and was hurrying to the door, followed by Colet and others, when Wolsey interposed.

"Tarry, I pray you," he said; "I saw all that passed. I was about to tell you that Master Hemynge, though somewhat hurt apparently by his fall, and unable to follow us, was not made prisoner by the town. I saw him pass through a doorway into one of the adjoining houses, where he is doubtless now in safety."

"If that be so," said Colet, "it would be folly for us

to venture forth in the present condition of the streets. Doubtless we were in no way to blame for the riot. But the Proctors have been unusually severe of late; and if it could be proved that we had seriously hurt any of the townsmen, we might be fined as much as a shilling for it."

"Aye, or even two shillings, if the wound was a dangerous one," said Langham; "Gilbert Onslow had to pay that for breaking a waggoner's head the week before last, 'though it was proved that the lurdane would not move out of the way when he was ordered."

"Well, anyway, all of us had better remain here for the next hour or two, until the town is again quiet. Then Wolford and Langham can slip through the meadows, climb the wall into Holywell, and so gain the back doors of the Queen's and Merton Colleges."

Those who are acquainted with the Oxford of the present day only, and the petty broils between town and gown, which the annual recurrence of the Fifth of November, or, possibly, a contested election may provoke, can form a very imperfect idea of the Academic outbreaks of the Middle Ages. These, indeed, were not limited to contests between gownsmen and citizens. We read of encounters of students of Law with students of Medicine; of Welshmen with Irishmen and Scotchmen; of Northerners and Southerners, fully as bitter as those of their American descendants in the present generation. Frequent reference is made to these in the statutes drawn up for the regulation of colleges by their founders. Waynflete, somewhat past the middle of the fifteenth century, deprecates the heart-burnings of

these rival factions, in language, the earnestness of which proves the intensity of the evil so engendered.

It should be borne in mind, too, that Oxford contained at that time a great many more scholars, in proportion to the number of the citizens, than is now the case. Rejecting the exaggerated statements which have been made on this subject, we shall still find, that there were at one time as many as eighty Halls or Hostels, for the reception of students, as well as numerous schools attached to the larger convents. Previously to the foundation of the grammar-schools all over the country by Edward VI., Oxford was the almost universal place of education for the sons of the farmers and tradesmen. It is probable that it contained almost as many junior members then, as it does now ; whereas the total of the citizens bore no proportion to that which it now presents. But for the accession of strength, which the latter could count on in an emergency, from the neighbouring villages, they would have been quite unable to cope with their antagonists.

During such lawless periods as those of the Wars of the Barons, and the Roses, these frays reached a height unknown in quieter times. They were fought, we are told, with swords, daggers, and battle-axes : for though the gownsmen were strictly prohibited from carrying arms within the city bounds, they were allowed to keep them in their rooms, of which they generally formed the chief decoration. When the gown party was in any danger, the young men were permitted, required indeed, to bring them out. The bloodshed was often very serious. We read of six priests and students killed,

and twelve wounded, on one occasion, and of fourteen Halls gutted and burned; at another time so many lives were lost, that the town was laid under an interdict by the Bishop of Lincoln; and on two others, the students suffered so severely, that they migrated in a body to Northampton and Stamford.

Towards the close of the fifteenth century, the unsettled state of parties naturally caused riotous outbreaks in Oxford, as elsewhere. The recent disturbance closely resembled a great many others occurring near about the same time; and when the authorities proceeded to hold an inquiry respecting its origin, they judged it wiser to meddle as little as possible with a topic so dangerous. Wulford therefore escaped, not only unpunished, but even uncensured. Respecting the young man in question, it will be proper here to add a few words.

He was the son of a Lancastrian gentleman, nearly related to the Hemynges of Lynden; but there had been a family quarrel, and friendly intercourse had ceased for many years between the houses. Reginald Wulford had been killed, by his leader's side, at Towton. The forfeiture of his estates followed, and when young Norman grew up, he learned that his only hope of regaining the position to which he had been born lay in the restoration of the House of Lancaster. Sir Marmaduke Hemyng, when applied to, had sternly refused to assist or countenance the son of a man, whom he regarded as a double-dyed traitor and rebel. Wulford deeply resented the rebuff, and it greatly quickened his zeal in behalf of the exiled family, to remember

that, should the Hemynges in their turn be attainted as traitors, he would be the next heir of the forfeited estates. Bold, crafty, and unscrupulous, he plunged deeply into the intrigues in progress for the transference of the Crown of England to the young Earl of Richmond; and at the date at which this tale opens, was recognised by Pembroke and Morton as one of their most zealous agents among the young men of the University. He was in general as cautious as he was daring, and the imprudence which had led to the disturbance in the present instance, formed a rare exception to his ordinary demeanour.

CHAPTER II.

MEANWHILE, Antony Hemynge had in truth escaped from his pursuers, though not quite so easily as his friends had supposed. He had been severely hurt by his fall, and would have been unable to offer any resistance to his enemies, or escape their fury, if a door in the wall close by had not at that moment been opened, and a man invited him to enter. Clinging to the arm of his newly-found friend, Hemynge contrived to raise himself, and limp through the archway; after which the door was instantly slammed to, and barred in the faces of the townsmen. The latter were not disposed to acquiesce in the escape of the enemy, but began to hammer with the pommels of their swords on the oaken panels, demanding with loud cries that Antony should be delivered up to them. They continued these

demonstrations for fully a quarter-of-an-hour, but without any result. The wall was thick, and built of stone, the archway narrow, and the door solid oak, studded with nails; without sledge-hammers it would be difficult to force it. The rioters presently grew weary of the attempt, and followed their comrades.

Meanwhile, Antony's deliverer invited him to enter his house. "I fear you are a good deal hurt, Sir," he said; "our house is but a poor one, but it is quite at your service." As he spoke he assisted the student to cross a paved court, surrounded by several solidly-built but very ancient houses; and opening a low-browed door, asked him into a small apartment. A young woman, who was engaged apparently in cooking the evening meal, rose in some surprise at the sight of the stranger.

"It is only a gentleman, who has been hurt in a fray, and needs your help," said the man, responding to her look. "You had better examine his wound. Sit down here, Sir, and let us strip off your hose; my sister Ruth has some skill in surgery."

Ruth complied, and laying bare the wound, pronounced it to be nothing worse than a contusion, which a few days' rest would set right. She had just risen from her task, when the clang of blows and the shouts of the mob were heard outside, louder than before.

"They will break in the door," exclaimed Ruth, "and perhaps slay you in their fury. You had better come in hither." She touched a spring, apparently in the wood-work, and one of the panels starting forwards, dis-

closed a chamber of about the same dimensions as that to which Antony had already been introduced. Her brother looked for a moment somewhat doubtfully at her; but his feeling soon changed.

"You are right, Ruth," he said. "The gentleman, I am assured, will not betray us; and in any case it is our duty to succour him. Go in, Sir; I will remain here, and should they break in, they will think you have made your escape into the town."

Antony obeyed his host's directions in silence. He seated himself in one of the solid beechwood chairs with which the inner room was garnished, and looked curiously round him. The appearance of the apartment in which he now found himself, as well as of the brother and sister, puzzled him. They were plainly dressed, the material of their clothes shewing beyond question that they belonged to a humble grade of society. But there was an intelligence and refinement in their movements and *ensemble*, which seemed not to consist with this. Ruth, in particular, wore her mean attire with the grace of a countess, and her lovely face had a thoughtful expression, which enhanced its beauty. The furniture of the room, too, was different from what might have been expected. The whole space between the two narrow windows, which looked out into a small court surrounded by high walls, was occupied by an oaken bookcase, not resembling the bookcases of the present day, but more like a large open cabinet. In its various compartments were arranged a number of manuscript books, of different sizes. These were rare articles even in the houses of

the wealthy, and far beyond the means of any one occupying so humble a lodging, as that in which Antony now found himself. He took up one of the thinner volumes which lay within his reach. It was the Gospel according to St. John, rendered into the vernacular by John Wycliffe, Rector of Lutterworth in the county of Leicester. A look of surprise, mingled with some embarrassment, came over his face; and the girl, who had been carefully watching its expression, exclaimed hastily, "You will not betray my brother. He does wrong to none! But you will not," she added a moment afterwards, "I feel assured of that!"

"You may indeed feel so assured," returned Hemynge, kindly; "I betray no man's secret, least of all one which I had discovered under circumstances like these. Your brother is one of those, then, who are employed in disseminating copies of the Scriptures in our English tongue throughout the land, notwithstanding that the rulers of the Church have straitly forbidden it, and under sharp penalties?"

"He is," she answered, "and I help him in the work."

"Indeed, and how?" inquired her visitor, with increased interest.

"By assisting in transcribing the copies which you see here, and which he carries about the country for sale. There are many besides me, in this city, who so employ a large portion of their time. This room, small as it is, contains sometimes eight or ten copyists. Thanks to the secret of its construction, we can work in safety, in spite of the utmost vigilance of our enemies."

“And is this your handwriting?” asked Hemynge, taking up an unfinished manuscript which lay on a desk. “I protest, Father Vyner, whose skill in penmanship has ever been my admiration, could produce nothing so clear and legible as this! It is an accomplishment which few, I think, —” he paused in some embarrassment, hardly knowing how to finish his sentence.

“Which few in my station in life possess, you would say,” added Ruth, calmly. “Aye, but we were not born to our present position. My father was a rich citizen of London, who had himself received a clerkly education. He caused my brother also to be carefully taught, sparing no cost.”

“And what befel your father?” inquired Antony, who was growing interested in his companion’s disclosures.

“Martyrdom for the faith,” answered the girl, firmly; “the same death that one day awaits me. He was accused, before the Bishop of London, of questioning the power of the Pope to grant indulgence for sin. He was condemned, and refusing to retract, was burnt at Smithfield. All his goods were forfeited to the Crown. I was then a babe in arms. My brother brought me up, and taught me himself. You see he did not labour in vain.”

“There is indeed a goodly supply,” remarked Antony, glancing at the well-filled shelves, “enough, as I opine, to supply your trade for many a month to come.”

“You are mistaken, Sir,” said Ruth; “John returned only yesterday, and he will set forth the day after to-

morrow with all these copies you behold here, which have been transcribed during his absence. Ere long I shall expect to welcome him back with an empty wallet, and he will carry forth a fresh supply."

"But the cost," remonstrated Antony. "There cannot be many, except among well-to-do persons, who are able to purchase such expensive wares. Nay, to the great mass of the people they would be wholly useless, even if their means allowed of their buying them, seeing that they are—nearly all of them—unable to read."

"You mistake again," returned the maiden, "our customers are almost entirely the poor,—farm-labourers, and cottagers, and journeymen, and small tradesmen. They will hoard up their money, denying themselves all but bare food and clothing, to buy a single book—one of the Gospels, perhaps, or an Epistle of St. Paul. If they cannot get together enough to purchase one of these, they will buy a few chapters. I have known a load of hay bartered for half-a-dozen pages of the Holy Book; or some treasure parted with that has been long in their possession, such as a broadsword or a silver flagon, and they who make the bargain are well contented with it."

"And as for the inability to read," resumed Ruth, "they will take such pains, that you would scarce credit it, to learn somewhat of the accomplishment, that they may not only study the Scriptures themselves, but read them aloud to their kinsfolk and acquaintance. Sometimes one of a family will give up all his spare hours for the purpose. Oftentimes neighbours meet together under cover of night, and the best scholar present will be the reader, while the others sit round and listen!"

"It is strange," said Hemynge, "yet it tallies with some things I have heard already. But a stranger thing than all to my mind, Mistress Ruth, is that you should have escaped notice in this city, where there are so many—and they armed with power to do you hurt—who would account your occupation to be as pernicious as that of Satan himself!"

"We have not been resident very long in Oxford," said Ruth, "and the secret of this room has been carefully kept. But I fear we have not escaped notice, as you assume. In my brother's absence I keep within doors as much as possible, and my friends rarely come hither, except at times when the streets are deserted. But I have been visited nevertheless several times by the monks, and especially by Father Oswell."

"Ha, Oswell!" interposed Antony, "a Benedictine is he not?"

"Yes, a Benedictine. I have never been employed on anything but household work on the occasions of his visits, and the outer room contains nothing which could give any hint of our employment. Yet he is full of suspicion, and ever questions me more and more sharply as to my attendance at confession and Mass."

"Father Oswell," muttered Antony to himself. The name was well known to him, as that of a monk generally believed to be deeply involved in the political intrigues notoriously carried on all over England at that time; credited also with a licentiousness of morals, more prevalent, it would appear, among the clergy of that age, than at any other period of history.

"Father Oswell," he repeated aloud, "he is indeed

a visitor of ill omen to you and yours. He is unscrupulous, crafty, and merciless. His character, too, as regards your sex—I shame to speak it—”

“There is no need,” said Ruth, bursting into tears; “alas, I know it too well already. He is a wicked and shameless man! I have vowed that, let what would be the consequence, I would never be alone with him again.”

She left the room in great agitation. A few moments afterwards Antony followed her into the outer chamber, where he found John Hettley alone, engaged in balancing his accounts. His sister, he said, had retired to her own apartment.

“It is well,” said Hemynge, “for I have a few words, Master Hettley, to say to you, which it were not well that your sister should hear. I know somewhat of this Father Oswell, of whom she has been speaking to me, and I know she does well to shun him. Many a maiden has he brought to ruin, to the shame of Holy Church and the scandal of all Christian men. But he is crafty and plausible, and moreover has influence with those who are able and willing to shield him. He cannot be conciliated by honourable means, and it would be unwise to defy him. Her best hope of safety lies in flight.”

“That is my own mind,” said Hettley; “but how or whither is she to fly? A jealous watch, I know only too well, is kept over our movements, and were Ruth to leave Oxford, she would in all likelihood be followed and arrested on some pretext, which is easily enough found, and then she would fall wholly into Father Oswell’s power.”

"I can secure you against that," said Antony. "My sister would receive her at Lynden, where none would venture to molest her. It chanced fortunately that my servant, Ambrose Lance, is on the point of returning thither, and could take her with him. He is a staid elderly man, a stout soldier to boot. She would be safe under his escort."

"She would indeed, Master Hemynge, and I thank you heartily for the offer. I have been a stranger to you until to-day; but in the course of my rounds I have heard much of you and of your father, and I know you both as high-minded and noble gentlemen. It rejoiced me to render you what poor service I could to-day. Report also represents you as unwilling to persecute poor men for the honest convictions they may hold."

"Report does us no more than justice there," said Antony. "I should tell you also that our family confessor, Father Vyner, is a mild Christian man, who will bring none into trouble, who do not grievously offend."

"That will not my sister," remarked Hettley, "I will answer for it."

"The matter, then, is settled," said Antony, moving to the door. "I will send Ambrose to you after dusk to-morrow, to arrange the time of your sister's departure."

They parted, and Hemynge returned to his lodging, through the streets, which had now regained their usual tranquillity. The hurt he had received was severe enough to confine him to his room for several days, and he had no opportunity of seeing Ruth again before she quitted

Oxford for Lynden. But he had other alleviations of his solitude. Colet and Wolsey visited him on the day following that of the riot, to render their thanks for his intervention on their behalf, and inquire after his hurt. Antony conceived a liking for the first-named of the youths. Colet's grave manners and thoughtful turn of mind were the qualities most likely to attract Hemynge's regard, and the latter was also able to appreciate the young man's rare ability. Antony was also much struck with Wolsey, whose brilliant talents, young as he was, were already the talk of the University. Both the Magdalen men, on their side, were equally pleased with Antony, the young bachelor probably seeing in him a man of rank and influence, likely to rise higher in the world, and so be able to abet him in the ambitious designs he was already cherishing. Before the end of the term the three had become fast friends.

Wolford too, after careful thought, had judged it wise to seize the opportunity of making Hemynge's acquaintance, or rather of renewing the intimacy which had once subsisted between their families. He had many reasons for desiring this; but in spite of his undoubted relationship, and his persevering efforts, he could not succeed in making himself acceptable to the young heir of Lynden. Antony knew somewhat of the reputation which Wolford bore in the University, and that was none of the most creditable. He knew, too, that Wolford was an intimate friend of the Benedictine Oswell, for whom Antony now entertained a more than ordinary disgust. Though perfectly courteous, therefore, in his reception of the young Queen's man,

he persistently avoided closer intimacy—a circumstance which the other was quick to perceive, and resented with all the passionate pride of his character. But Norman Wolford was not a man to abandon his purposes, because difficulties interposed themselves in the way of their accomplishment. If he could not win Hemynge over to his side, he would carry out his designs without his help, and the man who had repelled him should then assuredly pay the penalty of his offence.

The reader has already learned that Wolford was deeply interested in the scheme, now fast maturing, for the attempt of Henry of Richmond on the throne of England. He and Father Oswell were, in fact, the two principal agents of the conspiracy in the city of Oxford, having been commissioned by Morton, Bishop of Ely, to secure as many adherents as possible among young men of rank and family. The worthy pair had been labouring secretly for several months, and with extraordinary success. Among other youths who had lately been won over to the cause, was Cuthbert Bredon, whose hereditary aversion to the House of York was easily rekindled, by the recital of Richard's treacherous and murderous deeds.

As the spring passed into summer Henry's party strengthened rapidly. But Oswell and Wolford were nevertheless obliged to proceed with the utmost caution. Richard was still King of England, and had moreover many devoted partisans. Any open demonstration in favour of Henry Tudor, would have been followed by the instant arrest, and probably the in-

stant execution, of those who made it. It was nearly the end of June, when news was privately received by Oswell that the young Earl's plans were now ripe for execution. He had raised an army of three thousand men, and his fleet was lying off the coast of Normandy, ready to convey them to England. Almost immediately afterwards, a Royal Proclamation was issued by Richard, calling on the people to flock to his standard and repel the invasion of his rights, which was about to be attempted. Orders were issued at the same time to arrest all suspected persons, and detain them, until they could clear themselves of the imputation of disloyalty.

"We must tarry no longer in Oxford," said Oswell. "The Mayor is no Yorkist, or we should not have been left thus long unmolested. But he is one who will run no risk of getting into trouble himself, and he would be sure to do so, were he to take no step against us now."

"You are right," said Woford, who in company with the Benedictine, Langham, and one or two others, had heard the proclamation. "His attention hath been already directed to us more than once, and he has paid no heed to the applicant. He will act differently now; we had better to horse and away, with what speed we can. For my part I have long been prepared for this, and so, I doubt not, have most of us. Will you accompany me, Bredon? I have a horse at your service, if you need it."

"I thank you," answered Bredon, "but I shall not need your horse. My own, and that of my servant,

are in good order for the road. But I agree with you as to the expediency of a speedy departure. When do you propose to set out?"

"My proposal is that we meet under Cumnor Hirst in two hours from the present time. We had better proceed thither by different routes, or we may attract attention."

"That will suit well enough," returned Bredon. "I will but order my servant to get things in readiness, and take leave of Hemynge, of whom I have seen too little of late. Then I will straightway join you."

"Take leave of Hemynge," repeated Oswald doubtfully; "are you well advised to do that? Rather, I think, does your late avoidance of him argue wisdom. He is a bitter Yorkist, and will probably deem it his duty, in the present crisis, to arrest any one whom he accounts Richard's enemy. You smile, Master Bredon, at the word 'arrest,' I see. Doubtless you are his match in a single combat, and it may be more than that. But as matters now stand—"

"It was not that at which I smiled," said Cuthbert. "Rather that you should so mistake Antony Hemynge, as to believe that he is capable of betraying to his hurt, and it may be to his death, an old playmate, who came in friendly fashion to visit him!"

"Believe me you are in error," rejoined Oswald; "he is one who accounts loyalty the first of all duties, to which the ties of friendship, nay, to which the ties even of blood should be sacrificed. I and others have heard him say as much."

Cuthbert was about to repeat his asseveration, when

suddenly the recollection of Antony's angry remonstrance on the day of their return to Oxford recurred to his memory, and he was silent.

Oswell noted Bredon's hesitation, and pressed his advantage. He had his own reasons for wishing to keep Hemynge and Bredon apart. "What was his speech that day in Colet's room?" he asked, turning to Wolford. "No one who was a traitor to Richard should be his companion at board, or in his rides or walks, or—in sooth, I forget what. But you heard his words, and may remember them."

"I remember them right well," said Wolford, "and so, I doubt not, does Simon. He was speaking of Bredon himself here, whose name some one had mentioned as a former partisan of the House of Lancaster. His speech was, that no one should be a companion of his journey, or a guest at his board, or a suitor for his sister's hand—"

"Ha!" interposed Bredon. "Hemynge said that, and of me?"

"Yes, he certainly said it," observed Langham; "for I remember it was the first time that I became aware Master Hemynge had a sister. But he probably spoke in haste, and meant nothing."

"No, of course not," rejoined Cuthbert, recovering himself. "But if he be so angrily disposed, it were better we did not meet for the present. Well, I will ride forth then without delay, and meet you at Cunnor Hirst, as you propose."

The reader will scarcely need to be reminded of the events which came with startling rapidity in the months

of July and August. On the 23rd of the former month Henry landed at Milford Haven, and marched through North Wales, towards the centre of England. The Oxford party had joined his standard in Pembrokeshire; but for a long time the issue of the enterprise appeared so doubtful, that some of them half-repented the step they had taken in embarking in it. When the two armies came in sight of one another, that of Richard was greatly the more numerous; and his well-known courage and military talents rendered him, irrespectively of numbers, a formidable antagonist. But there was treachery in his camp. The most influential of his supporters were secretly adverse to him. Desertion and lukewarmness on the one side, devotion and enthusiasm on the other, had determined the issue of the day, before a sword had been drawn, or a banner unfurled.

Antony Hemynge, who, with his father, Sir Marmaduke, in obedience to Richard's summons had joined him at Leicester, fought stoutly to the last. In Sir William Stanley's decisive charge, father and son were both struck down; and both after the battle were reported as slain. This fact remained for a considerable time unknown to Bredon. He had been despatched northwards, immediately after the action, to Sheriff-Hutton in Yorkshire, in the train of Sir Robert Willoughby; who was commissioned by Henry to release the Princess Elizabeth from confinement, and conduct her to London. Cuthbert had been anxious to interpose his good offices in behalf of his early friend, whose bitter speech he would long since have forgiven, even if he had felt quite assured that it had been spoken. But the hurry

of his departure did not permit of this. He had barely time to entreat Norman—of whose enmity towards Antony he entertained no suspicion—to make all possible search for the Hemynges, and protect them from injury, if he could.

It was not until nearly a fortnight had elapsed, that a messenger arrived from Bosworth, with the sad tidings, that not only were both Sir Marmaduke and his son dead ; but the latter, it had been ascertained, had fallen by Cuthbert's own hand. Sir Marmaduke, it appeared, had revived from the death-like swoon into which he had fallen, and had lingered a few days before he expired of his wounds. He had recognised Cuthbert's crest and bearings, and had seen Antony fall by his sword. In the bitterness of his heart, at what he accounted the treachery of his former favourite, he had denounced Cuthbert as an ingrate and a renegade, and despatched a message to his daughter Alice, charging her, as she valued his dying words, to break off forthwith, not only the engagement between herself and Cuthbert, but all intercourse and acquaintance with her brother's slayer. Father Oswald added that he deeply regretted that this step on the part of the old knight did not become known to him, until after the departure of the messenger for Lynden. He had attended Sir Marmaduke in his last moments, and the latter had sent him his forgiveness ; but the Lady Alice unhappily had received the message, and was said to be deeply affected by it.

These tidings overwhelmed Bredon with sorrow. He remembered only too well an encounter with a knight,

whom he had dashed from his horse with a stroke of his sword. In the dust and confusion of the conflict he might have failed to recognise Antony, and so unwittingly have slain his friend. Indeed, the recognition of his person by Sir Marmaduke placed the matter beyond a doubt. There was, of course, an end to all thought of an union between himself and Alice. Even if her father had not solemnly forbidden it, he could not have asked her to accept a hand stained with her brother's blood. But the thought was so full of pain, that he could not endure the notion of returning to his home, from which she, who would have been the light of his life, was for ever banished. He solicited and obtained permission to accompany an envoy to the court of Rome; whom Morton was about to despatch for the purpose of announcing to Innocent the accession of Henry VII. to the crown of England, and entreat his aid in confirming the new King's title. They left England without delay—all the more speedily, because the terrible sweating-sickness was beginning its ravages there. When the business at the Papal Court was concluded, Cuthbert felt no disposition to return to England, so full of bitter memories for him. He wandered away into other lands; and for some years little or nothing was heard of him.

CHAPTER III.

WE must now introduce the reader to a stately old mansion in the south-eastern corner of England, where

the Hemynghes of Lynden had dwelt, according to local tradition, for many generations before William the Bastard landed with his invading Normans in the bay of Pevensey. The house had undergone repeated alterations, to suit the requirements of its occupants, as they slowly rose, under the later Plantagenet kings, from the condition of Saxon franklins to take their place among the wealthiest and noblest of the county families. But it never attained to the dimensions, or wore the appearance, of a feudal castle. It was rather an embattled and moated manor-house; its massive walls, low-browed mullioned windows, and wide-arched entrance-gate, presenting the picturesque appearance which modern architecture, with all its pretensions, so rarely attains. The moat was crossed by a drawbridge, resting on a narrow rib of stone, and scarcely twenty years had passed since it was regularly raised at sunset, and every point of access guarded by a sentinel. The Yorkist and Lancastrian bands—which during the Wars of the Roses were almost continually on the march, demanding free quarters if the owner was presumed to be of the same faction with themselves, and plundering and slaying without mercy if he belonged to the adverse party—rendered it necessary to keep both alike at arm's length, so far as was possible. But England had been at peace since the field of Tewkesbury, and the jealous precautions had been gradually relaxed. The drawbridge had not been lifted for many a year past, and no other precautions were taken for the security of the inmates, than those of locking the entrance-gates, and barring the wicket-door at the hour of nightfall.

Within the last few weeks, however, something of the former vigilance had been revived. The old lord and the young had set forth together, one bright morning in early August, for Leicester, taking with them nearly all the able-bodied men who were bound to render military service, and leaving only just enough to secure the mansion from pillage, in the event of a band of Lancastrian insurgents demanding admittance in the Earl of Richmond's name. The Lady Alice, left in charge of her Confessor, had been warned not to venture beyond the pleasance—a sort of garden, that is to say, walled round, and within the circuit of the moat, which was usually planted with shrubs, and ornamented with statues. This was, of course, of small extent, but it was laid down with turf and flower-beds, forming a pleasanter place of retirement, at all events, in the warm August days, than the spacious but low-pitched chambers of the house could furnish.

Alice Hemyng, “the White Rose of Lynden” as she had been named by no less a person than her godmother, Queen Elizabeth, was seated under the shade of a venerable cedar, round whose stem a stone bench had been fixed. She was engaged in conversation with her attendant, Ruth Hettley, who had now been an inmate of the house for nearly two months, and had grown greatly attached to her new mistress; who, in her turn, had conceived a warm liking for her young and graceful dependent. By slow degrees the conversation had ceased to be that of mistress and servant, assuming a tone more resembling that of equals. On the present occasion, Alice had it in mind to enter on a topic

which had lately been engaging her thoughts, and was desirous, moreover, of escaping, as far as she could, from the anxieties respecting her father and brother, which it was impossible wholly to banish. They had not been settled in the pleasance, therefore, more than a few minutes, when she began abruptly,—

“Rúth,” she said, “you know, I believe, that Father Vyner returned a day or two ago. I have had no opportunity of speaking to him till this morning; but I have now had a long conversation with him. You will probably guess what the subject of it was.”

“I think I can,” answered Ruth. “It was the lawfulness of reading God’s word in the English tongue.”

“Not quite that,” said Alice; “but it comes, I suppose, to the same thing. I grieve to tell you that the Father will not allow me to read your book.”

“I am grieved also, madam. The father is a good man, and a faithful priest, and I honour and revere him. But he is but a man after all, and we should obey God rather than man.”

“Aye, so you said, and even so spake I to Father Vyner. I told him nearly all you said, though I employed not your name. I pointed out that the Lord Himself had bade men “search the Scriptures,” how holy Paul had declared that the Holy Scriptures were “able to make wise to salvation,” and other like texts. I need not repeat them.”

“Surely not, madam. But what said Father Vyner?”

“He made answer that these passages were as well known to him as his breviary, and they did indeed prove the precious value of the written word. But, he

added, that the handling of such texts by the unlearned was as perilous to them, as the meddling with powerful drugs would be to those ignorant of medicine. The drugs might have healing virtue in themselves, yet do deadly hurt to those who took them without medical advice. It was thus, he said, that all heresies had arisen; and the Church, learning wisdom from bitter experience, had forbidden the study of the Scriptures, unless with the accompaniment of their correct interpretation."

"And what," asked Ruth, after a moment's pause, "what would the Father say to the case of the Bereans, of whom inspired Luke himself says that they were 'more noble' than their brethren of Thessalonica, who had received the Gospel as well as themselves,—more noble, for that they 'searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.' Luke says nought of any other interpretation, than that which their own understandings, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, put on what they read."

"But the Bereans," Father Vyner answered me, "had not been forbidden by their spiritual masters to study the Scriptures, and besides—"

"No, truly," broke in her attendant eagerly. "Luke and Paul and their fellow-labourers were not afraid to have their teaching brought to the test of Holy Writ, well assured that the two would be found to be in perfect accordance. Ah, lady, is it not because the priests know in their hearts that the Word of God would condemn alike their doctrines and their lives—"

"Hush, Ruth," interposed her mistress. "I cannot

hear this. It is not for us to sit in judgment on our teachers. Are they not the successors of those of whom the Lord Himself said, 'he that receiveth you receiveth Me!'"

"Nay, are not they rather the true successors of the Apostles," cried Ruth, "who are like them in soundness of doctrine and holiness of life? not they only on whom human hands have been laid—even as the faithful of every age are the true children of Abraham. Saith not the Scripture, 'He had made us all Kings and Priests,' that—"

"O hush, hush!" again cried Alice. "This is the very sin of Korah, against which the good Father warned me! This is to say, 'Ye take too much on yourselves, seeing all the congregation are holy.' Who that so presumes, can expect any other fate than that of those 'sinners against their own souls?'"

"The case does not apply, dear lady," rejoined Ruth. "The Priesthood had been especially assigned, by divine order, to the family of Aaron; and therefore, for any others to claim it, was doubtless rebellion against the Most High. But there is no such limitation in the Christian Church. There all are equally of kin to the great High Priest, and they 'who do His will, are His brethren and sisters and mothers.' And will all these priests," she resumed more vehemently, "if judged by this test, be found to be indeed His? What of the monks of St. Cross, our neighbours? I speak not of Father Vyner, or Father Joliffe, or it may be one or two more. But the others—do they not live in sloth and luxury—nay worse, in drunkenness and

lewdness, that might match the very heathen? Think not I speak only from hearsay. I myself have had experience of the foul wickedness of some of the monks, as it shames a maiden to think of."

Alice was silent. Those were not days when even ladies of the highest rank could be brought up in the total ignorance of the coarser vices of men, which has become possible in this more privileged age. Much had reached her ears that accorded only too well with Ruth Hettley's words. But she presently roused herself to answer.

"Even if it be so, still the wickedness of man would not destroy the holiness of the office. But to recur to what was said respecting the Bereans,—Father Vyner told me that the Church did not, after all, forbid the study of Scripture, even in the vernacular, so much as of John Wycliffe's version of it, which I shewed him. He said that the Church, which was 'the pillar and ground of the truth,' had the guardianship of the written Word, and was bound to be very jealous lest its purity should be defiled with error. And he further affirmed that Wycliffe's translation is full of grievous mistakes. Therefore, he says, it would be wise to abstain from its perusal, even if the Bishops of the Church had not forbidden it. Surely this seems sound advice. If you would make you a posy of pure white snow-drops in the early spring, Ruth, would you permit men whose hands were soiled and grimed with the mire of the highway, to bring the flowers to you; and should you do so, could it be but they would suffer defilement?"

"Nay, honey mistress," rejoined Ruth; "but would *you* forego the flowers altogether, rather than incur the chance that the hand which conveyed them to you was not wholly free from soil?"

"But that need not be so," returned Alice; "the Father said there existed other versions of parts, or the whole, of God's Word in the English tongue, which were not forbidden. Men were even encouraged to study these, always with the help and guidance of their spiritual teachers. Archbishop Arundel himself had commended Queen Philippa for thus reading Holy Scripture."

"And wherefore, then," resumed Ruth, after a moment's pause, "wherefore—if that be the true ground of their objection to the reading of John Wycliffe's version—do they not provide men with a version to which none would except? I, too, have heard of these 'other English versions,' for John hath met with them now and then, in the course of his wanderings. But they have never been issued by the authority of the Church's rulers, nor hath any pains been taken to diffuse them everywhere among the people, as a blessing so precious should be diffused. In truth so few and imperfect are they, that one might as well hope to light up the sky at night with a few scattered rushlights, as to illumine England's spiritual darkness by their means."

"That is true," said Alice half-unconsciously to herself.

"Only too true," rejoined Ruth. "And what have the Fathers of the Church, as you sometimes call them, done for their children all these hundreds of years?"

What, but neglect to provide them with the Bread of Life,—at best suffering them to feed on it, if they could find it for themselves; but oftener snatching from their lips, as it were, the precious food, which more charitable men had of their own free bounty prepared for them.”

“And consider,” resumed Ruth, after a moment’s silence, “if they did indeed approve and desire the reading of the Holy Book, how easy it would be for them to bring it about—hard though it be for us to do so. My brother has many and zealous helpers in his work; yet so slow and costly is the labour of producing copies by penmanship, that notwithstanding all the difficulties in his way, I have often heard him lament his inability to supply the demands made on him. But these machines, which they have brought of late years from Germany, multiply books with a rapidity that seems marvellous. There are several of these in England, mostly belonging to Bishops and mitred Abbots. There was one in Oxford, which the Archbishop himself had placed there. It is continually employed, I am informed, on the works of heathen poets and philosophers, or on idle romances, some of them (my brother told me) unfit for the reading of Christian men. But never has the Archbishop’s machine been used for the diffusion of God’s Holy Word.”

“Say no more, Ruth,” exclaimed her mistress. “You may be, and I fear are right in some things. At all events, I cannot answer you at present. But it grieves me to hear you. I must give this matter grave and serious thought, and will again talk with Father Vyner

respecting it. I will keep the book you lent me for a few days more. Now leave me, for I would be alone."

Ruth Hettley obeyed, well pleased at the result of the conversation. As the reader has been told, she had now been two or three months at Lynden, and had become deeply attached to her sweet and gentle mistress. Independently of her zeal in behalf of the reforming party, she felt interested for the family which had given her kind and generous protection, and would fain requite them by bringing them to the knowledge of the truth. There seemed now good hope that she would succeed—at all events, so far as her mistress was concerned. Another consideration caused her to regard with satisfaction Mistress Alice's probable conversion; this was, the influence it would have in Lynden village. There were some among the parishioners who were already earnest students of Scripture, so far as lay in their power to be so,—that is to say, they were at all times willing, and even eager, to attend at the gatherings, which took place in some barn, or cottage, or in the height of summer in some glade of the wood; where she read and explained the holy volume to her listeners. There were those who were ready to make sacrifice of their time, or their sleep, or their meals, and to defy the danger which might possibly await those who frequented the meetings. But there were more who stood aloof, not from any dislike to the thing itself, but because they doubted whether their young lady, who was beloved and revered by all, would approve of it. Ruth had hitherto been unable,

with any confidence, to claim Alice's sympathy with her work. But now she felt that the time was at all events not far off, when she might do this with a clear conscience; nay, when she might hope for the lady's own presence at the readings. It was with a joyful step that she passed through the great gate of the house, and along the road leading to Dame Heyford's cottage, where she knew her rustic audience would be waiting for her.

She was startled from the reverie into which she had fallen by the ringing of hoofs and clattering of arms behind her. Turning hastily round, she saw a party of soldiers, with two officers riding at their head, in company with a monk, whose dress declared him to be a Benedictine. They were evidently on their way to Lynden, where their arrival boded no good to the inmates. Little acquainted as she was with such matters, she could not fail to recognise the Red Rose which all the party bore in their caps. They were plainly emissaries from the Earl of Richmond; and the fact of his being able at this juncture to send out such a party, was strong evidence that he had been victorious in the struggle, which ere this must have taken place. But if so, what had been the fate of the owners of Lynden? Were they slain, or taken prisoners, or had they fled from the field, and were somewhere in hiding? The Lady Alice, too,—what would become of her? Ruth looked towards the gate, through which she had so recently passed, considering whether it would be possible to reach it and give the alarm before the horsemen came up; but a single

glance was sufficient to satisfy her that this would be hopeless. She was further off, if anything, from the drawbridge than they were; and besides, the leader had already noticed her movements, and shouted to her to stand. She turned again at the voice, which struck familiarly on her ear, and, looking more closely at the speaker, recognised in the leaders of the party, the Benedictine monk, Oswell, and two of his companions, almost as notorious in Oxford for debauchery as himself.

Suddenly it occurred to her that her capture might be the purpose, or one of the purposes, of the monk's visit to Lynden; and she resolved on the instant that she would never allow herself to fall into his hands, even if the alternative should be instant death. The road, at the point where she was standing, ran by the side of a brook, which supplied the moat with water, and carried off its overflow. It was five or six feet wide, and the bank on the further side steep and rocky. Beyond it lay a stretch of woodland country, extending for several miles, and the trees grew so thick, that in many places it was difficult to force a way through them. Without pausing for a moment, Ruth plunged into the brook, which rose above her knees, scrambled lightly up the opposite bank, and hurried towards the cover of the wood.

"Follow and seize her!" shouted Oswell to the men-at-arms. Half-a-dozen of them obeyed. Springing from their saddles, they crossed the stream after her, and reached the further bank just as Ruth disappeared among the foliage of the trees.

"After her, after her!" again shouted Oswell; "she cannot escape you. I will handsomely reward the man who arrests her."

"Is it worth while to take so much trouble?" said Langham. "She is, I suppose, only one of the household servants, and does not probably even guess the purpose of our coming—"

"Ha, saw you not that it was Ruth Hettley, then?" exclaimed the Benedictine. "I knew her in a moment; and, unless I mistake, she also recognised me. This, then, is the explanation of her sudden disappearance from Oxford. I have ever marvelled how she could have accomplished her flight. It is now plain enough that it was by the help of that meddling fool, Hemynge. But they shall both fare the worse for it."

"Ruth Hettley! was it indeed that coy damsel?" returned Wulford, with a laugh. "Aye, Oswell, you were check-mated there, I well remember. But Antony Hemynge is too grave and sober a youth to give you much cause for jealousy. And besides, he cannot have been at Lynden since the day when the fair one quitted Oxford."

"Jealousy!" repeated Oswell, "that has little to do with this matter? It was to cross and baffle me that he helped her to fly. She had told him a rare tale, I doubt not—"

"I will be sworn she did," assented Wulford; "and what is more," he muttered in a lower tone, "I will be sworn she had a rare tale to tell. Well," he continued in a louder tone, "she did not foresee our visit to Lynden, or she would not have been so ready to

accept Hemynge's help. She will soon be in your hands again now, and then, I trow, we shall have her at our mercy—aye, and the fair mistress Alice too, for the matter of that."

"Hardly the Lady Alice," objected Oswald. "Sir Marmaduke is dead, and Antony has been taken in arms as a rebel, and like to die into the bargain; though I did hear a rumour that he was recovering—"

"Aye, thanks to that steel head-piece, which must be of adamant," growled Wolford. "Nought else could have kept his brains from being dashed out like the pulp of a melon, by my horse's feet. Yes, he is recovering, for all the first report that he could not survive the day."

"That was a lucky blunder," said Oswald drily; "and so was Sir Marmaduke's mistake between you and Bredon, was it not? I hear Bredon is sore troubled in mind. Would it not be well to despatch a messenger to Paris—the party can hardly have got further yet—and explain the blunder?"

"It will be time enough to explain it when our plans have taken effect," returned Wolford. "Till matters are satisfactorily arranged, Bredon is better out of the way. He has favour with the King, and would use it to shield Antony Hemynge, if he knew him to be still living."

"Like enough," answered Oswald. "Well, you may succeed in depriving Hemynge of his estate as an attainted traitor, also in proving yourself the next heir. You have my full permission, especially after what I have now learned. I daresay the commissioners

will not look too critically into your claims. But there is the sister here,—she has not been guilty of treason, and is Antony's next heir; and the family has many and powerful friends."

"That may be overcome some way or other, if you will aid me with Morton," returned Wolford. "A marriage might be arranged between myself and Mistress Alice for instance. I hear she is fair to look on, and—"

"Aye, I have long seen that was the mark at which your arrow was pointed," said the Benedictine. "Well, I will aid you, Norman; but, observe, only on condition that you aid my schemes in requital. And one of my most stedfast purposes is that this insolent girl and stubborn heretic, shall suffer the penalty of her defiance of my authority, and the scorn she has dared to evince towards myself."

"I will aid you to the utmost," said Wolford. "How do you propose to deal with her, when she is brought to us?"

"I mean to have her taken before my old friend, Abbot Reinold, of St. Cross. It was mainly to confer with him, as you know, that I came down hither. He has power to deal summarily with her, as an obstinate heretic and rebel against the Church, and he will not be slack to do so. But here we are at the gate, and fortunately no alarm has been given. It were best to enter without summons, and take possession. I shall ride straight to St. Cross, which is only some five or six miles distant. When you have arranged matters here, bring Ruth Hettley with you to the Abbey. There

we can hold further counsel, respecting both your affairs and mine."

He took his departure accordingly, followed by his own immediate attendants, while Wolford gave his orders to the soldiers. Alighting from their saddles, and leaving only two of the party in charge of the horses, they crossed the drawbridge and entered the house. It was drawing near the usual dinner-hour, and all the household were assembled in the hall, with the exception of the Lady Alice, her attendant, and a man who had been left to keep watch; but whom the new-comers found buried in a very comfortable nap, over a flagon of ale, with which he had been solacing himself in his solitude.

The men sprang from their seats at the first sight of Wolford's steel casque and drawn sword, and drew together in one corner of the apartment. But the numbers which pressed in soon shewed that resistance would be hopeless, and the steward intimated to the leader that they surrendered. Wolford ordered the gates to be closed, and placed sentinels at them and the other points of defence. He then required that all the able-bodied men of the household should forthwith quit the mansion; and warned those that remained that imprisonment or death would be the immediate consequence of any infringement of his orders. This done, he sent a message to the Lady Alice, courteously requesting permission to wait upon her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Abbey of St. Cross, situated, as the reader has heard, some few miles from Lynden, had been founded rather more than two centuries previously to the date of this story, and been singularly fortunate (or unfortunate, as the reader may regard it) in obtaining large gifts of land and money during successive generations. The monastic buildings had never been much increased in size, and the number of the monks was small, when compared with other foundations possessed of the like revenues. But the Abbot, though he had no seat in Parliament, was a personage of great weight and influence in his own immediate neighbourhood. With its large revenues and easy duties, the Abbacy was a position much sought after by the younger sons of great families, for whom it was found difficult to make any adequate provision. The Abbots were consequently, as a general rule, easy-going men of the world, who practised no austerity of life themselves, and were not disposed to exact it of others. This, again, had the effect of attracting to the monastery men who, like the Superiors themselves, had embraced the religious life simply as a comfortable provision. The recluse, who desired to devote himself to severe study; the penitent, who was anxious to expiate the sins of his past life by prayer and mortification of the flesh; the weak-hearted and sorely tried, who craved for shelter from the temptations of the world, which they found too strong for them,—these sought admission into other communities, where they might find congenial spirits, stern discipline,

wise and loving counsel ; but none of them knocked at the gate of the Abbey of St. Cross. The reader will not require to be told, that such a society as that of Holy Cross became more and more lax in its discipline with each succeeding generation—more and more corrupt, as regarded the lives of its members. Perhaps no communities ever existed under a system in which degeneracy of morals was so likely to occur as the monasteries of the Middle Ages.

Yet it would be unjust to pass an unqualified censure upon them. There still exists a prejudice in the minds of most Englishmen on this subject, which is in many respects unreasonable. At the time of their foundation, the influence of the religious houses was one of almost unmixed good. Whatever advantages civilization brings with it, were developed and secured by these establishments. Learning would have languished, perhaps perished altogether, if it had not been kept alive by them. Waste lands would not have been cultivated ; bridges and factories would not have been built ; painting, sculpture, and architecture would have been almost unknown for many ages, if the monks had not bestowed their attention on them. Scanty as were the means of education in those days, there would have been absolutely none, if the monasteries had not existed ; few as were the copies of Holy Scripture then to be met with, they would have been fewer still, but for the labours of the monkish copyist. The widow and the orphan, if they secured a shelter anywhere, it was in a convent ; the oppressed and the helpless, if they found any to advocate their cause with the lawless

and powerful, found them among the monks and friars ; the pure of heart, if they sought protection against licentious pursuit, could find it nowhere but inside the consecrated walls. In times when all but universal anarchy prevailed, when the land was distracted by the private quarrels of turbulent barons, or the throes of civil strife, the monasteries were the only places where peaceable men could find a refuge. The lands of the baron and the franklin alike were liable to be devastated, the houses burned, and the inmates put to the sword. But the convent and its surrounding lands remained uninjured, a very Goshen in a land of darkness and suffering. This was the state of things for many generations. Two causes at length brought about their corruption and overthrow. These were, first, the enormous multiplication of their numbers and endowments ; which would, in process of time, have thrown the whole of the land into their possession, and secondly their exemption from episcopal control ; the rule of the Pope being substituted for that of the Bishop.

Both these circumstances, but especially the last-named, was doubtless at first regarded as a decided advantage. It set the convents free from the superintendence of a superior who was close at hand, and able to apprehend the merits of any case that might arise—substituting for it that of a potentate, living at a great distance, who could with difficulty be certified as to what had occurred, and who was naturally inclined on all occasions to side with the monks, his avowed and notorious partisans. In any dispute between them and the secular clergy, the latter were slow in appeal-

ing to Rome, unless their cause was an exceptionally good one; and even then, they in general found little profit result from the attempt. A timely present, made to the Papal exchequer, would outweigh the strongest arguments or the gravest complaints that could be urged. In this manner, they came in time to be left in a great measure to themselves. Men shrugged their shoulders when they heard scandalous anecdotes of the nuns, or caught the sounds of noisy revelry as they passed under the walls of the monastery; vowed that it was a disgrace to a Christian land, and that the Bishops ought to amend it. The Bishops echoed the complaint, and protested against the invasion of their office, whereby they were rendered powerless to repress the evil. But habit gradually abated the keenness of the indignation. There was nothing, in fact, left to check the increasing laxity of morals, but the consciences of the monks themselves; and consciences, under such circumstances, are apt to grow callous.

Callous enough, at all events, those of the brethren of Holy Cross had become towards the end of the fifteenth century. Abbot Reinold, a scion of the noble house of Orpingham, was a good-natured and open-handed man, possessed of sufficient ability and principle to have passed through life with credit, had he been placed in any position where honest work of any kind was required of him. But his father, an influential, but rather poor, nobleman, had been fortunate enough, in return for some service rendered in the field, to obtain the next nomination to the office of Abbot of St. Cross; and this chancing to fall vacant at the time

when his son Reinold had just attained the age at which it was possible for him to hold it, he straightway received the appointment, and was regarded as being provided for for life. It is hardly possible to imagine a position of greater temptation than that in which Reinold found himself thus suddenly placed,—suddenly, for the vacancy had not been expected to occur for many years to come. Reinold had led the ordinary life of the young nobility of his day, which was not remarkable for the strictness of its morality. He was required on a sudden to renounce the world, to take upon himself the strictest and most self-denying rule of life—to pass his whole time, in fact, in holy offices, prayers, and meditations. To impose this upon a man in the very prime of life, with no previous training, and no natural inclinations towards it, was in itself sufficiently profane. But when to this it is added, that the condition of the society, over which the young man was in this way called upon to preside, was corrupt to the core, that of all the brethren within the walls, scarcely one made so much as a show of keeping his vows—it was no wonder that the new Abbot soon became as careless and indifferent as any of his brethren. He had been thrown, when a boy, a good deal into the company of Oswell; and the latter had taken care that the acquaintance should not be broken off when they grew to be men,—being sensible that it might be a valuable one to him in his after career.

When the conspiracy was first set on foot for raising the Earl of Richmond to the throne, Abbot Reinold's purse and influence had been secured by Oswell for

the party, the prospect of advancement to a higher post being held out as the bait. In truth, the notion of Reinold's promotion suited well with Oswell's programme, the situation of Abbot of St. Cross being one which he greatly coveted for himself. When Pembroke and Morton proposed to send him to the neighbourhood of Lynden—where there were many Yorkist families re-residing, whose acceptance of Henry's rule was thought doubtful—Oswell willingly agreed to the proposal, as it would enable him to make acquaintance with, and secure the good-will of, the monks of Holy Cross. The unexpected appearance of Ruth Hettley now furnished an additional motive for remaining in the vicinity. The monk had been bitterly incensed at the indignant language with which the girl had at once repelled his advances, and ignored his office; and all the more so, because he knew in his heart that he deserved her scorn. Her strange disappearance from Oxford had roused at once his surprise and anger; and had it not been for the political crisis then impending, he would probably have left no stone unturned to discover the place of her retreat.

An opportunity of wreaking his vengeance had now presented itself. He had but to arraign Ruth before the Abbot of St. Cross, and his wishes would at once be fulfilled. The Abbot, it has already been remarked, was a personage of much importance in his own county. He had authority from the Bishop to seize and punish heretics by his own sentence, and would no doubt, as Father Oswell anticipated, carry out his designs without much scruple, or even inquiry. To-morrow, he reflected, at furthest, she would be wholly in his power.

It was about noon when he arrived before the gate of the Abbey, and directed one of his attendants to summon the porter. But the gate was fast barred, and for some time no attention was paid to the attempts to gain admittance. At length the well-fed and somewhat stately janitor made his appearance, with the information that the brethren were in the chapel, engaged in the performance of Sext, and no one could enter the Abbey until that was over.

Oswell's lip curled somewhat as he received this notice. But he made no remark; and presently, after a delay of some twenty minutes, the gates were thrown open, and the party invited within. As they complied, the brethren were seen leaving the chapel decorously habited, and walking two and two in procession. The Abbot himself came last, pacing slowly along with his eyes fixed on the ground, so lost in thought apparently, as to be unaware of what was passing.

The monk was assisted to alight, and then ushered into the Abbot's apartment. The latter advanced ceremoniously to receive him; but as his eye lighted on the face of his visitor, its expression changed, and he broke into a laugh.

"Ha, by all the saints, is it you? Why, what brings you hither at a season like this? I had surely deemed that you were at Westminster, high in honour, and deep in the councils of the new king,—in the way to be made a Bishop, or a mitred Abbot at the least."

"All in good time, my Lord Abbot," said Father Oswell. "I am at the present but a humble monk, remember. Such advancement as you hint at were too

long a stride up the ladder to be altogether a safe one. The step would more befit you than me."

"Say you so?" returned the other; "and what has brought you here to our poor house, where nathless you are right welcome? Have you any letter for me from the Earl of Pembroke, or the Bishop?"

"No letter, but a charge to consult with you as to King Henry's affairs in this neighbourhood. They rely much on your knowledge and influence, as you may well surmise. It is reported that many hereabouts are but ill friends to Henry Tudor, and ready to abet any schemes that may be devised for his overthrow. At Lynden, for instance—"

"Lynden," repeated the Abbot, "there is no one left there to plot anything. The Hemynges took with them all the able-bodied men they could muster, except just enough to defend the house. The only inmates of the manor now are the Lady Alice, and old Father Vyner, neither of them very likely persons to concoct treason!"

"It may be," returned Father Oswell; "yet Lynden, nevertheless, may be a rallying-point for mischief. And for this lady, I have reason to believe she is at least tainted with heresy, which is near akin to treason."

"The Lady Alice!" cried Reinold, in surprise, "the White Rose of Lynden! She is a quiet and gentle lady, of whom no ill hath ever been spoken."

"It may be," persisted the monk, doggedly, "yet she may be a favourer of heretics, for all that."

"Nay, but her confessor, Father Vyner," remonstrated the Abbot.

“Father Vyner,” repeated the other; “if I have heard aright respecting him, he is a weak, soft-hearted man, who would suffer almost any amount of mischief to be done, rather than take the proper measures for its repression. It is the Bishop’s wish that he be re-called from Lynden, and another set in his place, who will do the work of the Church without fear or favour.”

“He can be recalled, of course,” said the Abbot, though not without some hesitation. “But I know not that I should greatly desire his presence here, good man as he is. He was somewhat too much given, when he was residing with us, to complain of things which no way concerned him.”

“A bad habit for any man to fall into,” observed Oswald, “and one especially unsuitable for a monk.”

“I remember,” continued Reinold, “that I was right glad to despatch him to Lynden. If the brethren did not rise as early as he thought befitting—they being sick, or otherwise indisposed—it was no matter of his, surely.”

“Surely not,” assented the monk; “and if any of them had sat up somewhat late overnight, having doubtless been engaged in some good work, and too much exhausted to leave their beds, or had been paying visits of love and charity to their neighbours—some bereaved widow or orphan sister—and had not returned overnight, he should rather have commended their benevolence, than blamed their seeming slackness of devotion.”

“Most true,” assented the Abbot; “yet he would not view it so. I am sorry to add, he is not the only one to uphold these notions. There is Father Joliffe, who

was made Sub-prior two years ago—he is even more troublesome than Father Vyner. He complains of the luxury of our meals, and talks of wine-bibbing and the like. He forgets that this monastery is built in a situation so damp, that a reasonable allowance of wine is indispensable, or the ague would destroy a man's whole usefulness."

"It is monstrous," cried Father Oswell. "And how would these men—Father Joliffe and Father Vyner—how do they propose that the brethren should employ such time as is not given up to religious exercises?"

"Father Joliffe wants, as Father Vyner before him wanted, the Scriptorium reopened," said the Abbot; "they complain that for many years past no addition has been made to the library. But methinks it were time enow to add new books, when the old ones had been read; which is scarce the case at present."

"I will be sworn it is not," assented the monk. "Is the convent library a large one?"

"By my halidom, I can hardly answer you," replied Reinold. "There are some books, I know, stored away in the crypt beneath the chapel; or, by the way, I heard that the Sub-prior had caused them to be removed to his cell, alleging that they were perishing through damp. That was the last time he spoke to me respecting the Scriptorium. But the Scriptorium, or what he is pleased to call such, has been found a convenient apartment wherein to receive any guests, whom it might be desirable to see in private. It stands somewhat apart from the rest of the buildings, and has a high wall round it, and a private passage leading down

to the river, in order that the brethren might not be disturbed when engaged in study."

"I see," said the Benedictine; "and other persons might desire privacy, besides those engaged in copying manuscripts."

"True," assented the other, "therefore it is obviously inexpedient to revert to the former use of the *Scriptorium*; and as Father Vyner—"

"It is not necessary for him to return here," interposed the monk. "Surely you may place him elsewhere. Or even should he return to St. Cross, you know how to rule your own people. Remind those troublesome persons of their vow of obedience, and if that suffice not, impose a three months' silence on them, by way of penance. I warrant when they have the use of their tongues allowed them again, you will hear no grumbling."

"And whom is it proposed to place at Lynden in Father Vyner's room?"

"Even myself, for want of a better," said Oswell.

"Aye, you look surprised. But I have my own ends to serve, in agreeing to go thither."

"I do not doubt it," said Reinold; "you are scarce likely to mew yourself up in a dull country-house, like Lynden, unless that had been the case. But how will you and Antony Hemynge accord? Old Sir Marmaduke is dead; but his son is not one who will brook interference with his affairs, or his household either."

"Antony Hemynge is a prisoner, taken in arms against his sovereign," remarked Father Oswell. "It may be that he will never again interfere in his affairs or household himself."

"Aye, truly. I had forgotten at the moment his march to Bosworth. Well, mine old ally, I doubt not you have some deep design in view, which it concerns not me to inquire into. And you have done me more than one good service in times past, for which I owe you gratitude. I will recal Father Vyner, and set you in his place. Are you known to the Lady Alice?"

"No," said the monk, "she has never seen me. I did not enter Lynden Manor this morning, in order that she might not suppose I was connected with this seizure of her brother's house. It were better that I went there as one of your monks."

"Be it so," returned the Abbot. "Is there aught further in which I can pleasure you?"

"Yes," said Oswell. "There is another matter, respecting which I would speak with you. I hinted to you that the fair mistress of Lynden was thought to incline to the heresy of these Lollards. One ground for this was, my discovery this morning that she has in her service, and (as I learn) has bestowed much favour upon, a certain Ruth Hettley, the sister of one of those peddling hawkers, who travel about the country, palming off John Wycliffe's wares on any whom they can induce to buy them."

"John Wycliffe's wares!" repeated Abbot Reinold; "you mean his translations of the Holy Scriptures into the vernacular tongue?"

"Aye, surely," assented the monk; "you know his occupation is one forbidden under the severest penalties, and full of deadly mischief."

"You are in the right," said his friend. "These

fellows do but stir up discontent among the people, teaching them to distrust their spiritual guides. It was but yesterday that I delivered me of an admonition to one of our tenants, who had been slack in paying the convent dues, which he pretends to say are not chargeable on the lands. When I quoted to him one of the sayings of St. Paul, respecting the sinfulness of withholding from the clergy their just portion of men's profits, he affirmed that he had studied all the writings of St. Paul, and there was no such passage to be found in them."

"The insolent knave!" exclaimed the monk. "Surely it is high time that this kind of thing should be put down. Well, as I said, the Lady Alice hath this obstinate heretic in her service, and is, as I judge, in league with her."

"Wherefore think you that?" inquired Reinold.

"For this reason. Both this girl and her brother came under my notice at Oxford, and both set my warnings and threats at defiance. I was on the point of carrying them before the Vice-chancellor, when they suddenly disappeared. I had no time to make search after them; but to-day I discovered the girl at Lynden, where she had doubtless been sent by Antony Hemynge, who, as I ascertained, had visited her."

"If we can catch her, we will deal summarily with her," said the Abbot. "You say you have already sent out your men in pursuit."

"On the instant," answered Oswell; "and Norman Wolford—you remember him—will ride over this evening with the girl in custody."

"Then will we postpone the further consideration of

the matter until his arrival. That will be the more desirable, as the dinner is on the point of being served, having in truth been delayed somewhat on your account. Aye, and there sounds the bell. Let me usher you to the refectory. The Sub-prior chances to be absent, so you can occupy his place."

Father Oswell complied, noway unwilling. He had been well aware that the rules of abstemiousness and mortification of the flesh, enjoined by the founder, were not too strictly observed. But even he was hardly prepared for the sumptuous repast, under which the board might literally be said to groan. Venison from the neighbouring forest, fish of various kinds from the adjoining river, partridges and hares from the Abbot's own woods, were ranged side by side with huge joints of butcher's-meat. These dishes were succeeded by blancmanges and jellies, delicate comfits and confectionaries, the work evidently of domestic artists of no mean proficiency, together with rich fruits, some of them of kinds only recently introduced into the country. The wines, of foreign vintage, were so rare in their quality, that they might have served the table of King Henry himself. It is true that these wines were offered only to the Abbot, his guests, and one or two other persons of worship who happened to be present. But if the vintage at the inferior tables was not so *recherché* as at that of the superior, it made up by its abundance for its lack of quality. Any one who watched the expression of the coarse and flushed faces, and paid heed to the jests and innuendos freely circulated among the banqueters, would have become aware that even the out-

ward show of discipline had ceased to be maintained, and that every man indulged to the utmost his natural tastes and inclinations, so far as it was possible to do so consistently with the barest observance of decency,—if even that proviso was not frequently dispensed with.

Perhaps Abbot Reinold himself was aware that the bounds above named were in danger of being outstepped, for he gave the signal for the concluding grace somewhat earlier than was his ordinary practice, and retired with Oswell to his own apartments, where an hour or two afterwards the pair were joined by Wolford and Langham.

“How have you sped?” inquired the monk, half-an-hour afterwards, as they paced up and down a walk in the Abbot’s private garden. “Have you Ruth Hettley a prisoner?”

“I am sorry to say we have not,” answered Wolford. “We have been utterly baffled and confounded. We have searched pretty nearly all the houses in the village, if not every one. We found one of the peasants, Simon Osgood by name, who was a zealous supporter of Holy Church, and as anxious to burn all who are not, as you yourself could be, Father. He led us with right good will to every cottage where the inmates were suspected of Lollardy, and every cave and hiding-place in the neighbourhood where a runaway might be sheltered. But not the slightest trace of the girl could be discovered. It seemed as though she had sunk into the earth.”

“We will dig her out in time,” rejoined Oswell; “trust me for that. Well, Norman, and have you had.

your interview with the Lady Alice? *She*, I conclude, had not sunk into the earth!"

"By my halidom, no," returned Wolford. "Methinks she is more likely to rise to heaven."

"Ha, what? Is the lady then so lovely?"

"The loveliest I ever saw," returned Wolford. "She can be no traitor, Father. Antony may be dispossessed of his lands for treason, but her rights must not be forfeited."

"Except in favour of yourself. Is it not so?"

"You have said it," returned Wolford. "I am resolved that she shall be my bride. Father Oswell, you will aid me? Remember, I have ever been your ally."

"I have no objection," returned the monk, "provided you, in your turn, will assist my designs, as you have promised. You mean, I suppose, to take up your abode at Lynden for the present?"

"Even so," said Wolford. "I shall be thus brought into Mistress Alice's society, and shall have many opportunities of serving and obliging her. We may make her brother's life, perchance, depend upon her acceptance of me."

"It is well for your scheme that you have got Cuthbert Bredon out of the way," remarked the monk.

"Aye, truly that was a piece of rare good fortune," returned Wolford. "We must take good care to keep him abroad, now he is there. As for this girl Ruth Hettley, be sure I will use all possible diligence to discover her, and send you the earliest tidings."

"There will be no need," said Oswell. "I myself purpose to reside for the present at Lynden, as well as

yourself. The Abbot intends removing Father Vyner from the post of confessor to the family, and placing me there in his room."

"You do not say so!" exclaimed Norman; "that is fortunate indeed. As the Lady Alice's confessor, you will be able to serve my cause indeed."

"And I will do so, Norman, I once more promise you, if I find you zealous also for the cause I have in view."

CHAPTER V.

THE hall of Lynden Manor was more modern than any other portion of the house, having been built by Sir Marmaduke shortly after the first coronation of King Edward IV. The accession of lands and Court favour which had rewarded the loyalty of the devoted Yorkist, had rendered the ancient Saxon refectory too mean an apartment in the good knight's eyes for the state which he now felt it incumbent on him to maintain. He had, therefore, erected the present structure on the site of its predecessor. It was lofty and spacious, the roof and windows exhibiting the depressed arch and Perpendicular mullions of the period, and the walls were panelled with oak, which had not yet acquired the dark colour of age. The table, which ran from the foot of the dais the whole way to the door leading to the entrance-passageway and buttery beyond, was on most days full, and even crowded with guests. The greater part of these were house-servants and farm-labourers. But there was gene-

rally a considerable number of persons who had presented themselves uninvited to partake of the owner's hospitality; as every man was free to do in those days without stint or challenge.

One spring day in the year 1489, nearly four years after the struggle on Bosworth field, several of the persons already mentioned were assembled at the high table of the hall above described. They were five in number. In the principal chair sat Antony Hemynge, grown more manly in appearance since we last saw him, and with the addition of a dark beard, and the scar of WOLFORD'S sword-cut on his forehead. On his right was placed the Lady Alice, a more expanded and a somewhat paler rose than of old, but as lovely, or, if anything, lovelier than ever. Next to her was the Oxford student, John Colet, now a graduate of Magdalen College, and a man of rising reputation in the University. He had just arrived on a visit, not the first he had made to Lynden; for the friendship, begun on the day of the riot, had been cemented by mutual liking, and had become a close one. On Antony's left sat an ecclesiastic, a man of low stature, with small, sharp features; this was Father Hulett, the family confessor, who had taken Father Oswell's place, when he left Lynden some two years previously. The fifth chair, on the confessor's left, was occupied by Simon Langham. His sudden appearance in Father Hulett's company had surprised Hemynge as much as that of Colet had done, and, it must be confessed, not so agreeably. But no householder in those days ever disputed the right of a visitor to the hospitality of his table.

Much had passed since Bosworth fight, of grave importance to nearly all present. Wolford and the monk had taken up their residence at Lynden, in accordance with the programme arranged by them in the last chapter. They had remained there, Wolford for four months, and Father Oswald for eighteen—until, in fact, he had been made Abbot of St. Cross, in place of Reinold translated to a mitred abbacy in one of the western counties. But though both priest and layman had played their parts with unimpeachable skill, they had failed in attaining their object. Wolford's courteous attention to the Lady Alice's convenience, and the exertions which (he assured her) he was continually making to deliver her brother from the perilous position, in which his treason to King Henry had placed him, were received with gracious thanks, but elicited no confidence in return; and the confessor's hints, gradually growing into warnings of the danger, which nothing, probably, but Wolford's influence with Pembroke and Morton could avert, failed to produce the alarm he had anticipated. Neither were aware of the early friendship which had subsisted between Sir Marmaduke and Sir John Grey, Queen Elizabeth's first husband, and the interest which the Dowager Queen had always taken in her godchild Alice.

If the latter had trusted her new advisers, she would of course have confided this circumstance to them. But instinctively she shrank from their professions of good will; and carried on her own plans for her brother's deliverance irrespectively of them. She sent a secret messenger to the Queen, informing her of the perilous position in which Antony stood, earnestly im-

ploring her help. She received but a cold reply ; but Elizabeth, nevertheless, did her best for her protégée. She knew that she was no favourite with Henry, and that any personal request of hers, more particularly in behalf of a notorious Yorkist partisan, was more likely to injure than to serve him. But she had not passed so many years in the atmosphere of a Court without learning how to secure her ends, without betraying her complicity in the work. She induced her daughter Elizabeth to intercede with Pembroke in Antony's behalf. The Earl, who was fully aware that peace would never be secured except through the elevation of Elizabeth to a share in Henry's throne, willingly agreed to gratify her. All-powerful as he now was with the King, he had no difficulty in obtaining Hemynge's pardon, conditionally on his taking the oath of allegiance, and to this the young man now had no objection.

The news of his liberation at once amazed and confounded the plotters. It was obviously useless for Wolford to remain at Lynden ; Antony, he knew, bore him no good will. Moreover, it was not impossible that he might learn from one of the men-at-arms something of the deception which had been practised on Bredon. Making a virtue of necessity, therefore, Wolford paid a farewell visit to Alice, expressed the satisfaction which her brother's release afforded him, and pointed out that as Lynden Manor would now have its lawful owner again, there was no need for his own presence. With all good wishes, therefore, he bade her farewell, trusting he would not be wholly forgotten. He then withdrew with his followers to London, where he was well re-

ceived. His father's attainder and forfeiture were reversed by an order in council, and he entered on possession of his family estates. Not many months afterwards he took part in the battle of Stoke, and was knighted for his gallantry and good service on the field.

Father Oswell remained for more than a twelvemonth after Wolford's departure. But his residence was unwelcome both to Antony and himself. He now exerted all his influence to obtain the promised advancement for Reinold. He succeeded at last, and secured also the promotion for himself, which he had so greatly coveted. He was made Abbot of St. Cross, and took his departure from Lynden with great satisfaction. But he took care, for his own sake as well as for Wolford's, who had by no means abandoned his designs on Alice, to retain his influence over the family. He filled the vacancy caused by his resignation, by the appointment of one Father Hulett, a chantry-priest, who for a year or two past had been one of his most obsequious tools.

The institution of chantries—colleges, that is to say, of priests, whose special office it was to sing Masses for the souls of their founders—dates no doubt from a much earlier age; but they were not common in England until the latter part of the fourteenth century, just about the time when the zeal for building and endowing monasteries began to decline. During the whole of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries, it was continually and rapidly on the increase. Chantry chapels were erected in the cathedrals, many of which still exist, as for example those of Beaufort, Waynflete, and Fox at Winchester. Similar

buildings were added to parish churches: and often, where the worldly means which a penitent left behind him did not suffice for structures so costly, he would yet bequeath a sum which would secure in perpetuity the services of a mass-priest; who was entitled to have access to the testator's parish church, whenever he required it. The great increase of these foundations had the effect of producing a swarm of clerics, which over-spread the land. To St. Paul's Cathedral only, Dugdale tells us, there were attached no less than fifty-four chantry-priests. If no check had been put on the practice, in the course of another century these officials would have outnumbered the rest of the clergy in the proportion of ten to one.

There is something in these foundations which revolts against our higher Christian instincts. If men had combined into bodies for the purpose of endeavouring to deliver the souls of the departed from the chain of the sins still binding them, or had singly undertaken the same work, without thought of worldly gain or provision for themselves, however mistaken their doctrine might have been, there would have been a nobility of self-devotion in the work, which must have commanded our respect. To be sure, even then—supposing them to be ever so well persuaded that their prayers could reverse the decision of the Great Judge after the Books had been finally closed, and to be ever so earnest in desiring to accomplish such a reversal—even then the words of the Judge Himself, “let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God,” might have taught them that such could not be their duty in life.

Still, though an error, it would have been a noble one. But for men to take in hand such a task simply as the means of obtaining their daily living ; to be paid (to speak plainly) by the job in such a matter, like criers making a proclamation ; to repeat the same words over and over again, for persons of whom probably they knew nothing, and in whose behalf they could feel no special interest ; to be ready to recite the prayers as often as they were paid for doing so, and never when they were not—this must be regarded by every right-minded man as a degradation alike of priest and prayer.

The evil becomes still worse, when we regard it from the other point of view—that, namely, of the persons in whose behalf the chantries were established. The doctrine of the propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass was, doubtless, full of peril to the soul. To teach a man that if the Priest said Mass for his benefit, the offering of Christ on the cross, thus made anew for him, would purge away the sin he had committed, was as dangerous a snare, one would have thought, as any which Satan could devise. Still, the offender might supplement his faith in the rite at once with penitence and a resolution thenceforth to shun the misdoing which had required the sacrifice. But to encourage him to believe, that, after the period of his probation was over, when repentance and atonement had become impossible, he might nevertheless be assoilzied from his sin, by simply bequeathing the money he could no longer use for his own lusts, in paying the services of others to pray for him, was surely the most deadly delusion that was ever suggested to man's fancy. This was, in truth, to illus-

trate the words of the Psalmist, with a force and significance of which their author could never have dreamed—to believe indeed that men's "houses could continue for ever, and their dwelling-places from one generation to another." It is hard to say whether the sense of the profane or of the grotesque impresses us the most, when we peruse Henry the Seventh's careful provisions to secure, not only an ample amount of care for his soul after his death, but to secure it on the cheapest possible terms. This was one of the corruptions which could not be amended, and which the Reformers did well in entirely suppressing.

It was little wonder if men set to perform duties like those of the chantry-priests, soon lost all sense of the holiness of their office, and caused others to lose it also. No man, in fact, respected them. The people spoke of them contemptuously as "Mass Johns" or "poor Sir Johns," and scarcely accounted them as their own superiors in position. The parochial clergy, on their part, regarded them with dislike as well as scorn. They were obliged, as the reader has been told, to give them free entrance to their churches for the performance of their duties, but they did so unwillingly. Doubtless there were cases where the chantry-priests helped the Vicar in his work, or taught grammar and the like: but these instances were exceptional. In general they were idle, ignorant, and so dissolute in their lives, as to create grievous scandal even in those evil times. Father Hulett was no exception to this rule. Though never detected in any flagrant immorality, he bore a most indifferent character in the

neighbourhood, and Antony could with difficulty be induced to tolerate his presence at Lynden. He was silent, and seemingly unobservant, but in reality he noted everything, detailing it faithfully to his patrons, the Abbot and Wulford.

The conversation at the high table, on the day above named, was constrained and awkward. Father Hulett's presence always embarrassed Antony; who felt an instinctive distrust of him, though he could assign no definite reason for it. Further, the arrival of Langham,—of whom he knew little, but that little by no means to his credit—was still more unwelcome. Colet was a reserved man, Alice had her own pre-occupying thoughts, and the Confessor seldom spoke at meals, and when he did speak, it was only to address a few words to Langham.

Towards the end of the repast, however, Antony felt that good breeding required him to make an effort to dispel the general embarrassment. Turning to Colet, he began to question him respecting the present condition of things at Oxford.

“I hear there be great changes, John,” he said, “even in the two or three years which have elapsed since my departure. How does this new study—the study of the Greek language I mean—how does it progress?”

“Slowly,” answered Colet, “yet, as I reckon, all the more surely; it finds small favour with the Heads of the University, who are stout Trojans, as the phrase is. But among the younger men it has many zealous adherents, and the little leaven will, in process of time, leaven the whole lump. Our great need is teachers.

There be many such in Germany and Holland, whom during the last thirty years the tyranny of the Turks has driven from their native land. But they are few, as yet, in England. Could we induce some of these to take up their abode with us, the number of students of the Greek tongue would be greatly increased."

"Aye," said Antony, "or even some of the Germans and Hollanders themselves, who have been these men's pupils, might serve your turn. Good truth, they say it is a noble language. I would I myself had had the chance of studying the writings of Homer and Aristotle in their own vernacular, rather than through the medium of a translation."

"It is a privilege which I look forward to enjoying before long," responded Colet, "and there be other writers also—"

"Aye, there are the writers of the Holy Scripture," interrupted Father Hulett, with his soft smile—"holy Matthew, and Luke and Paul; they wrote in the Greek. Doubtless Master Colet refers to them."

He looked at Colet, as though he expected some reply; but the young Oxford student was silent, and Hemyng hastened to change the conversation.

"Who was your visitor, my sister?" he inquired, turning to Alice—"the man I saw speaking with you, as we passed the drawbridge? He was a stranger in these parts, so at least I fancied."

Alice started and coloured. "No," she answered hastily, "he does not belong to our neighbourhood. He was only a person who brought me a message, a message from—a friend."

Her embarrassment was evident to every one, and rendered more so by the efforts she made to hide it. Father Hulett, however, did not seem to notice it.

“I saw the man you mean, I think,” he said. “Master Langham and I passed him in the village. He wore a brown jerkin and hose, and was a farm-labourer, I judge. Methought he had walked over from one of the villages round about. Was it not so, my daughter?” he continued, addressing Alice.

“Yes, that was the man!” she answered. “He had walked over from—from one of the villages, as you say, with a message. That was all. I never saw the man before. It is a matter of no moment.”

There was another pause, and Antony finding that his attempts to relieve the constraint of the party had no other effect than that of increasing it, rose from the table, and the confessor having recited grace, the party broke up. Langham, having bid a formal adieu to his host, with the customary thanks for hospitality rendered, took himself off in company with Father Hulett, while the other three adjourned to the pleasance. Here they seated themselves in one of the summer-houses, and being now quite out of the sight and hearing of the persons whose presence had embarrassed them, began to converse more freely.

“I have scarce bestowed my greetings upon you, John,” said Antony. “Your company is at all times welcome to me, but the more so when it is unlooked-for. I deemed you could scarce have been spared from your avocations at Oxford.”

“True, Antony,” returned Colet; “on a mere visit

of pleasure I could not have permitted myself to leave home."

"You have something to tell us then," said Antony. "I judged as much, though I said nought before yonder priest, and this friend of his, whom I scarce expected to see at my table. What has happened then?"

"Tidings have been received at last of Cuthbert Bredon," answered Colet.

"Ha, of Bredon?" repeated Antony, glancing instinctively at Alice, whose deepened colour shewed how the name affected her. "Where has he been journeying, and what is the explanation of his strange absence? And how did you come to hear aught about him?"

"I heard of him through Wolsey," was the answer. "He has now the charge of the sons of a great nobleman, at whose house he sometimes visits. While there a few months ago, he fell in with a knight who had just returned from the Spanish court, and who spoke much of the valorous deeds of one of his countrymen, Sir Cuthbert Bredon, in the battles with the Moors."

"In Spain," exclaimed Hemynge. "What should take him there? Are you sure it is the same?"

"It cannot be any other," said Colet. "Wolsey was struck by the name, as being that of an old college friend, and questioned Sir Robert Knollis on the subject. The latter knew all the particulars of Bredon's wanderings. He had left England on the false information of your death, Antony, at Bosworth; which he had been further persuaded to believe had been dealt you by his own hand."

"His!" cried Hemynge; "it was WOLFORD'S troop, not BREDON'S, that rode us down."

"Aye, and WOLFORD'S sword, not BREDON'S, that inflicted yonder wound," added Colet; "but Cuthbert was induced to think otherwise, and that a gulf, which could never be bridged over, had thus been opened between himself and his promised bride. Therefore he left England, and served somewhere with the Knights of St. John in the East, and afterwards transferred his sword to the service of King Ferdinand."

"And by whom was this falsehood palmed off upon him?" asked Hemynge; "but it is needless to inquire. It could be no others than these traitorous villains, WOLFORD and Abbot OSWELL. Nor can any one doubt their motive. But a day will yet come when this shall be avenged!"

"And is Sir Cuthbert Bredon still in Spain?" inquired Alice, a deep blush again overspreading her face as she pronounced the name.

"I should scarcely think he is," replied Colet. "WOLSEY was sufficiently acquainted with the true facts of the case to be able to assure Sir Robert Knollis that Bredon had been imposed upon by a false tale, and that you were not only living, but had none but friendly feelings towards him—nor, in sooth, had Mistress Alice either. Sir Robert returned to Spain soon after his interview with Wolsey, and has doubtless long since apprised Bredon of the truth. His return to England may therefore any day be looked for."

"This is welcome news, and I wish you joy, my sister," said Antony, affectionately clasping Alice's hand.

"It is indeed," rejoined Alice; "nor can we thank Master Colet enough for his kindness in journeying hither to bring it."

"I thank you," said Colet. "But, I fear me, I am also the bearer of news, which will not be so joyful. As I passed through London on my way hither, I learned that charges against yourself, or some of your family, (I could not ascertain which,) of leaning to heretical doctrines and practices, had been laid before the Archbishop. Pidcock himself told me so."

"Heretical doctrines and practices!" reiterated Antony. "This must be Abbot Oswell's malice. What will the knave invent next? Know you aught of this, Alice?" he added, noticing the expression of her face.

"I fear I know what it means," she answered. "Father Hulett must have discovered, and reported to the Abbot, that I have in my possession, and oftentimes study, a copy of the Holy Scripture in the English tongue, which Ruth Hettley left behind her. He has tried to enter on the subject more than once, but I have ever parried his inquiries as well as I was able."

"John Wycliffe's translation, I suppose," said Antony. "Have you it still?"

"I have," replied Alice firmly, "and I would surrender it only with my life. At first I hesitated to look into it, knowing that the clergy forbade it. But when heavy sorrow and trial came upon me—my father's death, your danger, Antony, Cuthbert's alienation, and above all, that dreadful message from Leicester—and there were none to whom I could turn for comfort; I was driven, I may say, to seek for support in its pages.

I did not seek in vain. Well I am assured that none can study it in a reverent and dutiful spirit, without deriving the rarest and most precious blessings from it."

Antony regarded her with an expression in which doubt and uneasiness were mingled with something of approval. "What think you of this reading of Scripture in the vernacular?" he asked, turning to Colet.

"It is a question more easily asked than answered," returned the student. "For the study of the Holy Scripture itself, your sister seems to me to have said no more than is just and right. How can it be aught but good to hearken to the words of God,—so their sense be rightly apprehended."

"But their sense may not be rightly apprehended through John Wycliffe's version. Is that your meaning?" asked Hemynge.

"I would scarcely say so much as that," returned Colet. "Wycliffe's translation was not made from the original languages, but from the Vulgate. So far as I know, his rendering from that is faithful enough, except, it may be, in a few doubtful passages. But the wise Jerome himself admits that he made frequent mistakes in the progress of his work. It cannot but be, therefore, that there is a double risk of error in the instance of John Wycliffe's work."

"The Church, then, objects—not to the reading of Scripture simply, but to the reading of Wycliffe's version, because of its errors?" asked Hemynge.

"In the main, I believe that is so," replied the Oxonian; "but it is hard to say. Certain it is that

since the diffusion of this same translation, the numbers of these Lollards have marvellously increased. Many, therefore, in authority prohibit the use of Scripture in the English, simply because it turns those who study it over to Lollardy."

"If the reading of God's Word makes men Lollards," interposed Alice, "Lollardy can scarce be the heresy they represent it. Can a good tree bring forth evil fruit?"

"Pardon, fair lady," rejoined Colet, "but they would say that if Lollardy be heresy, as they hold it to be, this indiscriminate reading of Scripture which propagates it cannot be right, because evil fruit cannot spring from a good tree. In sooth, there is in this matter a great difficulty, caused by men's errors and shortcomings; and it is easier to do ill, than undo it when done. For my part, I hope to be able to do somewhat hereafter towards remedying it, by turning aside the minds of our Oxford students from Scotus and Aquinas to blessed John and Paul. Good trust have I that, through the recent introduction of Greek letters into our University, much may be accomplished. So shall a truer and a wider knowledge of Holy Writ be diffused abroad."

"But the poor and unlearned cannot study John and Paul in their own language," observed Alice. "Is the Holy Book then, which is the common heritage of mankind, to be withheld from all save those whose wealth, and ability, and leisure, enable them to obtain it after the fashion you speak of?"

"The Bishops would say," returned Colet, "that if a man hearken reverently to the teaching of his Priest,

who has himself been sufficiently instructed in the Scripture, he would derive through him all the knowledge that was needful to salvation—that he may, in fact, see with his Priest's eyes, and hear with his ears."

"And wherefore not with his own?" urged Alice. "To what end have eyes and ears been given to all men, if they are thus to see and hear through the organs of others? Would men be content to behold the common objects, and hear the common events of life after this fashion, only through the eyesight and hearsay of other men? Would they endure such a thralldom? Yet, if they cannot bear this in matters which concern this life only, would you compel them to do so in the more solemn interests of the life to come?"

Colet hesitated a moment, and then answered, "I would not, Mistress Alice. In very truth the Lord is no respecter of persons, nor is it the great and the gifted only who are entitled to drink of that Fountain which was opened for all. The possibility of the misuse, by some, of the Sacred Books, cannot annul the general right. Rather should the clergy correct such misuse by argument and admonition. I would our rulers would put forth some version, which without misgiving might be placed in the hands of all. I account it unwise that they have not done so already—more than this, I cannot question but that, ere many years have passed, they will find it impossible to delay the step longer."

"And meanwhile what shall we do?" asked Alice.

"What can I say, except 'hope and pray?'" returned Colet.

"And forego my Bible!" cried Alice indignantly.

“Starve my own soul, and see the souls of those round me starving also, and make no effort to help them—nay, perhaps you would have me betray them to torture and to death—”

“Sister,” interposed Antony, “you are unjust to John. He no more approves than I do the persecution of men for conscience’ sake. But there be difficult problems, which wise men would rather leave unsolved; and no problem is more difficult than that of conflicting duties. Determine the question as you will for yourself, I am content. For my part, I would rather take John’s advice to ‘hope and pray.’ It is no light matter to bid men set at nought their appointed teachers. But enow of this. John, if we are to ride to the West Hill, as we proposed, this afternoon, we must set forth at once.”

They rose, and quitted the pleasance accordingly. Alice, left to herself, relapsed into deep thought. She had hoped for some sure word of counsel from her brother, or, at all events, from Master Colet, a man of approved piety and learning. Yet what had even he told her? Put it in what form of words she might, did it not amount after all to this—that she was to obey man rather than God? Was not this what poor Ruth Hettley was wont to say, though she would not listen to her at the time?

Ruth Hettley! How strange that she should have forgotten! But the interest of Colet’s conversation, and still more (as she honestly acknowledged to herself) of his tidings respecting Cuthbert Bredon, had driven the matter for a while out of her thoughts. She had in her pocket a letter, which she was almost assured

came from Ruth. It had been brought to her by the messenger whose appearance had attracted her brother's notice, and afterwards that of Father Hulett, though the latter, happily, had taken no account of the matter. She had thrust the note hastily into her pocket at the time, and dismissed the man without further parley. She regretted this now, as she had long been most anxious to know what had become of her late attendant. If she was correct in her surmise, this letter would tell her. She drew it forth and broke the seal.

Ruth Hettley's disappearance, it should be mentioned, was not quite so great a mystery to Alice, as it was to Wolford and Father Oswell. She was aware that there were many in Lynden who would willingly run the risk of the stocks, or the prison, or it might be, the gallows itself, rather than betray Ruth. She did not indeed know who had sheltered the girl, or contrived her escape, and thought it wiser not to inquire. But it must needs have been one of some dozen persons on whom she had her eye, if indeed more than one had not been concerned in her flight. Nor did Alice wonder at her long silence; communications, either by letter or verbal message, were beset by difficulties in those troubled times; and Father Oswell's residence at Lynden, so long as it lasted, was enough to render any attempt of the kind dangerous in the extreme. And though the Father had now taken his departure for some considerable time, Ruth might not have learned the fact, or, again, have been informed of the character of his successor. Even now it would not be safe for Ruth to shew herself openly at Lynden.

These thoughts passed through Alice's mind as she opened the letter. A glance at its contents told her she had not been mistaken. Ruth and her brother were, when she wrote, lodging at Welmouth, a town on the sea-coast some twelve miles distant. It was Ruth's purpose to come over to Lynden that same evening, arriving about dusk, and meet her old associates at Dame Heyford's barn. They had been apprised of her coming, and would be in readiness to welcome her. Alice was entreated to repair to the old dame's cottage before the hour of meeting, that they might have at least one more interview, and talk over what had passed since they parted. Ruth added, that she knew many might think her overbold in asking this of one whose station was so much higher than her own; but she had learned from her friends at Lynden that Alice was now of one heart and one faith with herself, and she knew she would regard that bond as superseding all earthly distinctions.

"She is right," said Alice aloud, as she read these words. "Ruth has been more than a sister to me. I will not fail her."

She waited till the last ray of the sun faded in the heavens, and then, opening a private door in the garden wall, took herself through the wood to Dame Heyford's cottage.

CHAPTER VI.

FATHER Hulett and his companion, Simon Langham, had no sooner quitted the hall of Lynden Manor, than

they mounted their horses, which had been for some time in readiness, and rode off at a sharp trot for the Abbey of Holy Cross.

"We are an hour later than was intended," remarked Langham, as they neared the end of their journey. "Norman Wolford will have lost all patience. How came the dinner to be so long delayed?"

"It had something to do with the sudden arrival of this young Oxford student, I believe," answered the priest. "But methinks none of us have much cause to complain of the delay. But for that, we could not have heard Osgood's report respecting Mistress Alice and this Lollard girl."

"Aye! The Abbot will be but too well pleased to hear that Ruth Hettley—I know her name right well, I trow, having been interrogated, and received instructions, respecting her capture I know not how often—the Abbot will be overjoyed to hear that she has been caught at last. You managed that well, about the messenger. If I had not been behind the scenes, I could have sworn that you thought he was no more than an ordinary yokel."

"It would not have done to allow her to think I had any suspicion of him," returned Hulett. "They are difficult fish to land, these Lollard pedlars. Long practice has made them as wary as foxes. But here is the Abbey gate at last, and, by St. Nicolas, there is Wolford standing under the archway awaiting us."

They were soon in the Abbot's apartment, the doors of which, and of the lobby outside, were closely secured, so that not a word of their conversation could be overheard. Then Wolford broke forth,—

"Well, Simon, what tidings? what tidings, Father Hulett? Is Bredon at Lynden? Do they know of his return home?"

"He is not at Lynden, certainly," answered Langham; "and from their conversation and demeanour to-day, I scarce think it possible they can have received any tidings respecting him."

"I agree with you so far, that I think they had received none when we parted from them," added Hulett; "but I doubt whether they are still in ignorance of it. To my thought, Master Colet's arrival seemed somewhat strange—like that of a man who came for some special purpose, and that purpose might well have been—"

"To apprise Antony Hemynge and his sister of Bredon's return," interposed Wulford. "Doubtless you are right. This Colet was in London only a few days ago, and closeted with the Archbishop. The news of Bredon's arrival was well known in his Grace's household. Be sure, Colet has journeyed hither post-haste to bring it."

"You are mistaken," interposed Abbot Oswell. "He nas probably enough journeyed to Lynden to bring tidings derived from his interview with the Archbishop; but, I doubt, it concerned not Cuthbert Bredon. Your charges, Father Hulett, against the Hemynges, of favouring the heresies of the Lollards, have been laid by Abbot Reinold before his patron; and I hold it likely that this John Colet, being known to be an intimate of Master Antony's, the Archbishop spoke with him on the subject."

"Ha, the charges have been brought to the notice of Morton?" exclaimed Hulett, with more eagerness than he usually exhibited. "And how, I pray you, did the Archbishop receive them?"

"So coldly, that the Abbot judged it wisest to drop them forthwith, and recur to them no more," answered Father Oswell.

"Coldly! you cannot mean it!" cried Wolford. "Why should he receive them coldly?"

"Norman Wolford," said the Abbot, "I have warned you, though you would not heed me, that a change has gradually been taking place in Church matters; which you, as a layman, may not have noted, but which has not escaped me. In the days of Archbishop Chicheley, when I was a child, these Lollards were dealt with after short and sharp fashion. Either they recanted their errors, or they paid the penalty of them at the stake. Even under Archbishop Bourchier, when I was a youth, there were small scruples made about burning half-a-score of them, if they continued contumacious. We, of the spirituality, had but to prefer our complaints, and the law straightway avenged us. It is different now. A man convicted of heresy is not tied to a stake, and a fire kindled round him, but he simply walks thither with a faggot on his shoulder, a mark is branded on his cheek, and he is suffered to go free again."

"Nor is that all," resumed the Abbot, after a moment's silence. "Not only are the charges advanced by the clergy against heretics treated lightly by the laity; but the laity have begun to bring their charges

against the clergy. Attempts are made to bring them to trial for alleged irregularities and offences; and penalties for the same are clamorously demanded. I tell you I like not the aspect of things. Unless something occurs to change the current of popular opinion, many years will not pass ere the attempt, made a century ago, to seize on our lands and revenues, and turn ourselves adrift, will be raised more loudly, and this time not in vain. The storm passed once without breaking; it will not pass again."

"If so, Lord Abbot," said Langham, bluntly, "were I in your place, I should take measures to save what I could out of the fire, while there was yet time."

"You speak wisely, Simon Langham," said Father Oswell; "even so I myself am minded. But what measures can I take? I cannot amass money by gifts for lowering rents, or by selling timber, or pawning the Convent plate and jewels, as some of my predecessors did. The Sub-prior, Father Joliffe, keeps too keen an eye upon me, for me to venture aught of the kind, unless in the last extremity."

"The Sub-prior," repeated Wolford, "your subordinate officer! I scarce thought you were the man to brook mutiny in your camp."

"Nor am I, Norman," answered the Abbot, "if either stern or politic measures would avail anything. But he has powerful friends, especially Nicolas Pidcock, the Archbishop's chaplain; who is also Colet's friend. And I myself am out of favour of late."

"You say no more than the truth, I fear," remarked Wolford. "I have myself sure information that this

Sub-prior, Father Joliffe, is labouring with others to bring you to trial on certain charges, which he has embodied in a memorial to the Archbishop. But I think you misunderstood Langham's words. If I am right, he referred to obtaining preferment elsewhere, not to making what harvest you could out of your present revenues. Was it not so, Simon?"

"It was," said Langham. "We are all friends here, and all, so to speak, sail in one boat. I referred to the offers which have been made to three at least of us, and which would hold good so far as the fourth is concerned—by the Duchess of Burgundy. She, you know, will never acquiesce in the possession of the English Crown by Henry Tudor."

"Speaklower, Simon," said Father Oswald, "though we are shut in thus together, for this is hanging work to talk of."

"It is impossible we can be heard by anyone," returned Langham. "Well, she has resolved to make a fresh attempt to deprive Henry of his crown. She may succeed: it will not be, at all events, the first time such a scheme has prospered."

"You refer to the attempt of Edward of March, when he landed in Burgundian ships at Ravenspur," said Father Oswald; "aye, I grant you; but Henry VI. and Henry VII. bear but little likeness to one another; nor will the Duchess readily find a general like Edward IV. to lead her enterprise." He paused, and then went on, "I scarce think it possible such an attempt could succeed. Still, even though she should fail, she has the means of rewarding those who have served her

faithfully: and were my position indeed a desperate one in England, I might accept her offers. But we have not come to that—not yet, at all events. I only wish to make it clear to you, Norman, that attempts to compel the Lady Alice to become your bride by threatening her with the penalties of heresy should she refuse, would utterly fail of their purpose. If it is true that Cuthbert Bredon has returned to England, and discovered the stratagem by which he was induced to leave it—I fear your purpose is hopelessly balked.”

“It shall not be,” exclaimed Wolford fiercely; “I will challenge Bredon to mortal combat.”

“You can do that, to be sure,” said the Abbot, “and doubtless he would not refuse your challenge. He is reported a very Paladin—knighted on some Moorish field of battle by Ferdinand’s own sword.”

“I fear him not,” said Wolford.

“Certes, we do not question that,” observed Father Hulett; “but bethink you, Sir Norman, even should you succeed in overcoming and killing your foe, it would obtain you small favour with the lady, who would only see in you the slayer of her promised husband.”

“It would gratify my revenge, at all events,” returned Wolford; “anything, sooner than that she should become his wife.”

“Nay, but listen,” said Hulett, “I can devise something at any rate less desperate than that. My Lord Abbot,” he continued, turning to Father Oswell, “you have been for a long time past in search of one Ruth Hettley

and her brother—the last-named a travelling hawker of John Wycliffe's poisonous wares—have you not?"

"You know that I have," answered Oswald, "for these four years past; but for some months I have abandoned the quest as hopeless; wherefore do you ask?"

"Because I have been fortunate enough to-day to light upon her track," returned Hulett.

"On her track—on Ruth Hettley's?" asked Father Oswald, with an eagerness which contrasted strongly with the tone of his previous remarks. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," was the answer; "I am persuaded, for I have kept the most careful watch, that none of John Wycliffe's books were to be found in the village until within the last few weeks. I except the copy which I feel convinced Mistress Alice has in her possession, though I have never been able to obtain a sight of it. But quite latterly I have noticed that one or two of the villagers have appeared embarrassed when I questioned them on the subject, as it is my wont to do. I have also from time to time observed a man, who wore a dress which was evidently a disguise, lurking about the lanes: Simon Osgood told me he was one of the itinerant hawkers who carry about the prohibited books. I caused the man to be followed, and have discovered that he is one John Hettley, an old offender, who has been repeatedly convicted and punished, and that Ruth Hettley is his sister, and further, that she is now with him in Welmouth, near here."

"And you know where in Welmouth she is to be found?"

“Yes, but there will be no need to repair thither in order to apprehend her. Nor would such a step serve our turn as well as what I am about to propose. I saw the man to-day in converse with the Lady Alice—

“With the Lady Alice, ha?” exclaimed Wolford.

“With the Lady Alice,” repeated Father Hulett; “and he delivered a note to her, which she instantly hid away. I straightway set Osgood to make inquiries, and have discovered that the girl is coming over this evening to Lynden, to hold one of her meetings in Dame Heyford’s cottage; at which she will read aloud from one of the volumes she carries about, to a large muster of the parishioners; further, Mistress Alice herself, in all likelihood, will be present. If you will give me your warrant, and also lend me a dozen of your followers, we shall be able to seize the whole party, having caught them in the very act.”

“Excellent,” exclaimed Wolford; “it will be impossible for the authorities to overlook such an act on Mistress Alice’s part. The law is too plain to be evaded. She will be at my mercy.”

“And Ruth will be at mine,” muttered the Abbot, “at my mercy at last. Yes,” he added, still speaking in an undertone to himself, “for this I will run any risk of displeasing those in power, or giving them a handle against me. Besides, the law will plainly justify me. Brother Hulett,” he said aloud, “you shall have the warrant you desire; and for men—you will find enough, I doubt not, among Wolford’s and Langham’s followers for your purpose. If not, there are many among the lay brethren, who will be willing to aid in such a

matter. Take horses, and all you may need, and set forth at once. You will scarcely have more than sufficient time for your purpose."

Instant preparation was accordingly made, and in another half-hour the party set forth. Wolford and Langham both accompanied Father Hulett: the first-named, resolved to prevent the escape of Alice; the second, moved by mere curiosity to witness the event. The Abbot saw them depart with a fierce satisfaction, which he had not felt for many a day past. It was strange that this seemingly insignificant and harmless girl should have awakened such a storm of passion in a man of Father Oswell's temperament. But her beauty, her innocence, her resolute courage, above all, the shrinking horror towards himself, of which she made no secret, roused to the utmost every evil impulse of his nature. One way or another, he would subdue her to his will: one way or another, she should be his victim.

A character like that of the Abbot of St. Cross will shock many, and it is certainly not a pleasant one either to contemplate or describe. But too many like him existed in the age to which this tale belongs, to permit of their being ignored in any book which professes to give a faithful portraiture of it. Of their flagrant immorality no one can doubt who studies the writings of contemporary historians—not those only, be it observed, who were favourable to the Reformation, but of those also who strongly disapproved it. It is as needless, as it would be revolting, to cite cases. Any student, unhappily, may easily enough find them for

himself. As regards their persecuting spirit again, it would be a mistake—though a mistake often made—to represent such men as mere worldly hypocrites, secretly indifferent to the cause, of which they avowed themselves the zealous supporters. For the furtherance of true spiritual religion they could indeed have cared nothing. But they were genuine and determined partisans nevertheless, and would scheme and toil and even suffer, to secure the ascendancy of the Church, whose soldiers they were. They cared little what hatred they might provoke, and what misery they might inflict, so they achieved their purpose. If Father Oswald had had no other motive for persecuting Ruth Hettley, than her persistence in practices forbidden by the Church, he would still have put forth the full force of his authority against her, without scruple or pity.

Meanwhile Alice, little suspecting what was passing at a short distance from her, had reached Dame Heyford's cottage, finding the old woman, to her surprise, quite alone. But the dame instantly responded to her inquiring look, by assuring her that the person whom she was seeking was close at hand. She accordingly left the room, and in a few minutes returned in company with Ruth Hettley.

It was a joyful meeting. Not only had Alice become much attached to the attendant, whose refinement and acquirements raised her so far above her station—not only did she honour her unflinching courage, but she felt that she owed Ruth more than she could ever repay, and was anxious to express her gratitude for it. After some preliminary talk, Alice begun to inquire by

what means Ruth had contrived to effect her escape, when she was so hotly pursued nearly four years before.

Ruth smiled. "The same good friend who now shelters me," she said, "was my deliverer on that occasion."

"Dame Heyford!" exclaimed Alice, in astonishment. "Why, we were told that her cottage had been so closely searched, that not a mouse could have escaped discovery, had it been concealed there!"

"Aye, truly," said Ruth, "they did not spare their pains; and had I been hidden in the cottage, I should speedily have fallen into their hands. But they never thought of examining the rick-yard, or suspected that there was a hollow place between two of the stacks, which touched one another. There I lay, snug enough, during the daytime for three weeks at the least, until they grew tired of their job. As I crouched in my place of shelter, I could hear the oaths and curses of those who were hunting for me, only a few feet off, and many times gave myself up for lost. But the Lord delivered me from their hands, and I got safe away."

"And where have you been living since?" inquired Alice.

"I returned to my brother at Oxford," answered Ruth, "as I had learned that my enemies had taken their final departure thence. We led much the same life as before, for two or three years; and have many times been delivered from perils, quite as deadly as those of which I have just now been speaking. Not once, but many times, have we been present at meetings, where armed

men broke in upon us, and carried all they could lay hands on before the justices. But through God's protection we ever escaped them."

"And to what penalty were they subjected, who were thus seized?" asked her visitor.

"That depended mainly on the temper of the persons before whom they were dragged. Some of these were merciful men, who only placed the accused in the stocks, or admonished them to offend no more. Sometimes the magistrates would condemn them to the pillory, and the brand of infamy, as they accounted it. Sometimes nought but the torments of the stake would satisfy their rancour."

"The stake," cried Alice, "for no other fault than that of reading the Word of God—oh Ruth, it cannot be!"

"Alas, lady, you know little of the ways of these men; I marvel you have never heard of their doings, even in your peaceful home. I have known the father of a family, a man who had ever borne a good repute among his neighbours—I have known him burnt alive at his own cottage door, because he would not swear to close his ears to the reading of the Scriptures! Yea, and his wife and his little children were forced to stand by, and behold his sufferings. Worse even than that, I have heard of a wife being compelled to carry the wood which was to burn her husband."

"It is too dreadful for belief," cried Alice; "and yet the people persist?"

"They do: these cruelties, far from accomplishing the purpose of those who practise them, only make fresh

converts to the Faith. Trust me, they will have to exterminate the whole nation, before they can succeed in extinguishing the flame that has now been lighted."

"And your brother, Ruth,—it is strange that I should have forgotten to question you respecting him."

"He is well," answered Ruth. "Like myself, he has passed through many a sharp trial, through which the Lord has sustained him. He is at Welmouth, attending a meeting there to-day, and will join me here to-morrow; when we journey hence into another county."

"But our friends are assembled by this time," she added, after a short silence. "You will come with me, will you not?"

"I will," said Alice.

She followed her companion across the rick-yard into a small barn, which at that time of the year contained nothing but a cart, some hurdles, and farming implements; all of which had been removed from the upper end, so as to leave a square space of a dozen feet or so unoccupied. The dusk had been gathering so fast during Alice's interview with Ruth, that it was with difficulty they could distinguish, at their first entrance, who, or how many, were present. But the gleam of her white dress, as she passed through the doorway, was no sooner perceived, than all rose reverently to greet her, and she found herself in company with some twenty of her poorer neighbours, together with several who belonged to a somewhat higher station. There was old Bridget Hall, an aged granddame, and her young niece Margaret; Giles Møssop and his wife; Widow Osborn, and her two sturdy sons; Nanny Gill,

a cripple from her birth; Reuben Smith, and half-a-dozen more middle-aged men, nearly all farm-labourers, and most of them in her brother's employ; together with Pierce Eversfield the well-to-do miller, and one or two of the smaller farmers. The faces of all these were recognised, one after another, as her eyes became accustomed to the half-gloom of the building—illuminated as it was only by the reflection of the faint light outside, and the gleam of a single candle, which threw its ray on the pages of the volume which Ruth held in her hand.

She took her place as the reader, in a chair set for her against the wall, and opening the book, addressed herself at once to her work. "I have here," she said, holding up the volume, "the four holy Gospels; which of them do you choose to have read to you, and at what chapter shall I begin?"

There was a momentary hesitation, and then Dame Mossop, whose deep black dress and pallid cheek were evidences of her recent bereavement, asked for the raising of Jairus's daughter. Ruth complied, and in a clear, sweet voice read the history of the miracle, adding to it, the raising of the Widow's son at Nain, and afterwards that of Lazarus. This ended, Nancy Gill reminded Ruth of the cure of the sufferer at the Pool of Bethesda, which she had heard years before, and entreated that she might hear it again. Then, one after another, they suggested each some favourite passage, of which they had an indistinct perhaps, but most reverent recollection, and Ruth was quick to understand their references, and to comply with their re-

quests. After this, Master Eversfield suggested that, as so many of them had now chosen portions of Scripture to be read, it was but reason that Mistress Ruth should choose one for herself.

Ruth assented, and selecting the fourteenth and two following chapters of St. John's Gospel, closed the reading with them.

Alice sat in her corner, deeply affected by what she saw and heard. They to whom the Bible has been familiar from their infancy, who can take the holy book from the shelf, and read it as often and as long as they please, can form no idea of how it sounded in the ears of these untaught and simple-minded people, who only at rare intervals, and under conditions of the greatest difficulty and danger, could hear any of its holy lessons. The whole scene was indeed most deeply impressive. The dim light, and the rude surroundings; the sense of companionship, at once in a holy cause and a deadly danger, and of trust in Divine power to preserve them from it; the glorious and solemn words, which had never sounded so glorious and solemn to her before; the marvels of love and power they set forth; the simple reverence and delight of the unlettered audience—all these brought forcibly before her the history of the Church's earliest and holiest days, when Christian men and women would meet secretly in the vaults of the Catacombs to worship the God they had so lately found, knowing, that should they be discovered, the stake or the fangs of the wild beast would be their portion.

She was too deeply lost in thought to notice a slight

sound in the yard outside, like that of the muffled tread of a large body of men. But the more experienced ears of several present at once heard and understood the meaning of the noise. They started up, and looked round for some avenue of escape. The next moment the doors on either side were forced in, and Wolford and Langham, each followed by a file of armed men, burst into the building.

"Let all keep their places," thundered Norman; "cut down, without mercy, any who attempt to fly."

He was obeyed in silence; resistance and escape were alike impossible.

"Seize yonder girl," was his next command, as he pointed to Ruth. "She is the main mover of this heretical treason: see the book still in her hand! Take it from her, Geoffrey; and do you and Leonard tie her securely, and convey her straight to St. Cross. This time, at least, she shall not give us the slip. Ha, Master Eversfield, and you, too, Miles Stidolph, and James Soltram, how come men of your station into company like this? By my faith, ye must look for a turn at the pillory, or a round sum by way of fine, at the least, for this! and you,—by St. George, it cannot be!" he exclaimed, with well-acted surprise, as his eye lighted on Alice Hemyng,—"It cannot be, and yet it is,—Mistress Alice herself. By what strange mischance, Madam—"

"By no mischance, Sir," interposed Alice calmly. "I came here to hear the Word of God read aloud to the people. If that be an offence, I am guilty of it?"

"I am deeply grieved, Mistress Alice, to find you in

such a position. Had I suspected aught of the kind, I had not undertaken this duty. Even now, were it in my power, I would gladly let you go free. But so many have seen you here, that it would be hopeless to attempt concealment—”

“I desire none, Sir,” again interrupted Alice; “I am your prisoner, carry me whither you will.”

CHAPTER VII.

It was early in the forenoon of the day after the apprehension of Alice and Ruth. John Colet, looking anxious and troubled, was pacing up and down the broad walk in front of Lynden Manor, in company with a tall and powerful man, whose dress and carriage alike bore token of the soldier. The dark locks which clustered round his temples had in many places been worn short by the continual pressure of the helmet, and the fresh tint of the cheek and forehead had grown swarthy under warmer suns than those of England. It was no other than our former acquaintance Cuthbert Bredon; whom the tidings conveyed by Sir Robert Knollis to the Court of Castile had brought without an hour's delay to England. He had arrived at Lynden late in the evening of the previous day, and chancing to fall in with Antony and Colet on their return from their excursion, had ridden to the Manor in their company. Their conversation on the road was sufficient to explain fully the treachery which had been practised; and ere they reached the house, Bredon had registered a vow,

that his first act, after the renewal of his troth with Alice, on the ensuing day—for now it was past her hour for retiring for the night—should be to summon Wolford to meet him in the lists, and answer with his life for the treachery he had practised.

“We cannot touch the worse villain of the two,” he said. “These Churchmen still contrive to work their evil schemes with impunity; though, unless I greatly err, their day of reckoning is not far off. But Norman Wolford shall not escape me. To do him justice, I scarce think he would wish to do so. He has the repute of a valiant soldier, and will doubtless answer my challenge hardily enough.”

“I believe you do him no more than justice there,” said Antony, “little as I love him. Well, the opportunity you desire is nearer at hand than, perhaps, you may suppose. I have learned since dinner to-day, that he is no further off than the Abbey of St. Cross, whither he journeyed yesterday in company with Simon Langham. Father Hulett has now ridden over to confer with him. What mischief they may be contriving I cannot guess; but I will be sworn there is mischief of some kind brewing.”

“We will pardon him the mischief, in consideration of the speediness of the account he will render me,” returned Bredon. “Antony, you will bear a message to him early to-morrow morning, will you not?”

“Aye, and with right good will, answered Hemynge. “The encounter, which I conclude will be with lance, sword, and dagger, may take place in the tilting-ground yonder; and Langham, with a dozen of his men-at-

arms, may attend to ensure him fair play, should he distrust us. You will not object to Langham's presence, Cuthbert?"

"Not I," said Bredon; "nor to Abbot Oswell's either, or that of all his monks, if he likes to bring them. It is a pity that Churchmen have ceased in these days to wear armour and mount war-horse, or he, too, might meet me under shield, and expiate his treason."

At daybreak on the following morning, accordingly, Antony Hemynge took horse as soon as the morning meal had been despatched; and his two friends were now impatiently expecting his return, which had been delayed for an hour at least beyond the time when he had been expected.

At last the sound of the horse's hoofs were heard, and Antony rode up. His brow was grave, and he alighted from his saddle in silence. Giving his horse to a groom, he led the way into the house, and entering a private chamber, closed the door behind him.

"What now, Antony!" exclaimed Bredon, as soon as they were seated. "Methinks you must be the bearer of no good tidings. Had WOLFORD left the Abbey before you arrived?"

"No," answered Hemynge. "He was there, and I had speech with him, and with Langham too."

"Does Langham refuse to back his friend's quarrel?"

"No," returned Antony; "we did not come to that. But Norman refuses your challenge."

"Refuses my challenge?" repeated Bredon in great surprise. "Is he a poltroon after all?"

"It is not that, or I mistake," said Hemynge. "What think you, John? You know him as well as I do."

"I am of your mind," said Colet. "I remember him for two or three years at Oxford, and have since heard much respecting him. He was overbearing and unscrupulous, but no one ever charged him with cowardice. On the contrary, he was daring beyond any man I remember. He fought more than one duel, with antagonists who were generally dreaded. At Bosworth, too, and at Stoke, he gained high repute for his bravery."

"You are right, it is not cowardice," rejoined Hemynge; "it is craft, rather. This villain Abbot has, I grieve to find, arrested my sister, the Lollard girl Ruth, and others, at a Bible reading late yester evening. Strange we heard not of it. He has them in his keeping, which he will take care to make secure enough. He, and Wolford too, will have free access to her. Doubtless they hope to work upon Alice's fears, or any way on her regard for this girl, Ruth Hettley—"

"Work on her fears," repeated Bredon. "With what object? To exact a bribe, do you mean?"

"Aye, the bribe of her hand in marriage," replied Antony. "I have long been persuaded that Wolford has set himself on accomplishing that, notwithstanding Alice's persistent coldness. That probably was his motive, or one of his motives, in the falsehood he passed off on you. Have you never suspected this?"

"No, by Heaven!" exclaimed Cuthbert. "I never dreamed his presumption could have soared so high! I knew he reckoned you his nearest of kin, and fancied his object had been simply to ensure your condemnation and death, that he might himself enter on possession. But that he should aspire to your sister's hand—he, the

coarse ruffian! By St. Cuthbert, my patron Saint, he shall dearly rue it! I will ride straightway to St. Cross, and force him to an encounter."

"It will not avail," said Antony. "They have the law, at least the letter of it, on their side, remember. Besides, they have secured the convent gates, and placed a strong guard at them. We could not gain admittance, unless by actual force. Indeed, I doubt whether they would not be able to make their defence good against any numbers we could bring."

"Must we then remain patient, and endure this outrage?" asked Cuthbert. "Are we to leave your sister in the clutch of these ruffians, to work their pleasure? It is not to be thought of!"

"Certes, that cannot be suffered," said Colet. "But I agree with Antony, that open force will scarce succeed here. Harken to me. I told you yesterday, that, when I passed through London a few days ago, I had had an interview with Nicolas Pidcock, the Archbishop's Chaplain, who informed me of the charge of heresy which had secretly been brought against you. But he told me somewhat more, respecting which I thought it discreet to keep silence at the time; though now the case is altered. I learned from him that a bull had been received from Rome, requiring the Archbishop to make inquiry into the state of certain of the monasteries, in which the scandalous lives of the inmates had awakened general indignation."

"I rejoice to hear it," said Antony; "never was inquisition more needed."

"Further," pursued Colet, "the Chaplain informed

me that a complaint had been laid before him, signed by Father Joliffe, the Sub-prior, and Father Vyner, one of the monks, of the misrule of Abbot Oswell, and the enormities perpetrated under his authority;—praying also that inquiry might be made into the charges, and the evils complained of amended.”

“Aye, I have known how deeply these abuses touched the good Father Vyner,” said Antony. “I wonder he has borne with them so long.”

“Well,” pursued Colet, “the Chaplain told me that he had not yet brought this petition to his Grace’s notice, the latter being too much burdened by business to pay heed to it at present. But, if it seems good to you, I will forthwith ride to Lambeth, and report to my friend what hath now taken place. I will urge him at once to present Father Joliffe’s petition, and move Morton to issue a Commission of Inquiry, which will take all authority out of Abbot Oswell’s hands, until the matters complained of have been duly examined into. The Commissioners will, I doubt not, deal leniently with this Lollard girl; for the Archbishop grows daily more averse to severe measures against such as she is. As for your sister, your assurance and mine that she will attend no more such meetings as that of last night, will suffice for her immediate release. What say you?”

“It is excellent, John,” said Antony. “Lose not a moment, I pray you, in carrying it out.”

“I will ride with you, Master Colet,” said Bredon. “I, too, have friends at court, who may be serviceable in this matter. Moreover, I have heard somewhat of this

Abbot's dealings with the Court of Burgundy, which he may find it somewhat difficult to answer."

"Have with you then," said Colet; "we shall reach London with sharp riding in time to have an audience with the Archbishop this afternoon, if he be minded to receive us."

"I will go order the horses," said Hemynge. "John, you shall have brown Lancelot. It is the best steed in my stable, and will carry you to London before the twilight falls, if you handle him rightly."

Meanwhile there was rejoicing at St. Cross over the success of Wolford's and Langham's enterprise. The Lady Alice, on her arrival at the abbey, had been lodged with the consideration due to her rank in a handsome apartment, with attendants of her own sex to wait upon her. She was informed, however, that she would be most strictly guarded, and no one permitted to visit her,—until she had been arraigned before the Lord Abbot for the offence against the law, as laid down by Archbishop Arundel, of which she had been guilty. Ruth, with less ceremony, was conveyed to one of the prisons beneath the Abbot's house, in which refractory vassals, or small tenants who refused to pay the dues to the monastery, were wont to be incarcerated, until the imprisonment brought them to a more towardly frame of mind. Sometimes, though very rarely, some of the brethren who persistently rebelled against the Abbot's authority, had paid a visit to the same undesirable lodging; but this of late years had been quite discontinued.

The cell—for it was too small to merit the name of a dungeon—was lighted by a narrow slit, opening on

a walled area of about ten feet deep, so that no gleam of the sky was visible through it, even during the brightest hours of the day. It was furnished with a rude stool and a heap of straw. These, with the brown pitcher and metal dish common to all such melancholy chambers, constituted its entire garniture. Ruth had been hastily thrust into this place of confinement, and the door closed upon her immediately after her arrival,—the attention of the jailer having been engaged chiefly in making provision for the reception of the Lady Alice. Ruth passed the night on her bed of straw, calm and composed. It was not the first, by many times, that she had been exposed to the like peril, and the lesson of entire trust in her Divine Protector had been fully learned. She anticipated with patient fortitude the trial of the ensuing day—the stern questions, the angry rebukes, the peremptory demand of entire submission to the Church's will, or the threat of instant and sharp punishment. She knew into whose hands she had fallen—that, un pitying as judges were apt to be in those days towards offenders like herself, there was no judge in all England likely to be so pitiless, in her instance at least, as Abbot Oswell.

She remained all the following morning in expectation of the summons before his tribunal. But the hours passed on, the light grew as strong as it ever shewed itself in that dreary vault; then began slowly to fade, until utter darkness succeeded, and still her solitude remained unbroken. Enough bread and water had been left in the cell at her entrance to last her through the day. She ate what remained of the bread, drained the

last drop of water from the pitcher, and then lay down again on her couch of straw.

She was awakened by a light glimmering in the gloomy chamber, and the sound of a footstep on the stone floor. She started up in alarm. A tall man, wrapped in a dark cloak, was standing by her side—the lantern which he carried scarcely enabling her to distinguish the outline of his figure. But she divined in a moment who her visitor must be; and the next minute the sound of his well-remembered voice assured her she had not been mistaken.

“So, unhappy girl, I behold you again.”

She made no rejoinder, and after a pause the Abbot went on.

“You know the penalty you have brought on yourself. I warned you at Oxford that it would inevitably be your portion, if you persisted in your obstinate rebellion against the commands of our holy Church. You know what the penalty is, do you not? Answer me, girl; why do you not speak?”

“I know I am at your mercy,” answered Ruth firmly; “and you may do what you will, so Heaven interferes not to prevent you.”

“Heaven does not interfere to save heretics and rebels from their doom,” said the Abbot. “And one who has been so long an offender, in spite of so many warnings and entreaties, can least of all look for such deliverance. If you are brought before my tribunal, there can be but one sentence for such guilt as yours—the stake and the fire.”

“I am prepared to endure it,” she answered.

“Have you considered what you are saying?” returned Father Oswell, quickly. “Do you realise what it is to die, in the very flower of your youth and health,—die, by a death of the most agonizing and protracted suffering,—with the finger of scorn pointed at you, and the Church’s final sentence of condemnation ringing in your ears? Have you thought of this?”

“I am willing to die, when it is God’s pleasure,” she replied, with unmoved calmness. “He will give me strength, as He did to His martyrs of old, to endure all that man could do unto them. For the scorn you speak of, and the Church’s sentence, I appeal against them to Him, Who alone can really acquit or condemn!”

“Are you indeed so determined, Ruth?” rejoined the Abbot, in a milder tone; “I would fain save, fain shelter you. You know how differently I would have dealt with you at Oxford, had you but hearkened to me. And so now—”

“I do indeed remember how you would have dealt with me,” broke in Ruth, with a shudder; “I am not likely to forget it!”

“Nay, but why reject my friendship—my more than friendship; ah, Ruth, my affection, my love—”

“Love,” she again exclaimed, “do you presume to renew your hateful proffers! you, a monk, styled by men a Ruler of the Church, a light and pattern of holy living! Do you dare insult a maiden by speaking to her of love? The very word on your lips is pollution!”

“Why so regard it?” urged her visitor. “How many hundreds of women are there who view this matter differently, and of whom the world thinks no scorn.

They are wives in all but name, loved, cherished, respected. They who are of your persuasion have ever insisted that none should be debarred from possessing the love of women. Why so bitter with me, because I maintain the same? Listen to me; I will bear you, if you will let me, to a foreign land, where you may live in safety, honour, and luxury. I will bestow on you my whole affection—”

“Cease, cease!” cried Ruth; “it makes my blood run cold to hear you. Let the Church alter its rule, and exact no vow of abstinence from marriage of its clergy; and I, for one, should say it did well. But as things now stand, for one like you to swear chastity in the face of Heaven, and yet in secret indulge your worst lusts, is abomination, which it shames me to think of! Nay, hear more. Even were you bound by no vow, I should still abhor you. I would die the most painful death, rather than endure the pressure of your hand!”

“Enough said, girl,” returned the Abbot, sternly; “I sue no more. I have never in truth rightly known whether I loved or hated you the more; your words have turned the scale! Henceforth we meet only as judge and criminal.”

He turned to the door, and the next moment the harsh clashing of the bolt was heard, as the key turned in the lock. Ruth again lay down on her straw pallet, and soon lost the recollection of her sorrows in sleep. Abbot Oswell remounted the secret stair which led from his own chamber to the dungeons of the monastery, and summoning a servant, inquired whether Sir Norman Wulford was still in his apartment, and if so, requesting

his presence. In a few minutes the knight obeyed the summons, his heavy step and moody forehead shewing that his frame of mind was near akin to that of his entertainer.

“How have you sped with the Lady Alice,” asked Father Oswald, “will she hearken to reason?”

“She will hearken to nought from me,” said Wolford shortly; “I shall waste no more fair words on her. As well entreat the sun to shine on a cloudy day. I told her I had influence, which could procure her release from prison without further inquiry, and she told me she did not wish to shun inquiry, and would rather it were made. I warned her that her conviction might endanger her brother as well as herself; and she answered that he was well able to defend his own cause, without the aid of any. I hinted that the fate of Ruth Hettley might depend on the evidence I gave, or any way on my view of her case—”

“You did not give her to understand, I trust,” interposed the Abbot coldly, “that the girl’s life might possibly be spared?”

“Nay, you authorised me to do so,” returned Wolford.

“You mistake. I said I had not yet resolved how to deal with the case of this Lollard girl, and should I incline to mercy, you were welcome to have the credit of it. But a more careful consideration of the matter has satisfied me, that none but the sharpest measures will avail in this instance. I find that she has long been known, not in this neighbourhood only, but in many others also, as the open promoter of heresy and rebellion. She has, I learn, been cited repeatedly before

other magistrates, and admonished, and has received slight punishment with threats of severer measures, and all without avail. Such determined obstinacy demands the sternest handling, and I shall not shrink from my duty."

"You mean it is your intention to sentence her to be burnt for heresy?" suggested Wolford.

"I do," was the answer. "My mind is fully made up."

"And the Lady Alice?" inquired Sir Norman.

"I have determined nought about her," answered the Abbot. "Sooth to say, I care not much how that is settled. Hark you, Wolford. I have learned much within the last four-and-twenty hours, which I only vaguely guessed at before; but which is of the last importance to me. I have discovered that those two meddling fools, Fathers Joliffe and Vyner, have actually laid a formal complaint of irregularities among the brotherhood before Morton, and prayed him to make inquiry into it. Had I learned this a few days sooner, I might have been able, by some means or other, to prevent the delivery of the petition at Lambeth. But I made my discovery too late for that."

"Surely, my Lord Abbot," observed Wolford, "that need trouble you little. Such representations have been made again and again of late years, and nought has come of it."

"True, but it will be different now, or I am much in error," said the Abbot. "The archbishop, Morton, is much changed of late, and he is surrounded by those who wish us no good. Hitherto it has been the policy of our rulers to suppress anything that might prove, if known,

injurious to the Church: now there is a disposition rather to proclaim and magnify it. It is not my purpose to endure the indignity to which I might be subjected ere long."

"Is your purpose then to quit England?" asked Wulford.

"It is," said the Abbot. "We were speaking only two days ago of the Duchess of Burgundy's offers, which I then deemed it would be unwise to accept. My judgment is different now. I surmise that you, and it may be Langham and Father Hulett, will not be indisposed to accompany me in my flight. Else be sure I had not mentioned this to you."

"I should not like to leave England at this moment," answered Wulford, "while the Lady Alice—"

"While the Lady Alice is yet in your power, ha! Why, Norman Wulford, where has your keen wit flown to, this time, that you see not that in this same flight lies your only hope of winning her for your bride! Why need she be left behind? If you carry her with you—"

"Ha! by St. Nicolas you are right, and I was a dull-brained fool not to apprehend it before. Yes, if I carry her off with me to Burgundy, she must needs become my wife. Her brother, her proud relatives at Court, even Cuthbert Bredon himself, must acquiesce in it then. But the means of flight—have you them at your command?"

"I have taken care for many a day past to have that in readiness. You know Stephen Luttrell, the Portugal Captain, as they name him?"

"Surely," answered Wulford, "that craft of his is well

known along the whole of this Eastern coast. He has taken messages ere this for you, to and from the towns of Flanders, if I mistake not."

"He has done so," returned the other, "and has been richly paid for doing it. To him I despatched a message late yesterday evening, desiring that he would have his vessel in readiness, in two days from that time, to sail for the Flemish Coast—"

"In two days," repeated Wulford. "Is it your intention to undertake this flight to-morrow?"

"If it is to be effected at all, it must be without loss of time," returned the Abbot. "But for this girl, Ruth Hettley, I tell you frankly I should have departed to-night."

"You will witness her execution ere you leave England, then?"

"Such is my purpose," said the Abbot. "I have already got together what money and jewels it is in my power to secure at so short a notice. They have been despatched this afternoon by a trustworthy hand to Welmouth, and are already, I doubt not, on board Luttrell's vessel. She is a roomy ship, as you doubtless know, and will convey you and any friends you wish to take with you, as well as me and my party. Are you minded to make the venture?"

"Aye, that am I," cried Wulford. "I would cross the Stygian river itself, and face the fiends on its further shore, to win the prize I aim at. My thanks to you, Martin Oswell. My hopes were just at the lowest when I entered this room, half-an-hour since. I know not what desperate venture I should have essayed, had

things remained as they then were. But now all is again well—better than it has ever been. If I fail now, it must be by my own fault. I will go at once to Langham; who, I will answer for it, will join heart and soul in this enterprise. At what hour is it your purpose to set out?"

"Towards dusk to-morrow evening," replied the Abbot. "The trial will take place in the morning, and there is nothing to prevent the immediate carrying out of the sentence. But we could not sail before twilight comes on, and therefore had better not enter Welmouth till then. You will be able to steal unobserved out of the monastery an hour or two before. Everybody will be drawn to the great quadrangle, to see the stake set up, and have no eyes or ears for anything else?"

"And where are we to wait for you?" inquired Wolford.

"In the cover of the wood, a bow-shot from the Abbey-gate; I will join you when the dusk begins to gather, and we will ride straight for the sea-coast."

"It is well," answered Norman; "all shall be in readiness."



CHAPTER VIII.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day, when a troop of horsemen, perhaps thirty in number, all well mounted and armed, were riding along the road which led from Lynden to the Abbey of Holy Cross. At its head was seen a grave personage of

middle age, whose dress and deportment shewed him to be an ecclesiastical officer of some kind, though there was something of the layman also in his appearance. This was Gilbert Woodville, one of the Primate's somptnours. He rode a stout nag, which ambled easily under him; and he was followed by three or four servants in the Archbishop's liveries. On his right rode Cuthbert Bredon, reining back his charger to keep pace, as well as he was able, with his neighbour's palfrey,—both horse and rider seeming to chafe somewhat at the slowness of the journey. On the other side of Woodville, Antony and Colet were engaged in a conversation, which interested them so much apparently, as to render them insensible to the tardy pace at which they were proceeding.

“It was unfortunate,” Colet was saying; “but it could not be avoided. We reached Lambeth just as the Archbishop was on the point of sitting down to supper; and he had with him guests of too much distinction to allow of any message being taken to him while they continued at the palace.”

“But you saw him last night?”

“Yes; Nicolas Pidcock, who is ever my good friend, obtained an audience for us as soon as the Duke of Bedford had departed; and the Archbishop heard us without interruption. He had learned somewhat, it appeared, already, of the scandals current respecting the Abbey of St. Cross, and had it in mind to issue a commission of inquiry into that, as well as into one or two other like cases. Father Joliffe's petition and our own statement determined him to do so at once. He

gave the needful orders before we left him; but it was too late for the necessary documents to be begun that night,—indeed, it was only by the utmost exertion of Pidcock's authority, that we got them duly signed this morning. Then we set off without a moment's delay, and are, I trust, still in time to prevent mischief."

"I trust so indeed," assented Antony. "But, knowing the bitter malice and unscrupulous craft of Abbot Oswell, I am on thorns as long as he holds my sister in his power. I am concerned also for this unhappy maiden, as well as for my tenants and neighbours, some of whom he has carried off, and of whom he may exact extortionate fines, or revenge himself on them, if they refuse to pay."

"But you have received information, have you not, that, up to this morning, he has taken no step respecting the prisoners?"

"Yes; Ruth Hettley's brother, who was hanging about the monastery yesterday to gain what tidings he could, came to Lynden this morning with the intelligence, that, so far, nothing at all had been done. Probably the Abbot designed to try the effect of imprisonment on his captives. But Ruth Hettley, her brother had ascertained, was to undergo her trial this morning, and none of the others were to be dealt with at all for the present. The girl's trial is probably now in progress. It could hardly have been commenced before Sext, and would, I suppose, occupy some time."

"At all events," continued Antony, "we may hope to reach St. Cross before any sentence, that may have been pronounced, can be executed. But whom have we here?"

he added, as a man issued forth from the covert of the thicket by which the road was bordered, and approached the horsemen,—“who may this man be? Ha, it is John Hettley! I bade him return, and still keep watch on what was passing. Well, Hettley, what news do you bring? Is the damsel’s trial concluded?”

“I have not been able to obtain admission within the monastery to-day,” answered the man; “the entrance is more closely guarded than ever. There is also a company of a dozen horsemen, armed to the teeth, stationed outside the walls, at the distance of an arrow’s flight from them, I should think. I crept as near as I could venture, to ascertain what was their purpose.”

“Ha!” said Cuthbert, who had been listening attentively, “they have gained some inkling of our intention, and are resolved to deprive us by force of the Archbishop’s instrument, without which our commission could not be executed. But we will baffle them.”

“Under your favour, Sir, I do not think that can be their object,” said Hettley. “Their muster is not strong enough for such an attempt. Moreover they seem, notwithstanding their arms, to be preparing for flight rather than attack. They have a prisoner, too,—a lady as I think,—carefully muffled up, and guarded—”

“A lady!” exclaimed Cuthbert, “and carefully guarded! It must be the Lady Alice! There is some deeper treachery at work here than we had guessed. Good fellow, can you guide us by a path through the woods, so that we may come upon them before they have any knowledge of our approach?”

"I think I can," answered Hettley. "There is a thick growth of ilexes and laurels, about a hundred yards from the spot where they are stationed, which would completely conceal your whole party. Only be sure to observe the strictest silence, and be careful that your horses tread only on the turf; and I can bring you within a stone's throw of them, before they will have the slightest suspicion of your neighbourhood."

"Do so," said Antony, "and you shall be rewarded—nay, I forgot, you will need no reward. Cuthbert, it will be the best course, I think, for me and my men to remain on one side of the glade of which he speaks, and with which, if I do not mistake, I am well acquainted, while you ride on to the opposite end. So we shall have them on two sides, and be able to intercept them, in whichever direction they may attempt to fly."

"It is well thought of," returned Cuthbert. "Hark you, my men!" he continued, addressing his followers; "There is a knot of these traitors, whom we shall succeed in seizing if we are cool and wary. Let every man ride cautiously, and in strict silence, until the signal is given, which will be a blast on this horn; then all break cover together, and ride down any one who refuses to surrender himself a prisoner. Now lead the way, Hettley. Stay, let him have yonder led horse. You can ride, I suppose, can you not?"

"On a pinch—well enough," answered Hettley; and the whole troop was soon in motion again.

Meanwhile, Wolford and Langham were awaiting the arrival of their accomplice with a feeling of im-

patience, which increased with every quarter-of-an-hour of delay.

"I marvel what can induce the Abbot to linger thus!" exclaimed Langham, as he paced restlessly to and fro on a smooth stretch of turf, near which his horse and several others stood picketed. "He must know there is risk in tarrying here, risk which grows greater every hour. What can the punishment of this heretic girl signify, when compared with our safety?"

"Our friend loves his safety right well," rejoined Wulford, who had remained seated on his horse, "no man loves it better. But he loves his revenge even more."

"He has had ample time for any revenge he could desire," said Langham. "The preparations for burning a Lollard do not usually take so long, I trow. There are stout stakes enow, and faggots to boot, in the Convent wood-yard. All might have been over two hours ago."

"Aye, but the Abbot explained why that was not done. We might perhaps have left the Abbey three hours since, for the matter of that, had we so chosen, but we could not have ventured to embark at Welmouth till the dusk had fallen. We might be questioned, and perhaps stopped. But I own I wonder at the delay now. The twilight has been gathering for the last half-hour and more."

"Were you present at the trial?" asked Langham.

"I was," was the answer. "I had to give my evidence, you know. The Abbot would abate no jot of formality, notwithstanding that he had determined the issue long before."

"Did the girl bear up bravely?"

"Bravely, said you? The bravest man in England could not have borne himself more gallantly! By our Lady, I could not but marvel at her constancy; and methought the Abbot himself must needs be moved to pity by it. Yet he shewed no more emotion than the carved figure of St. Benedict in the niche above him! He pronounced the sentence on the stout-hearted girl, as calmly, as though he had but been giving notice of one of the Church's fasts or festivals!"

"His heart might match the stone image of which you speak for hardness," observed Langham. "But hark, what is that?" he added with a start, as, all of a moment, a deep hollow sound was heard reverberating through the forest glades.

"The great bell tolling for the execution of the heretic," said Wolford. "It is strange I had forgotten that was to be the signal. All will now soon be over. And ha, what is that too?" he added a moment later, as the note of a bugle rang out from the depths of the forest, and armed men were seen issuing from the cover of the greenwood.

"To horse, Simon!" he once more shouted. "It is Hemynge and Bredon. I know their crests. Surround and protect the Lady Alice there, or, by all the fiends, she will fall into their hands!"

He spurred forward as he spoke, but too late to accomplish his object. Bredon, followed by half-a-score of his men, had already reached the spot where Alice had been stationed. The soldiers placed in charge of her, startled at the suddenness of the attack, gave way

before the advance of the enemy. In another instant Cuthbert, leaping from his horse, had released her from her bonds. Almost at the same moment he was joined by Hemynge and his followers; and Wolford found himself confronted by a force greatly outnumbering his own.

"We must ride for it, Norman," said Langham, pricking up; "it would be useless to hope for aid from the Abbot. Few of his men are under arms to-day; and even were they all to join our party, these fellows would be too many for us. But they do not know the byways of the wood, and we may escape their pursuit."

"Fly if thou wilt," said Wolford. "I will not. Revenge is still left me. Ho, Cuthbert Bredon," he shouted, riding straight to the spot where the knight was now standing, with Alice leaning on his shoulder. "Dare you repeat your challenge of yesterday, or are you one of those who make loud boasting at the feast or in the bower, but shrink from making it good in the hour of battle?"

"Unknightly villain," retorted Bredon sternly, "you are unworthy the lance of an honourable man. Yet you shall not escape me. Be this decided on the instant. Rein back your horse, and take ground for our encounter; and Antony do thou give the signal of onset."

He leaped on his charger as he spoke, and moving off some thirty paces, again turned and laid his spear in rest. Wolford had already done the same. The next moment Hemynge's signal was heard, and both, putting their steeds in motion, rushed at full speed against each other.

The charge of the knights in the fifteenth century, when both man and horse wore the heavy plated armour of the period, must, in sooth, have been a fearful sight to witness. So fierce was the crash of the encounter between Bredon and Wolford, that it seemed to the bystanders that neither champion could escape from it without deadly hurt. Wolford's lance was shivered to fragments against his adversary's shield. Practised warrior as he was, Cuthbert was hurled backwards on his horse's croup, only escaping a heavy fall by clutching the mane of his charger, as it reared almost upright under the shock. But his own weapon had been levelled with more dextrous management, or with greater good fortune. It passed over the top of Wolford's shield, and striking the latter exactly at the spot where gorget and corslet met, broke through the fastenings, and penetrated the throat. Norman fell heavily to the ground, and his frightened charger, breaking loose from his rider's hold on the rein, galloped wildly into the forest. Cuthbert sprang from his saddle, and was about to require the fallen man's immediate surrender, when a glance assured him that the demand was needless.

One of Wolford's squires pressed to his master's side. He raised the visor, and would have removed the helmet, but the dying man resisted the attempt.

"Bredon," he said in a faint voice, "the day is yours, and I am rightly served. I would fain do somewhat—"

"Hasten to the Abbey," said Hemynge, "and bring hither Father Joliffe or Father Vyner. They are both comfortable men at an hour like this."

“Forbear,” said Wolford, “it would be useless. Ere they could reach the Convent gate, I shall be gone. One thing I can do. This poor Lollard maiden—I would fain have remonstrated with—with Oswell against his vindictive cruelty, but—but I sacrificed her to my own advantage. Hasten—hasten to the Abbey. You may yet snatch her from his clutch. Ha—there—there!” he gasped, as a dense column of smoke rose from the centre of the monastery, “the pile is only—just kindled. You—will—save—her—yet.”

He fell back on the sward a corpse. Springing up and commanding their men to follow them, Bredon and Hemyngé rushed with one impulse to the great gate of the monastery, where they found John Hettley in an agony of grief and alarm, imploring in vain permission to enter. The guards gave way without resistance before the rush of the men-at-arms, and the next moment the assailants had forced their way through the crowd into the great quadrangle.

It was a striking and terrible sight which met their eyes. The whole area, large as it was, was crowded by the monks, and peasants from the adjoining villages, looking on with pale faces and shortened breath. In the centre was raised a rude platform of stones and earth some four feet high, with a guard of the Abbot's soldiers round it, to prevent the throng from pressing too closely. The platform was heaped with faggots and tar-barrels, which were now sending forth a lurid light, struggling with the volumes of pitchy smoke and the gloom of the gathering twilight. In the midst appeared the figure of Ruth, habited in coarse sackcloth, and

secured by iron chains to the stake. Her long dark tresses streamed loosely over her shoulders, and her white features, firmly set as those of a marble statue, were distinctly visible to all. The flames were whirling and eddying round her, but they did not seem as yet to have done her hurt. She stood as one too deeply absorbed in the contemplation of some distant object, to be sensible of what was passing round her.

"Tear down and trample out this accursed pile," shouted Antony, springing on to the platform, and dashing aside the armed men who would have stayed him. "She is still alive, the flames have not touched her yet."

He was seconded by Bredon and his followers with right good will. In a few minutes the burning masses were scattered in all directions; and Ruth, unfastened with difficulty from the stake to which she had been bound, was conveyed to a neighbouring chamber. One of the brethren, famous for his skill in leechcraft, was summoned to her aid; but the moment his experienced eye rested on the prostrate figure before him, he pronounced that any efforts to restore her would be useless.

"The burns she has sustained," he said, "would not in themselves be mortal; the flames had not been long enough in contact with her body for that. But these injuries, aggravated as they are by the nervous exhaustion of so many hours of suffering, are enough to destroy a far stronger woman. She cannot live an hour at the most. It is possible, nay likely, that she may recover her senses, but it will only be to pass away."

The leech's predictions were fulfilled. After half-an-hour of anxious watching, Ruth Hettley opened her eyes, and gazed in evident wonder round her. Her glance fell on the agonised features of her brother, who was kneeling at her side, and then passed on to the tearful face of Alice, and the sympathising looks of Antony and Colet.

"Where am I?" she murmured feebly. "Is it heaven, and have my friends gone thither before me?"

"My sister, my sister!" moaned poor Hettley. "God give me strength to bear this!"

"It *is* you, John. How came you here, and who has delivered me from the fearful flames?"

"My brother," answered Alice, "my brother and his friends. Oh, that we had arrived but one quarter-of-an-hour sooner!"

"Ah, I understand. The flames have done their work, though they have not consumed me; and I am dying, am I not?"

"Alas! I fear so," said Alice, bending forward and kissing her forehead.

"And why fear it, my sweet mistress? Is it not thus that I have always expected and been willing to die? Lady, you will be true to the cause you have taken up, will you not? You will not forsake it, though men threaten and forbid?"

"Never, while I live," she answered through her tears.

"John," she continued, turning her head with difficulty towards him, "I need not ask the same of you; we have worked together too long for that. You will have

to work alone now. But you *will* work, even to the end, and your labour will not be in vain in the Lord. Yes,"—she spoke now in a stronger voice, and a flush came over her face, like that of sunset on a snowy peak,—“I have assurance of it. The darkness is well-nigh past; the day-break is at hand! Before another generation has gone by, there will be a free Bible in England—the unchallenged birthright and heritage of the people, even to the end of time!”

She sank lower on her bed, exhausted with the effort. Once more she relapsed into unconsciousness, from which she only awoke to press her brother's hand, and then pass peacefully away.

Little more requires to be told. When order was sufficiently restored to allow the Archbishop's somptnour to enter the Abbey and deliver the citation, Abbot Oswell was nowhere to be found. It was ascertained an hour or two afterwards, that he had fled by a back way, as soon as the entrance of Bredon and Hemyng became known. Riding at the utmost speed of his horse, he reached Welmouth unchallenged, and embarked in Luttrell's vessel in company with Simon Langham, whom he had found awaiting him. He was next heard of at the Court of the Duchess of Burgundy, where he attained considerable distinction, being largely mixed up in the Duchess's schemes for the restoration of the House of York. Simon Langham also entered her service, and was killed six or seven years afterwards in the attempt made by Perkin Warbeck to land on the Kentish coast.

Notwithstanding the flight of the Abbot, the Commission appointed by Morton held its inquiry into the

charges which had been advanced, of the profligacy and corruption of the monks of St. Cross, eliciting revelations which shocked and scandalised all Christian men, even in those days of licence. Abbot Oswell was formally deposed, and several of the brethren condemned to penances of more or less severity. But the day of the monasteries had not yet come, and the Abbey escaped for the time the sentence of dissolution. Father Joliffe was promoted to the vacant office, and laboured zealously to restore the godly discipline of former days; succeeding so far, that when, some fifty years afterwards, the whole of the religious houses were put upon their trial, St. Cross was honourably reported of, and its inmates pensioned or provided for. But in other respects, it suffered the fate of its neighbours. The revenues were bestowed by Henry on one of his favourites; the greater part of the buildings were levelled with the ground; and the rest converted into a dwelling-house, where the reeve of the new owner of the lands resided.

As regards the mode in which this and other similar establishments were dealt with, a few words should here be said.

There can be no doubt that, by the middle of the sixteenth century, they had not only become a great and ever-increasing scandal, but their wealth and numbers were becoming a serious impediment to the growth of national prosperity. It was imperative on the government to check in some manner the growing evil. In many instances, doubtless, no more than the strictest justice was done; and in many others, if the penalties exacted were severe, there was, at least, much to justify

them. But, nevertheless, the measures resorted to were most calamitous. A great opportunity of securing the most precious benefits to the nation was lost; and endowments, which pious men had set apart for holy and beneficent uses, became the prey of needy courtiers and parasites. If the monastic houses themselves had been turned into schools, and hospitals, and almshouses, —if the revenues attaching to them had been employed in maintaining these and other like institutions, the condition of England in the two succeeding centuries—nay, even in the present day, would have been very different from what it is. The ignorance, the pauperism, the spiritual destitution, the alienation of large bodies from the Church, which characterised those ages, would probably have been avoided; and the present generation would not have had to make up, so far as it is possible for it to do so, for three centuries of sloth and indifference. Nothing could justify the alienation of revenues given for religious uses, except the fact that no religious uses remained to be served; and that, all men know, was as far as possible from being the case.

As for Bredon and Alice, and the other characters of our tale, the reader will scarcely require to be told, that the first-named were married a few months after Cuthbert's return to England, as soon as Alice had somewhat recovered from the shock of Ruth Hettley's death. Warm and affectionate intercourse was maintained with Lynden Manor. Alice often met John Colet at her brother's house; and it delighted her to hear from him the gradual, but steady, progress of the principles she had so nearly at heart; of which he grew in time to be

one of the most distinguished advocates. He did not survive to behold the fulfilment of Ruth's prophecy, in the public setting up of the Bible in the English tongue in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, for all men to read without let or hindrance ; but he saw afar off the coming of that day, and he was glad.

None of the shortcomings and mistakes of the Church's rulers in the fifteenth century proved so disastrous as the attempt to suppress, by the exertion of official influence as well as by open force, the use of the Bible in the English language. If the injury done to the nation by the violent suppression of the monasteries has been great and lasting, far more so have been the consequences of the other more fatal error. Had the Bishops exerted themselves to produce a faithful translation of the Scriptures, and diffuse it everywhere among the people, requiring the clergy themselves to make it their study, and urge its study on their flocks,—it may be doubted whether the great division in the English Church of the next century would ever have taken place. Such joint handling of the Divine Word could hardly have failed to lead to the amendment of many abuses, the correction of many errors, the healing of many springs of bitterness, the taste of which is even now in our mouths. Had the laity been instructed that, though all might read, it was not safe for private individuals to put what interpretation they pleased on texts, without regard to primitive tradition or the consent of the Church in all ages—they would, in all likelihood, have acknowledged the reasonableness of such a warning, and been willing to look to their teachers for the correct explanation.

But to forbid absolutely and altogether the perusal of the Word of God,—nay, to punish with the gibbet and the stake those who simply sought to study its divine lessons,—was tyranny, which roused the indignation of every manly bosom, and enlisted at last the whole nation against them. The rod of their power was broken, the faith of the people in their teachers was rudely shaken; alas, it may be doubted whether it will ever fully be restored!

THE PRIOR'S WARD.



“What mean you by this violence?”—(p. 459.)

THE PRIOR'S WARD,
OR THE
BROKEN UNITY OF THE CHURCH:
A
TALE OF THE TIMES OF ELIZABETH.

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The Prior's Ward, or The Broken Unity of the Church.

CHAPTER I.

NONE of the twelve months of our English climate is accounted so dull and sombre as November. Its leaden skies and leafless trees are felt to indicate the old age and approaching dissolution of the year. Yet there occur in it, now and then, days as balmy as those of summer, but exempted from its scorching heats; and so to a thoughtful mind teaching a truth—perhaps seldom recognised—that if old age indeed be happy, it is the happiest period of human life.

Such a day was the one on which this story commences. The sky was almost entirely cloudless: the patches of gorse and broom, and the evergreen oaks, which were the ornaments of Gerard's Cross Heath, shone brightly in the genial sunlight. It was a day which would be chosen, in all likelihood, as a suitable one for one of the football matches between two neighbouring villages, which was always looked forward to by both parties with interest—or perhaps, late as it was in the year, for a wrestling bout, or the return archery contest of the season. Any stranger who, surmounting the summit of Eveleigh Hill, beheld nearly the whole population of Gerard's Cross gathered

on the village common, would have guessed that some such cause had brought them together. But a nearer view would have induced him to alter his opinion. The faces of the rustics shewed no tokens of the mirth and joyous excitement usual on such occasions. In some few instances, the expression legible on them was that of stern and gloomy satisfaction. Others there were, who seemed bitterly indignant or profoundly distressed,—only restrained from giving vent to an expression of their feelings by the conviction of the utter uselessness, and perhaps the danger, of such a demonstration. But the crowd in general seemed to be awed and terrified, as though some dreadful tragedy were about to be acted before their eyes; which they were unable to prevent if they were so minded, and about which it was wisest to say as little as possible.

No one in those days could misunderstand what was about to take place. In the centre of a broad expanse of turf a massive oaken post had been driven firmly into the ground, having two or three iron chains attached to it. A pile of faggots close at hand, together with a heap of straw and a tar-barrel or two, revealed only too surely the purpose for which they were intended. The ground was kept by half-a-dozen soldiers, under the command of Lawrence Oldfield—a stern and harsh-looking elderly man, whose dress shewed him to be a personage of some distinction.

John, or as he was more commonly called, Sir John Harlow, was about to suffer at the stake by command of her Majesty's Privy Council. He had been for some ten years the Rector of Gerard's Cross, having been

appointed by Archbishop Cranmer to take the place of one Father Oldaker, dispossessed for his refusal to accept the reformed creed of the Church. Father Oldaker had been popular in the parish, and his departure had been generally regretted. For whatever may have been the prevailing opinion of the higher ranks of society, it is certain that the great majority of the peasantry were at that time attached to what was called the older Faith. Harlow was a zealous and worthy man, and did his duty honestly by the people. But the parishioners generally did not forget their old pastor, and there was a certain party in Gerard's Cross which would never accept the new comer's ministry. Compelled to keep silence throughout the reign of Edward VI., they murmured in secret; and in the third year after Mary's accession, a petition for the restoration of Father Oldaker to his former charge was made to the Privy Council. It was favourably entertained; and Harlow was required to submit himself to the authority of the Church, or make way for one of its more faithful servants. If he had either submitted or retired in silence, he would probably have escaped further molestation; for the persecution of the Protestants had now lasted so long, and had plainly so little effect, that even the pitiless Bonner was growing weary of it. Father Oldaker, too, shewed no disposition to press hardly on his rival. The presentation of the petition had been long delayed, mainly in consequence of the cold support he had lent to it; and it was only when he perceived that if Harlow were not dispossessed in his favour, he would be so in favour

of somebody else, that he lent it any countenance. He even paid a visit to the Parsonage, and kindly urged Sir John Harlow to submit quietly to the powers that be, as he himself had done when the other party was in the ascendant,—assuring him that he would do all in his power to make his deposition as little painful to him as possible.

But Parson Harlow was not the man to yield up his post after this meek fashion. He expressed his thankfulness indeed to his adviser, but gave no promise of compliance with his advice. On the following Sunday, when the malcontents, believing that the matter had been fully settled, attended at the parish church, expecting to hear Mass sung within its walls, as in the olden time, they were a good deal surprised to find the church still in Harlow's possession. The Parson, aided by certain sturdy Protestants of his congregation, had seized bodily on Father Oldaker about a quarter-of-an-hour before the commencement of service, and had imprisoned him in the vestry; while Harlow himself, mounting the pulpit, delivered himself of such a homily on the idolatry of the Mass, as warmed the hearts of his own partisans indeed, but roused to the utmost the indignation of the rest of the congregation. It was impossible to overlook so gross and deliberate an affront to the royal authority. The matter had no sooner been reported to the Privy Council, than the delinquent was conveyed to London, and arraigned before Heath and Bonner; when, continuing contumacious, he was sentenced, like so many of his brethren, to be burnt on his own parish

green. Notice of the sentence was forwarded to the Sheriff of the county, Sir Guy Wyndford, a veteran of Flodden Field, and a man held in high honour both at court and in his own country. By the good Knight it was received with feelings of great regret; for though attached to the Romish party, he had no love for fire and faggot as a means of upholding it. Further, while dissenting from Harlow's views in many things, and condemning his conduct as turbulent and seditious, he respected his general character. But whatever might be his private feelings, he was too loyal a subject to hesitate about carrying out the royal commands. Sorely unwilling therefore, he named the 17th of November, at noon, as the time for the execution. It was now near the hour appointed, and all eyes were fixed on the road leading to the south-east, in which direction lay Wyndford Castle, the High Sheriff's residence.

"What think ye of these doings, Gossip Aylmer?" inquired a man whose dress, of better materials and make than those of the crowd generally, argued him to be a person of some local consequence, a small farmer probably. "What think ye of these doings? if one may judge from your looks, you scarce approve them."

"I do not, Master Hardy," said the person addressed, an elderly man, with a long white beard and a benevolent countenance, which was now clouded with sadness. "These burnings like me not. Such things have ruined many a good cause, but never hurt a bad one."

"How, neighbour Aylmer, would you have men despise Church and Sovereign alike, and yet no order be taken with them?" asked another man, who had just

come up in company with the first speaker. "You, Sir Herbert's reeve too! Fie, Master Aylmer. Would you allow your master's tenants so to outface him, and nevertheless go unpunished? By my halidom, I trow not! Yet how much more ought our Sovereign Lady and his Holiness to be avenged on those who defy them!"

"Say you, you like it not, Martin Aylmer?" exclaimed almost in the same breath another man, whose sober and precise attire shewed him to belong to the party now beginning to be known as Puritans. "I marvel to hear a godly man like you say so! Blessed are these days, I uphold, when pious servants of the Lord, like good Sir John Harlow, yield up their lives in His behalf! They are the very seed-corn of the Church, and goodly and abundant is the harvest that shall spring from them."

"It is well," said the man who had spoken first. "Both of you, it seems, find ground for rejoicing in this work; though, by the Mass—which is quite the right oath for men to swear by now-a-days—the grounds you take agree not so well as your conclusions. Here is neighbour Pycroft,—he affirms that men are ever to obey lawful authority, and to be burned straightway if they refuse. But he forgets, methinks, that lawful authority changes hands so fast in these days, and the new hands are so sure to knock down what the old ones had set up, that a man of leisurely understanding is in danger of being sent to the faggots before he has fully found out what *is* lawful authority. And for what neighbour Dutton maintains,—if it be true that these burnings ever raise up a cloud of new proselytes to the same faith as

that wherein these martyrs died,—by our Lady, it will be a cloudy matter, in more senses than one! In bluff King Hal's time men were wont to be burned, sometimes because they stood up for the Pope, and sometimes because they stood up against the King. In King Edward's days there was no lack of fire and tar-barrel; and goodly was the number that had experience of them, because they stood not up for either Pope or King, but affirmed that all men had an equal right to preach and govern. Now, in Queen Mary's time—whom may Heaven preserve—there have been more burnings than ever, sometimes for King Hal's reasons, and sometimes for King Edward's; nor does the practice seem to be in any wise on the decline. Doubtless all is as it should be. Yet if all these are by their deaths to raise up children like unto themselves,—why Mother Church is like to have a numerous family, but of somewhat ill-assorted children.”

“You are a bold man, neighbour, to speak as you do,” said Aylmer, “though it be among friends. Yet I cannot relish your jests, let your wit be ever so keen. It was not by stern dealings with error, like unto these, that our blessed Master and His Apostles went about converting men to the truth. Rather He rebuked those who would have employed fire from Heaven, as a means of punishing men for their offences; and I cannot see that it mends matters much, that the fires used at these executions are kindled on earth. It will be a happy day for men of all parties, and happiest of all for those who are of the party of the Lord Himself, when these bloody and cruel punishments are stayed.”

"You are a good man, Master Martin," said Hardy; "and I stand corrected. After all, to burn a man is to put him to but an ill use. And it may be," he added, lowering his voice, "you will have your wish sooner than you may expect. I heard but yesterday that the Queen was sore sick, and the leeches had but little hope of her restoration. Her malady grows apace, and the end may come any day."

"Best say nought on that subject," said Pycroft, dropping his voice almost to a whisper. "I have known a man hanged ere now for prophesying the King's death. Were Laurence Oldfield yonder to overhear you, I doubt he would be for tying you up back to back with Parson Harlow."

"Aye, as the godly Ridley and Latimer were, some three years since at Oxford," said Dutton; "it were a goodly end—"

"Too goodly for me," interposed Hardy. "I avow myself wholly unworthy of it. But see yonder, where the Sheriff comes at last, attended by his men, with Parson Harlow in his last shirt, and the Priest on his right hand. But surely that is not Father Oldaker, or my eyes deceive me."

"No," said Aylmer. "The Father prayed to be spared such attendance; and Father Eustace, Sir Guy's brother, has taken his place to-day. Father Eustace is a kind man too, yet of a more stubborn texture than our present parson."

While this conversation was proceeding, the melancholy *cortége* had been moving slowly along the road, and had now reached the village heath. At the head of

the procession rode the Sheriff, Sir Guy Wyndford, a fine-looking man, more than sixty years of age. He was dressed after the fashion of the time, in a tight-fitting doublet of russet taffeta, a huge ruff encircling his neck, standing out as stiff as starch could render it. He wore trunk hose of the same material as the doublet, puffed out by horsehair, slashed and ornamented with quaint patterns and devices. A flat cap of velvet, with a drooping feather, together with the sword invariably worn by gentlemen, completed his equipment. He was followed by half-a-dozen soldiers, wearing the same armour and accoutrements as the men already in charge of the stake. These consisted of a steel cap and a breast-plate, thickened so as to be proof against bullets. Each carried a hackbut, with its clumsy wheel-lock, and its stock shaped after the likeness of a dragon,—whence the name of “dragoon,” given originally to those who carried the weapon. Bandoliers, supplying the means of loading the hackbuts, were girded round their waists.

In the centre of the throng rode Harlow, in the shirt of sackcloth, which was to be, as it were, his winding-sheet. As the day, notwithstanding its brightness, had a touch of chill in it, and Harlow was a man advanced in years, some one had compassionately lent him a cloak; and his guards had not deprived him of his three-cornered hat, so that his appearance was not so forlorn as was ordinarily the case under such circumstances. His demeanour was calm and even cheerful, and he returned gravely, but kindly, the compassionate greetings of such of his parishioners as were not afraid to declare their good-will towards him.

In the course of a few minutes the party had reached the spot where the stake had been set up; and Harlow, dismounting, surrendered himself into the custody of Oldfield and his satellites; who proceeded with short ceremony to divest him of his borrowed cloak and hat, and secure him to the upright post by the chains attached to it. While this was going on, Sir Guy had dismounted, accompanied by his Confessor, and advancing to Harlow's side, addressed him in a low voice, audible to themselves only.

"Master Harlow," he said, "this grieves me much: cannot it even now be avoided? You are not called upon to do aught of which your conscience disapproves, but merely to make submission to the Queen, as every loyal subject should. You are not required to declare your belief as to the change of the Elements in the Mass, or the sovereign authority of his Holiness the Pope, or the like; but only to express contrition for the hasty and undutiful words you have made use of towards her most sacred Majesty and her advisers, as well as to yield up peaceable possession of your benefice to Father Oldaker, whose entrance on it you cannot in truth prevent. If you will so declare yourself, I will take upon me to delay this execution, and, I doubt not, shall be able to obtain your pardon."

"Be guided by him I entreat, Sir John," added Father Eustace; "or at least take time for deliberation of this matter, before you thus cut short the thread of your life. You have hitherto refused to discuss with me the questions at issue between yourself and the Catholic Church. But I am assured there is much misapprehension of them

on your part, as regards some things, while others lie beyond the possibility of human knowledge. Will you not at least hear me, and prevent, if you can, this woeful scandal and sorrow?"

"I thank you both," returned Harlow. "Account me not obstinate or ungrateful if I decline your proffers. For submission to the Queen's authority—I profess myself ready to obey Her Majesty in all things in which she can lawfully require my obedience. But in things which are not Cæsar's, but God's, I must needs continue to refuse obedience; and such be, in reality, the matters now at issue. As for the argument whereto you invite me," he continued, turning to Father Eustace, "I shrink not from discussion; but I know full well it would avail nothing. The result would be the same as now; only that my people would peradventure believe that I was doubtful in my faith, or afraid to encounter death in its behalf. I would ask no further grace of you, than permission to address a few words to those here assembled, before the fires are kindled."

"And that is what Sir Guy, I trust, will not allow," said Oldfield, who it should here be mentioned was Sir Guy's Seneschal. "There is nought which my Lords of the Privy Council have more strictly forbidden, than these last discourses of heretics about to be burnt for their offences. It only incites other men to follow their pestilent example."

"And so bring them, in their turn, to the stake," said Sir Guy; "that were pity, doubtless. Yet it seems hard to refuse a dying man permission to take leave of his friends. Speak what you will, Sir John," he

continued, turning sadly away, "only I pray you be careful not to say aught which is like to bring others into the same unhappy plight, in which you now are involved."

"I must needs speak according to my conscience," said Harlow. "As concerns the lot which may befall any here present, that must be as the Providence of God shall determine; yet, if any should be called upon hereafter to yield up their lives for the truth, as I am now about to do, they would not, to my thought, be greatly to be pitied. Good people," he continued, raising his voice; "my children in the faith, among whom I have laboured these many years, and in whose behalf I am now called upon to die, I pray you to take notice that, in the first place, I freely forgive all who may have had any share in my death, trusting it may not hereafter be charged against them. In the next place, I call you to witness that I die in the faith of the Church of England, as she has received it from the times of the Apostles, purging away, in these days, the corruptions wherewith it had been overlaid. I exhort you that you continue stedfast in this faith, and suffer no man to beguile you with the perilous superstitions of the Mass, or the arrogant and tyrannous pretensions of the Pope to be regarded as universal bishop, or exercise sovereign authority in this realm. And, not to make many words, I pray you to live in peaceable subjection to the laws of this land, in all things save those in which your allegiance to Christ forbids you to render it. And in such things, once more, I pray you to regard human authority as of no value whatsoever. And now, Master Sheriff, having said my say, I am ready for your faggots."

This address was not heard without much emotion by his audience. "God bless you, good Sir John," they cried; "the Lord support and strengthen you in your trial:" "the Lord avenge you on your slayers," was added by more than one voice, notwithstanding the presence of the Sheriff, the soldiers, and the Romish Priest, as well as of the Seneschal, Oldfield, who was likely to hold such words in more perilous remembrance than any of the others. The old man scowled angrily at the crowd, as his ear caught their expressions of sympathy; and perhaps, if Sir Guy himself had not been present, he might have proceeded to adopt some measures for punishing their disloyalty, as he accounted it. As it was, he took no other notice than that of hastening the execution. He applied to the Sheriff for licence at once to kindle the pile, and having received a nod of melancholy acquiescence, was advancing torch in hand to the faggots,—when there was a sudden movement in the crowd, and voices were heard shouting "a reprieve, a reprieve! Excellent Master Sheriff, pray you command them to suspend the execution!"

The Sheriff turned his eyes in the direction indicated by the crowd. On the top of the hill, a long way off, a horseman was seen urging his steed to its utmost, and waving a kerchief over his head, as if endeavouring to attract attention.

"It is no reprieve," exclaimed the Seneschal, as the crowd pressed on him. "It is some one who wishes to arrive in time to see justice done on the heretic. But we cannot wait all day, I trow." He advanced with his torch as he spoke, to ignite the pile.

"Hold, Lawrence," said Sir Guy, "the man will be up with us in five minutes now. That is no long time, methinks, to tarry, when a life is at stake. Ha," he added, as the rider approached nearer; "it is young Walter Powell, if I mistake not. I know his horse, a bright chestnut, with a star on his forehead."

"It is he, sure enough," growled Oldfield; "a likely tale, is it not, that a madcap lad of fourteen would be chosen as the bearer of an order from Her Majesty's Privy Council! Are we to wait for every idle roysterer who may want to witness the show?"

"Your zeal outruns both your discretion and your humanity, Master Seneschal," remarked the Prior. "Were the case your own, you would hardly advocate haste so peremptory."

"Well said, Eustace," said Sir Guy; "and here is the lad himself. Well, Master Walter, of what tidings are you the bearer, that you shout and beckon to us thus?"

"Tidings of the deepest import," said the boy, as he reined in his foaming horse. "Her Majesty the Queen is dead; she expired between four and five o'clock this morning."

"The Queen dead!" repeated the Sheriff, greatly moved; "are you assured of that? Whence had you the information?"

"From the household of the Bishop of Winchester," answered Walter. "My father rode into Winchester early this morning, having business with my Lord Bishop at his palace. When we reached the gate, we found that a messenger, despatched by the Chancellor, had arrived only a few minutes before, with a summons for

Bishop White to attend the Council about to be held, in consequence of her Majesty's decease. My father remembered that the Rector of Gerard's Cross had been ordered for execution at twelve of the clock. He himself could not leave the palace, but he bade me ride, with what speed I might, in the hope of arriving in time to save him. May Heaven be praised that I have been able to accomplish my purpose."

"You are somewhat in haste, young Sir," observed the Seneschal sourly. "The warrant for the execution stands good, having been duly signed by the Chancellor, Heath, as well as by her late most gracious Majesty, whom may God assoilzie. I doubt not, the Sheriff will hold it to be binding on him to carry it out."

"Not so, Master Seneschal," said Sir Guy. "Until I hear further of the matter from the Privy Council, I shall stay proceedings. It may be, of course, that Master Walter here is mistaken as to the tidings he brings. It may be that the Council, together with the new sovereign, will order the sentence still to be carried out, in which case I shall of course obey. But on the other hand, their decision may be different, and Sir John may be spared. Say I not well, Eustace?"

"I think so," answered the Prior. "Let the stake remain, and the prisoner be taken back to a place of security for the present. These tidings will be confirmed or denied in the course of a few hours. See you to the safe custody of Sir John as before, Master Seneschal."

The old man complied, with a dissatisfied scowl on his face, and proceeded to escort his captive back to

Wyndwood—eyeing him as a terrier might a rat, which had escaped from his clutches. Sir Guy rode homewards, accompanied by his brother, while young Walter Powell returned to Winchester to rejoin his father.

Father Eustace, it may here be mentioned, had been some twenty years previously the Prior of a Cistercian convent, situated at no great distance from Gerard's Cross. He had been respected by all parties for the purity of his life, his ability and learning, as well as for his wise and judicious government of the brotherhood over which he presided. Great efforts had been made to save it from the general destruction. Such intercession in general had no other effect than that of bringing down a sharp reproof on those who offered suggestions so unpalatable. But in the present instance it was thought it might prove successful, Sir Guy having been an early friend and fellow campaigner of Henry himself. But the revenues of the Convent were too much needed at the moment by the King, for the pleas advanced in its behalf to be listened to. It was suppressed, and the Prior turned out upon the world; though not without the assurance of a liberal pension, and the offer of high preferment, if he would attach himself to the party of the King. But Father Eustace declined both suggestions, and for many years past had resided with the old knight, his brother, at his Castle of Wyndford, as the family Confessor. He had been too generally respected and loved to receive any molestation during the reign of Edward. At the accession of Mary, there had been some talk of restoring the Convent to its former splendour; but the build-

ings had in the lapse of the twenty years become ruinous; the revenues were in the hands of a nobleman too powerful to be lightly meddled with; above all, Father Eustace himself scarcely desired the restoration. He had become reconciled, in the interim, to the obscurity of a private station, and did not desire to be thrust into public notice again. He had, however, made use of what influence he could command, to requite Harlow and others for the forbearance shewn him during Edward's reign, by protecting them in his turn. It was due to his influence, as well as to that of Oldaker, that Harlow had so long escaped molestation; and if the latter had remained quiet, it is more than likely he would have been left undisturbed to the end of Mary's reign. As it was, attention was drawn to him chiefly by his own superabundant zeal, and the fire once kindled, Father Eustace had been unable to put it out.

The ex-Prior, or we may say the Prior, for such was still his general designation, rode home wrapped in silent reverie, from which Sir Guy attempted once or twice to rouse him, but in vain. Eustace was glad of Harlow's escape—persecution of all kinds, and more especially the infliction of death by burning, being repugnant to his nature. But at the same time Mary's death seemed to indicate that a new page in English History was about to be turned, which might be darker and sadder than even the previous ones had been. The faith of England would be again unsettled. The strife of parties might run higher than ever. When would the Lord give His people the blessing of peace!

CHAPTER II.

MORE than a twelvemonth had passed since Mary's death. It was New Year's day, 1560, when Sir Herbert Powell, accompanied by his son, Sir John Harlow, and several serving-men, rode over to Wyndford Castle to bestow the greetings and good wishes of the season on his neighbour Sir Guy. Harlow, it should be premised, had soon been released by an order of the new council established by Elizabeth, and restored to his former cure. Father Oldaker had never been very desirous of returning to Gerard's Cross, where he felt that he would occupy an invidious position. Sir Guy—who had entertained a sincere value for him as a pious and peace-loving man, whose views in many respects resembled those of his own brother Eustace—saw him depart with sincere regret, and would perhaps have interposed to prevent such a consummation, but for Oldaker's own wish. He therefore exerted himself to procure for him a small benefice in the adjoining county town, which Oldaker accepted: and Harlow was allowed to resume his pastoral duties without opposition.

The guests had been sumptuously entertained in the noble old dining-hall of Wyndford Castle, an apartment which had moved the admiration, it was said, of bluff King Hal himself. In the days of his youth he had been royally received there by Sir Guy, not long subsequently to the victory of Flodden, at which battle Sir Guy himself had been present, and had borne a conspicuous part. The visit of Sir Herbert had been celebrated by the introduction of a quaint masque, in

which men, dressed to represent the various nations of Europe, had made their appearance—each in his turn reciting verses, and displaying the products of his own land, which each declared to be the first of all nations. They ended however, *en regle*, by withdrawing their pretensions in favour of England, and Queen Elizabeth; the first of which, it was declared, would outvie all other lands in renown, as Elizabeth excelled all other sovereigns alike in virtue and in beauty, and would excel them in prosperity and glory. After the delivery of this loyal effusion, which was enthusiastically applauded, the guests gathered closer round the Yule-log, and began to converse among themselves.

“Whose be the verses, I wonder?” asked Sir Guy. “They do honour to his loyalty, whatever else might be said about them. They are not of your composing, Eustace, as I judge,” he continued, turning with a smile to his brother.

“No, they are not mine,” said Father Eustace, reciprocating the smile. “I am told they are John Horwood’s, the village schoolmaster; and as you say, they do honour to his loyalty, if not to his foresight.”

“We will hope that, even in that respect, he deserves to be commended,” said Sir Herbert Powell, “at least so far as our gracious Lady the Queen is concerned! Wherefore in truth should it not be true? She has now been more than a twelvemonth on the throne, and every day she seems to become more prosperous and better loved. I am told that when she makes her progress through the city, the people greet her with shouts, such as never have been bestowed on an English sovereign before. It is even the same abroad. Two

enemies she had, Paul of Rome, and Henry of France ; but both of these have been taken away from the earth since she ascended the throne. All the princes of the Continent court her alliance—Spaniard and Frenchman, Swede and Austrian—the burden of their song is ever one and the same.”

“You speak truly, old friend and guest,” said Sir Guy, “and she is in truth a noble lady, worthy of any honour they can render her. Yet I would I could view it as you do. It seems to me as though these sovereign princes were each striving how they might win her to support their own faction ; and that some day, when she has been driven at last to make her choice, the more part of them will be bitter enemies, rather than professing friends.”

“It may be,” said Sir Herbert, “but at least do not let us anticipate evil. Any way, whatever dangers may seem to threaten abroad, we have peace at home. Let us remember how for nearly one hundred and fifty years men have been burned in England, because their faith agreed not with that of their neighbours. Here is good Sir John Harlow—you remember how narrow was his escape ; yet here he is, a sound man, no man interfering with him. Here, too, is Father Eustace, free in the main to teach and hold what he will. Surely this is good, and men may well be thankful for it.”

“No doubt,” assented Sir Guy. “It is a wise and politic princess ; and if men suffer her to take her way, she will do much toward restoring peace and unity in this land, from which they have so long been banished. Is it not so, my brother?” he continued, turning to

Father Eustace, who had been listening, with a thoughtful expression on his face, to the conversation ; but, out of delicacy perhaps towards Harlow, had taken no part in it.

Father Eustace paused, and then answered, "May it be as you think, brother. There is no greater blessing, no higher privilege, than for a people to dwell together in unity. And it would seem that our Queen—who, I nothing doubt, will prove a wise and successful ruler—is minded to do all that may lie in her power towards restoring it amongst us. She has done some things for which I am deeply thankful. She has refused to assume the impious title of 'Head of the Church,' which her father arrogated : she has abjured the bitter and un-dutiful language in which the Holy Father was spoken of in her brother's days : she has caused words to be introduced into the new Communion Office, which at least disown the pestilent heresy of the Zuinglian. Some of her acts, doubtless, I cannot approve, and some I must needs deeply regret. But we may well surrender much, so that it be not vital to the Faith, for the sake of peace. She has silenced some able and honest men ; but on the other hand she has restrained the calumnies of railers, and violence against holy things. On the whole, I hope England under her sway may return to its sound mind again, and by patience and forbearance we may avoid that worst of all evils—a schism in the Church."

"You say wisely, my father," observed Sir Herbert. "Be it also remembered that those whom she has silenced—honest though they may be—would put no restraint on their speech, but assailed her royal dignity as a Queen

no less than her opinions as a Churchwoman. She might brook the latter, but scarcely the former. No King can endure to have his title questioned."

"True, Sir Herbert," remarked the Sheriff. "When his Holiness, the late Pope, published his bull, declaring her no true Sovereign of England, and calling on men to renounce their allegiance,—by our Lady, true son of the Church as I have ever been, I could not stomach it. Nor could you, Eustace, I'll be sworn! That bull of the late Pope—it likes you no better than it does me, ha?"

He paused, awaiting his brother's reply. Father Eustace remained silent for some time; but at last, perceiving that not Sir Guy only, but all present, anxiously looked for his answer, he said reluctantly,

"It is not for me to sit in judgment on the acts of my spiritual superiors, nor, pardon me, brother, for you either. The matter you speak of belongs now wholly to the past. The present ruler of the Church does not require of the faithful that they so regard their earthly sovereign. Let us be thankful for it. But I must bid ye good e'en. Old Dame Woolstan has been smitten with a sore sickness, and I must visit her."

He rose and left the hall in evident embarrassment. Sir Guy was not on the whole sorry for his departure. He had observed that Parson Harlow, though his respect for Father Eustace had prevented him breaking forth into open protest against his words, had with difficulty restrained himself. The door had indeed hardly closed behind the Prior, than he broke forth.

"I too am content," he said, "on the whole, with

things as they are. My heart goes along with the good Prior in what he said but now respecting the excellence of unity among Christians. It is in truth so rare and precious a thing, that, even as he said, we may well sacrifice some matters, which are in themselves valuable, rather than forego it. Yet there are sacrifices which we cannot make, even for the sake of unity; and there are things going on, as I learned but yesterday in a letter from the godly and erudite Bishop of Salisbury, which would, I fear, make it necessary for all faithful men to make their protest, and declare plainly that they would have nought to do with those who uphold or permit them."

"Aye, indeed," said Sir Herbert. "I grieve to hear you say so. Of what things in especial do you speak?"

"Of things which are tolerated, if not openly approved, at Court," said Harlow. "I am informed that, although the Host—praised be God for it!—is no longer elevated when the Supper of the Lord is celebrated, yet that the rite is performed to a great extent after the old Romish fashion. Two lights are kept burning, on either side of the consecrated elements, and the Minister who officiates is habited in the gold and purple and scarlet vestments worn by the Romish Priesthood. Above all, a crucifix is suffered to stand on the Holy Table. It is even said that her Majesty would fain retain the images of the Virgin Mary herself and St. John in the roodlofts of the churches. What would this be but flat idolatry, which no Christian man could tolerate? And if the Queen bow in worship before a crucifix, why not any one among her subjects?"

"I cry you mercy, Master Harlow," said Sir Guy. "But methinks it would be well if you weighed your words, before you advanced charges against your brethren so harsh as these. For more than sixty years have I knelt before the crucifix, to keep me in pious remembrance of the death of Him whom it represents; but I know not when, in all those sixty years, I so much as once offered it any worship?"

"I crave your pardon, Sir Guy, if I have in aught maligned you," said Harlow. "Pious and good men there may be, I doubt not, who regard the crucifix in the manner you describe. But they, it is to be feared, are but few by comparison; and the ignorant multitude bow down to it as to an idol."

"It may be," said Sir Guy. "But the abuse of a thing takes not away its lawful use: and my judgment is, that the multitude should not be deprived of the crucifix, but rather taught to use it rightly. And wilt thou, for thy side say, Master Harlow, that there be no superstitious or dangerous usages among those who are of your own faction—"

He was interrupted at this moment—fortunately perhaps for all concerned—by the sudden entrance of his granddaughter, little Grace Wyndford, who had been playing for the last hour in a large ante-room adjoining the hall with young Walter Powell, and her cousin, Hugh de Spencer—a great-nephew of Sir Guy, who had been left an orphan some fourteen years before, and had been brought up at Wyndford Castle under the care of Father Eustace.

Grace, a lovely little maiden of nearly eleven years old, ran up to her grandfather in a state of the deepest

distress, imploring him instantly to interfere between her playfellows, or they would surely do one another some deadly mischief.

"What, have they quarrelled, my little woman?" said the old Knight, fondly stroking her curls.

"Oh yes, a most dreadful quarrel," replied Grace. "Walter said, if Hugh were a man, he would challenge him to meet him with lance and sword in the lists; and Hugh replied, that if he were a man, he should regard a base heretic like Walter as unworthy of his sword. And then Walter said, 'Better a heretic than a traitor,' and Hugh got more angry still at the answer; and when I left them they were just standing up to fight."

"Heyday!" muttered the old Knight; "'heretic and traitor.' Have these two wretched words got into the mouths of babes like these. Alas, alas, when will they cease to breed strife and mischief among brethren! But we must see to this forthwith." So saying, he rose from his chair, and followed by Sir Herbert and John Harlow, entered the room where the boys had been playing. Almost at the same moment Father Eustace, having received a similar summons from old Lawrence the Seneschal, who had witnessed the outbreak, entered the apartment from the other end.

For the first hour of their stay in the hall the young people had amused themselves amicably enough with battledore and shuttlecock, shovelboard, and other like games. But presently, growing weary of these, they betook themselves to the seats ranged on either side of the large open fireplace, and began a conversation on the topics of the day,—ending at last, after the

same fashion in which similar conversations among their elders in those days were apt to end,—viz., in a bitter quarrel. Neither party being able to prevail in argument, it had been resolved to settle it by force of arms; and hostilities were just commencing, when Grace, as the reader has heard, rushed off to obtain her grandfather's aid in stopping the proceedings. But the fray broke out before she had well quitted the room, and was at its height when Sir Guy and his guests entered the chamber. Black eyes, swollen lips, and cheeks streaming with blood bore testimony at once to the acrimony and the prowess of the combatants.

They desisted on the Sheriff's entrance, and stood at some little distance from one another, each eyeing his antagonist with looks of fury and defiance.

"By the Mass, here is a coil," exclaimed Sir Guy. "Hugh, know you no better than to handle a guest and a friend after this unseemly fashion?"

"He brought it on himself," answered Hugh sullenly. "He insulted our holy Faith, for which Father Eustace tells us a man ought to be ready to die. And Lawrence Oldfield says that a man who is not willing to fight for it, does not deserve to be called a man."

"What he says is not true," cried Walter. "It was he who insulted our Faith, not I his. He said our good Archbishop was a coward and a turn-coat, and withal no more a Bishop, than one of our blue-coated serving-men. Grace heard him say it."

"No more he is," retorted Hugh sturdily. "I have heard Lawrence say so many a time, and I know Father Eustace thinks so too, though he may not have

said it. The true Bishops are all in bonds and prison for the truth's sake, and these men, Parker and his crew, are only mock Bishops, like the King and Queen on Twelfth-night."

"They are better Bishops than bloody Gardiner, and barbarous Bonner, who burnt pious Archbishop Cranmer and the others," returned Walter. "And besides, he said that good Archbishop Parker had acknowledged the Pope himself once, and then when he had turned his coat, ran away by night like a coward as he was to escape the consequences; and he broke his leg in running away—"

"And so he did," shouted Hugh. "The Seneschal told me so. He *is* a coward, and I will maintain it. I wish it had been his neck rather than his leg that he broke."

"It is a base falsehood," cried Walter. "The Archbishop is as brave a man as ever lived. I know that when the rebels in King Edward's time were going about, burning and killing, the good Archbishop had the courage to go into their camp and preach to them, when no one else would venture near them. And when I said that our gracious Queen honoured and upheld the Archbishop, Hugh declared that the Queen herself was more than half a heretic, and if she did not mend her ways—"

"Hush, Walter," said Sir Herbert, succeeding at last in breaking in after repeated efforts, "this is most improper language for you to hold. You are but a guest here, and even were it otherwise, you know nothing of the matters about which you are speaking; which in

good truth wise men avoid as alike perilous and unprofitable."

"I must say the like about you, Hugh," said Sir Guy; "only that your fault is greater, because Walter here, as I told you just now, is your guest. You will now ask his pardon; and by-and-by, I doubt not, Father Eustace and myself will have somewhat to say to you about this matter."

"Nay, nay, there is no need to ask pardon of anyone but of you," said Sir Herbert, goodnatureedly. "I counsel that we straightway go back to the hall, drink a cup in honour of our gracious Queen, and forget the idle chatter of the boys; which indeed there will be no profit in remembering."

They returned to the hall accordingly; and shortly afterwards Sir Herbert, having remarked on the lateness of the hour, which would scarcely permit them to return home before nightfall, caused his horses to be saddled, and set forth on his return. He took a most friendly leave of his old companion. "You will think nothing, Guy, of this foolish quarrel between our boys. Walter has been bred up mainly under the care of worthy Miles Everard, who leans more to the new opinions, as men call them, than I do. And Hugh, as I judge, has taken his notions from your brother Eustace and your Seneschal, who also are pious and excellent men, but who in their turn lean more to Rome than you or I. But it were a most unhappy chance if these things should cause coldness or ill-will between our houses."

"You say well," returned Sir Guy. "It is bad

enough that these things should make strife between men, so far as the conduct of public affairs is concerned, without their separating old and tried friends. Nay, think no more of this. Why, even the lads themselves will be all the better friends the next time they meet, which I suppose will be before many days; since it is my purpose to ride over to Fernleigh and bid you farewell ere you join Lord Grey in the North, as I learn it is your purpose to do. Does my friend Walter accompany you by-the-bye?"

"Unhappily he is too young," returned Sir Herbert. "I would he had been some two or three years older. That is one of the things that most disturbs me. I cannot disobey our gracious Mistress's commands to join her levies; but it grieves me sorely to leave my boy behind."

"Have you no one at Fernleigh in whom you can place confidence?" asked Sir Guy.

"No one now," answered Powell. "Everard was a sore loss to me. There is Harlow, to be sure; he is a good man, and loves Walter with all his heart. Ever since the boy's rescue of him, as he regards it, he cannot make too much of him. Yet I care not if I tell you that I do not wish Walter to see too much of him. He carries his notions beyond what I can approve, and is, I fear, somewhat bigoted and intolerant. I should not wish my son to learn to be the like."

"Can you not place him somewhere else during your absence in the North?" suggested Sir Guy.

"Aye, at some friend's house," returned Powell; "such as yours. It was that I was about to propose,

when I rode hither this morning. But I fear this unlucky outbreak—”

“Speak not of that,” said Sir Guy. “Hugh is hot-tempered, but he is obedient in general to Eustace, and will I doubt not be glad to have such a companion. Let him come hither, old friend, and make Wyndford his home during your absence. Our families, which have so long lived in amity and good-will, shall lose nought of it while I live, through me at all events.”

“Nor through me,” returned the other. “Rather it is my hope that our children should carry on the old friendship unimpaired, when you and I are in our graves. Nay more, may there not be a nearer union still between our houses. Walter is my sole heir, as Grace is yours; why should not the lands of Fernleigh and Wyndford be united?”

“I have often thought of it,” said Sir Guy; “and should have spoken of it ere this, had it not been that by my boy Reginald’s will, Grace cannot marry till she has attained her one-and-twentieth year. It may be it would scarce suit you that your heir should remain unwedded for nearly ten years yet to come.”

“Walter will be scarce five-and-twenty even then,” said Powell, “and if Grace were willing to accept him, methinks it were no such long time for him to wait for her.”

“He might think it so,” said the Sheriff. “But should the young people take to one another, it will please me well enough. That boy of yours has always taken a warm place in my favour, nor do I know any

one to whom I would more willingly surrender the charge of my little Grace. Well, let him come and be our guest, during your absence at the least, and then may be we shall see, at the time of your return, how matters are likely to turn out."

Sir Herbert took leave and returned to Fernleigh, whence he set out shortly afterwards for Northumberland. In due time young Walter arrived, and took up his abode at Wyndford Castle. Father Eustace, at his brother's request, addressed a serious remonstrance to Oldfield for having instilled notions into Hugh's head, which had given just offence not only to Sir Herbert Powell, but to Sir Guy and himself. The Seneschal was reminded that—old comrade of Hugh's father though he might be—the charge of the lad's education had been committed to the Prior, and no one could be suffered to interfere with it. Hugh was also reprimanded, though more mildly, being simply told that it was not his business to concern himself with such matters as those which formed the subject of his quarrel with Walter Powell. He would do well to leave the topics in question wholly to his elders.

Both the delinquents submitted themselves to the reproofs administered to them without attempting any defence of themselves. But neither, it is to be feared, derived much benefit from them. The old Seneschal muttered to himself something about half-heartedness, and truckling to those in power; and Hugh had the wit to see that, although Father Eustace felt himself obliged to censure the very broad and plain terms in which he had expressed himself, he was in his heart

more with, than against them. He greeted Walter however willingly enough, not being in truth a very earnest theologian, and much desiring the society of a companion, who could enter into all his pursuits, as his little cousin Grace was unable to do. In the years, therefore, following Sir Herbert Powell's departure for the North, nothing occurred to disturb the quiet of Wyndford Castle.



CHAPTER III

MORE than three years had passed—momentous years for England, yet marked by few occurrences of the startling description with which the chronicles of those times generally abound. The wise policy of Elizabeth had consolidated the throne, which at the outset of her reign seemed to be tottering to its fall. The nation had unanimously accepted her as its sovereign; and foreign intrigues had so far been baffled, that, for the time at least, they were discontinued. The religious differences which distracted the country had quieted down to an extent which excited all men's wonder. The measures taken for the restoration of the reformed worship had been so gradual, and directed by a hand so cautious, that they had provoked very little of the opposition which might have been anticipated. In the first instance, no part of the existing service, except the elevation of the Host and the exclusive use of the Latin language, had been forbidden: and though the Romish divines were re-

strained from inciting the people to sympathy with their cause, their Protestant brethren were laid under the like interdict. Then the oath of supremacy was tendered, not claiming, as the reader has heard, for the sovereign the title of "Head of the Church," which her father had assumed, but only that of Governor. It was refused by nearly all the Bishops, and by a large proportion of the other dignitaries of the Church; but accepted with little demur by the working clergy throughout the country, not above eighty of these declining it. In all likelihood, the great mass of parish priests had become weary of controversy, and were anxious to do their duty among their flocks, without troubling themselves with abstract questions, or nice points of theology. Presently the celebration of the Mass was forbidden, and a Communion Office substituted; but still so much of the old service was tained, that the fierce outbreak of hostility which might have been expected did not ensue. Even the Pope, Pius IV., made no sign. He had from the first carefully avoided the policy of his predecessor, and endeavoured to obtain by courtesy and forbearance the recognition of his claims, which he was shrewd enough to see he could never wring from the English people by force. He addressed Elizabeth as a dutiful daughter of the Church, urging her to receive his legate, and promising every possible concession which he could in conscience make. Elizabeth, it is likely, was in her secret heart by no means indisposed to listen to these overtures. Her precise opinions on the points agitating the Churches are not very clearly un-

derstood by writers. It may be that she did not very clearly understand them herself. She could have little love for Romanism, which had been a harsh stepmother to her in early life, and more than once had nearly brought her to the block. But she had, if possible, a still greater abhorrence of Puritanism; and if she had been compelled to choose between the two, would probably have preferred the more dignified and imposing sway of Rome. But in religion, as in other matters, this sagacious sovereign found it necessary to make concessions to the prejudices of her people. This consideration is the key to much that appears otherwise inconsistent, and difficult of comprehension in the history of those times. If the Queen could have taken her own course unmolested, a system would probably have grown up in England, nearly resembling that which Churchmen in the last generation have sought to introduce, and to some extent with success. But she early discovered that she could not carry the nation with her on many points of crucial importance; and she conceded them with the grace and composure which ever characterised her acts.

In the year 1563 the Council of Trent, which for eighteen years had been continuing its session, concluded, somewhat suddenly, its labours; and its decrees were promulgated in England, as elsewhere. It caused, as might have been expected, everywhere the keenest interest; and in many cases stirred anew the embers of strife, which for a long time past had gradually been growing cold. Among other places so agitated were the villages of Wyndford and Gerard's Cross—

the latter a parish containing five or six hundred souls, the former a mere hamlet of about twenty cottages, lying just on the verge of Sir Guy's park. The church indeed stood in the grounds, and was connected with Wyndford Castle by a long cloister, the good knight and his household forming fully half the congregation. No one had sought to introduce into this building, which was in general regarded not so much the parish church of Wyndford, as Sir Guy's own private chapel—no one had sought to introduce into it the changes, which had been effected in all the churches round about. The crucifix still hung over the altar; the rood-screen retained the images of the Virgin and St. John; the lights still burned at the time of the Consecration, and the Sacrament hung in its ancient place. For a long time these things caused Parson Harlow the deepest disquiet, and he was continually reproving himself for his own faintness of heart, and the carnal unwillingness to offend others, which had induced him so long to leave these enormities unnoticed. To be sure, for some time there was great difficulty in handling the matter, because these very things were retained in Her Majesty's own place of worship, and if permitted in one private chapel, why—it would at once be asked—why not in another? Even when the joyful news was received, as it was in the autumn of the year 1562, that the crucifix and candles in the Queen's chapel had been removed, it was accompanied by a rumour that the change was so little to Her Majesty's liking, that it was judged probable that they would ere long be restored: which

expectation was presently made good, to the Rector's great vexation.

With the promulgation of the decrees of Trent, however, there came such a re-kindling of the good man's zeal, that he found it impossible to continue any longer to acquiesce in what he accounted the abominations of idolatry. Armed with the authority of Bishop Jewel, to whom he had referred the matter, he proceeded to enforce the order in council, which had so long been suffered to remain in abeyance.

It was a pleasant, warm afternoon. The Lady Grace Wyndford, now a damsel of fourteen, giving promise of the rare loveliness which, tradition said, had ever characterised the daughters of her house—was returning homewards, attended by Walter and Hugh, from a hawking expedition on the moors which lay beyond Gerard's Cross. The old Seneschal, with half-a-dozen of Sir Guy's grooms, had accompanied them, partly as an escort, partly to keep an eye on the young folk, in the absence of Sir Guy, who had ridden in company with his brother the Prior, into Salisbury. A letter had been received from Father Oldaker (who maintained a friendly intercourse with the Castle) detailing to Sir Guy a conversation the Father had lately held with his diocesan; which induced the old knight straightway to call on the Bishop, and ask an explanation.

None of the hawking party were in their usual good spirits. The sport had been extraordinarily bad. Grace's favourite bird had strayed, and it was feared had sustained some serious injury. Hugh had had still worse luck. A hawk, for which he had a special value, had

impaled itself on the beak of a fierce old heron, and been picked up dead. He was out of sorts too, because Grace had shewn—or at least so he fancied—especial favour to Walter Powell that afternoon. The feelings of the two lads towards Grace, and hers towards them, did not at this time appear to go beyond the mutual liking, which those of their age are likely to entertain towards one another. They both sought to attract her regard; and a thousand petty rivalries were the consequence, tending to momentary triumphs or vexations, which however seemed to have no effect on their mutual relations. Grace, in reality, made little distinction between them, liking them both as companions; and if she had any secret preference for either, was scarcely aware of it herself. An acute observer would have foretold that, some day or other, one of the lads would have to experience a bitter disappointment, but he would probably have been unable to discern which of the two was likely to be the sufferer. In accordance, it should be observed, with Father Eustace's peremptory requirement, no hint had been given to Walter or Grace of their relatives' views regarding them.

"Cheer up, Hugh," said Grace. "It is but the loss of a bird after all; and old Simon will find you one, I doubt not, among that new batch of hawks he was lauding so highly, that will match even poor Gawaine; and I have lost mine too, though I hope Lance may yet recover him."

"I wish he may, I am sure," returned Hugh, "and I should think there was good hope of it. But for me, I was not so much angered at the loss of the bird, as at

its misbehaviour. In sooth, it deserved its fate for its clumsiness."

"Nay, you must not blame your hawk," said Grace. "Methinks the fault was less his than yours, in loosing him on that bird. Walter warned you against it, you may remember."

"I do not know how he should know more about it than I do myself," returned Hugh hastily. "Methinks I have had as much experience, and understand the craft as well as he does." He glanced angrily at young Powell as he spoke.

"Quite as much," said Walter, good-humouredly answering the glance. "I am sure Grace did not intend to imply otherwise. It was only that I remembered that old heron, which they told me had cost the life of more than one falcon already."

Hugh made no rejoinder. Probably he felt that Walter's good humour contrasted favourably in Grace's eyes with his own churlishness, and that his wisest course would be to say nothing, until he had regained the command of his temper. He rode silently on until they had passed the gates of Wyndford Castle, when the attention of the whole party was attracted to the presence of a crowd of persons, chiefly villagers, who were standing about the doors of the church; which latter stood wide open.

"What can be going on there?" inquired Walter. "This is neither Saint's Day, nor Vigil. What can have brought Father Eustace hither?"

"He cannot be here," said Hugh. "You forget that he accompanied Sir Guy into Salisbury, and it is impos-

sible that they can have yet returned. Who can have presumed to open the church in his absence?"

"It is that pestilent heretic, John Harlow," exclaimed the Seneschal. "He has taken advantage of the good knight's absence to offer some indignity to our Holy Church. I have heard that he has been planning somewhat of the sort this many a day past."

"Indignity to our church, and in my uncle's absence!" repeated Hugh, in a tone of indignation. "You are surely mistaken, Lawrence. He dares not do it."

"At all events he would not," interposed Walter. "Whatever he might feel it his duty to do, would at least be done openly, and in the presence of all men."

"Aye, it is ever your habit to uphold him," retorted Hugh indignantly. "We all know that right well. But we will at least see what work he has here in hand." He sprang from his horse as he spoke, and throwing his rein to one of the grooms, moved towards the church-door.

"But Hugh," exclaimed Grace, "would it not be better to await the return of my grandfather and Father Eustace? I scarce think Sir John Harlow can mean them any affront; but if he does, it were best they dealt with it themselves."

Hugh made no answer, but he did not turn back. While Grace was still speaking, Lawrence Oldfield also alighted, and commanded the others to follow him, leaving only one groom in charge of the horses. As his figure disappeared within the porch of the little building, Grace turned piteously to young Powell, who had sat quietly in his saddle, studiously avoiding, as it seemed, any interference.

"Oh, Walter," she exclaimed, "there will be wild work. Sir John Harlow is there, I can distinguish his voice; and Lawrence is bitter against him, and Hugh is hot-tempered. My grandfather will be so angry. Will you not go in and prevent the mischief? Oh, I would that we had kind old Father Oldaker back again."

"I will do anything I can, Grace," said Walter, dismounting; "though I fear none of them will pay much heed to me." Giving his horse also in charge to the servant, he followed the party. The spectacle he beheld, did not in truth hold out much hope of a peaceable issue to the dispute.

The little church at Wyndford was a very beautiful specimen, partly of Early English, and partly of Perpendicular Gothic. The triple window at the east end, as well as the side windows of the chancel, were filled with rich glass, the work, it was said, of the monks of a neighbouring convent, some three centuries before. Beneath was a carved reredos of stone-work, with the Tabernacle in the centre; in which, as the reader has heard, the Sacrament itself was still preserved. The piscina, the sedilia, the stone basin at the door for holy water, had all been left untouched—the figures in the rood-loft, carved with more than ordinary skill by the same brethren who had supplied the windows with their rich decorations, had stood undisturbed in their places when the congregation had left the building only the evening previously. Now there was a strange and startling change. The church was not filled with devout and reverent worshippers, joining in prayer or psalm, but with a noisy crowd of men engaged, as it seemed to

Hugh, not merely in profaning the shrine, but in offering a direct insult to the Majesty of Him, to Whose worship it was dedicated. The wafer had been removed from the Tabernacle, the holy water had been spilt over the floor of the church, the crucifix, torn from its place, lay on one of the seats. John Harlow, with his back to the door, was issuing orders to his men to lower the figures of the Virgin and St. John, which still remained in the rood-loft, preparatory to the demolition of the entire structure. So eagerly was he occupied, that he did not perceive the presence of Hugh and the others until he found himself rudely tapped on the shoulder, and an angry voice exclaimed in his ear,

“What mean you by this violence, Sir John Harlow? Is it with my uncle’s permission that you venture thus impiously to desecrate the House of God?”

Harlow turned abruptly, and beheld with some surprise the indignant countenance and menacing gestures of young De Spencer.

“Softly, young Sir,” he said. “We do no impiety or violence here, but are only carrying out the law, as is our bounden duty. And for permission—I need no man’s permission to enter here. This is my own parish, and I am responsible for the worship offered in it.”

“Insolent! this is my uncle’s own private chapel,” retorted Hugh; “and I am assured neither he nor Father Eustace will endure your intrusion.”

“Well said, Master Hugh,” added Oldfield. “I trow the rights, of which he speaks, have never been enforced against the masters of Wyndford since old Sir Bertrand built this chapel. Nor do I think Sir Guy will be minded

to admit them now. At all events, we will not permit them to be enforced in his absence. Will it not be well, Master Hugh, to clear this holy place of these profane knaves? Stephen and Robert and the others, together with what help we can lend, will make a speedy clearance."

"Aye, out with the heretic scum," assented Hugh, laying his hand on his sword as he spoke. "We will not profane the sacred walls with bloodshed, if it can be avoided; but go they shall. Will you retire peaceably, Master Rector?" he added, addressing the divine, who had been silent through indignation and surprise, at finding himself thus bearded by one whom till now he had been wont to consider as little more than a boy.

"Stand aside, Hugh de Spencer," he replied angrily. "My purpose is too grave to be balked by any man, least of all by a stripling such as you are. Lay hold on him," he added to some of the bystanders, "if he be troublesome, and remove him from the church."

"What! you threaten Sir Guy's nephew, and on Sir Guy's own land, and would thrust him out of Sir Guy's own chapel!" cried Oldfield. "By St. Mary, this is not to be borne! Ho, Stephen, Gerbert, Greenwood, Robert, stand by your young Lord, and strike down any who dares assail him."

The peasants fell back at his words. Devoted as they were to Parson Harlow, and resolved, equally with himself, to purge away the plague-spot of popery from their parish at whatever cost to themselves, they yet shrank from any personal collision with the near kinsman of their Lord. Perceiving their hesitation, Harlow

himself stepped up to Hugh, and laid his hand on his shoulder, half in persuasion, half in coercion. But Hugh shook him off, and exerting all his strength, thrust the Parson from him. The latter, unprepared for the assault, staggered several steps, and would have fallen, if one of his followers had not caught him in his arms.

A cry of indignation broke from several of Harlow's followers as they witnessed this violence, which they would have requited in kind, if Walter Powell at this moment had not pressed forward between the contending parties.

"I have your young Lady's commands," he said, addressing in the first instance Oldfield and his followers, "to prevent any outbreak of strife, and more especially within these consecrated walls. I charge you therefore to hold your hands. If any wrong has been done to Sir Guy, he will know how to deal with it when he returns home. For you my honoured Pastor," he continued, turning to Harlow, "will you not also consent to wait, for what will probably not be more than a few hours? Sir Guy has but ridden to Salisbury, and knows nought of your intended visit. Doubtless all will be arranged to your satisfaction and his, when he returns."

Both parties paused as they heard these remarks; which were uttered with a modesty and deference which gave weight to the words of even so youthful a stripling as the speaker. Harlow seemed not indisposed to acquiesce. He was sensible that he had, after all, acted somewhat hastily and uncourteously towards his neighbour, though within the strict bounds

both of his authority and duty. His conscience had, in fact, pricked him so sharply for having permitted the abominations of popery, as he regarded them, to remain so long undisturbed under his very eye, as it were, that he had been induced to display a somewhat excessive zeal, as a kind of atonement for it. But after all it was only necessary that these papal enormities should be put a stop to; and if that could be done without violence or strife, it would be surely so much gained. He was therefore on the point of replying, that if Hugh and Oldfield would give their promise that no attempt should be made to replace any of the illegal ornaments which had been already removed, he would consent to desist from further proceedings until the Sheriff's return, and had begun a speech to that effect, when Hugh, whom Walter's interference seemed to have provoked to still greater irritation, burst out more wrathfully than before.

“I for my part will agree to no such compact. What! are Christian men to stand by and behold holy things, as it were, trampled under the feet of these sacrilegious dogs, and make no efforts to prevent it? Am I to behold the Body and Blood of the Lord torn from the spot where holy hands have placed it, and cast I know not whither—on some dunghill it may be? Shall I endure to see the image of the Lord Himself mishandled and tossed aside, as though it had been the toy of a child, for which its owner no longer cared? No, not while I live! Help me, Oldfield, and all other faithful Churchmen; I charge you to amend this sacrilege, and be the consequences on the head of any one who attempts to stay us.” He moved forward as he

spoke, and reverently lifting the crucifix from the spot where it had been flung, advanced to replace it in its former position. There was now risk of a serious outbreak. The passions of both parties had been stirred up by Hugh's words. Two or three men pressed forward to snatch the crucifix from his hands, while Oldfield and his party, drawing their weapons, seemed to be on the point of commencing a general onslaught. But before a blow had been struck, the sound of horses' feet was heard outside, in the midst of which the voice of Sir Guy was distinguished, issuing orders to his attendants. All held their hands at the sound; and almost immediately afterwards the old knight, with Grace clinging to his arm, and followed by a dozen or so of his retainers, entered the church.

He glanced round him with an expression of surprise, mingled with some indignation, as he beheld the scene we have described.

"What means this, Master Rector?" he inquired. "Methinks, if you had intended me or mine the honour of a visit, you would have done well to give me notice of it, that I might at least be at hand to receive you with fitting courtesy."

"I mean you no reproach, Sir Guy," returned Harlow. "I seek but to do my duty, which I fear me I have too long neglected, mainly out of regard for you; when I ought to have thought not how I might please any man, but how I might please the Lord."

"I thank you, Sir," said Sir Guy; "and do not desire that you should neglect what you hold to be your duty,

for any personal regard to me. But methinks you can hardly consider a scene like this, involving the outbreak of angry and violent passions within the House of God Himself, to be within the requirements of your duty."

"Your pardon, Sir Guy; if there has been aught unseemly, it has been caused by the violence of your nephew, not by any act of ours. He came upon us while we were peaceably engaged in the execution of our duty—"

"Do you account it your duty to tear the figure of our blessed Master from the holy walls?" broke in Hugh impetuously, "and cast it down on the ground, as though it had been some heathen idol; or to—"

"Peace, Hugh," said Sir Guy; "you have done ill to meddle here, and I fear me have made bad worse. It were better you left the church; anon I will speak further with you."

Hugh looked for the moment as though he were disposed to persist in his remonstrance, but his habitual respect for his uncle prevailed, and he turned sullenly to the door. The knight waited until the sound of his footsteps had died away outside, and then resumed—

"You have come here in discharge of your duty, you say, Master Rector. Of what duty do you speak?"

"The duty of removing the emblems of Antichrist, wherewith my parish is at the present profaned," answered Harlow, resuming the harshness of language and demeanour which Sir Guy's presence had for the moment somewhat subdued. Long ago ought I to have done this—"

"You have said that before, Sir," interrupted the

Knight, "and it will be better to despatch this matter as speedily as possible. You speak of things done in your parish—do you account this spot, where I am standing, to be a part of it?"

"Surely," answered the Rector. "It has always been so reckoned."

"Your pardon," rejoined Sir Guy, "you are in error there. I made inquiries on this subject some years ago, and learned that this chapel—that part of it, at all events, in which the greater part of the ornaments complained of are placed—is my private property; and therefore in no way subject to your control."

"My Lord of Salisbury gave me to understand—" began Harlow.

"He was under an error," said the old Knight. "I have seen and conferred with him on the subject this morning. He is satisfied of his mistake now. Had you waited, as I cannot but think you might have done, for my return, this scene would have been avoided."

"But do you mean that you are to be permitted to retain without hindrance these ornaments, which the law has forbidden?" asked Harlow.

"I do not know how that may be," answered Sir Guy, "any way it rests not with you to require their removal. But when I spoke with my Lord of Salisbury to-day, I told him that it was not my purpose to retain them any longer, having learned that her gracious Majesty herself had once more consented, for the sake of peace, to their removal from her own private chapel. But I shall proceed to displace them

after a different fashion from that which your followers have pursued. Take up yonder holy image, Lawrence," he continued, pointing to the crucifix, which Hugh had laid down. "Let it be placed in my private oratory, where no man may interfere with it. Replace the candlesticks on the Altar. There they will continue to stand, though they will not again be lighted at the same seasons as heretofore. For the rood-loft and its images, I will see to their removal to-morrow. And now, Master Harlow, you will perceive, I think, that there is no further need for your interference in this matter."

"I crave your pardon for the mistake which it seems I have made," said the Parson. "I would fain avoid strife with all men, and more particularly with you. If these ill-omened ornaments are in truth taken away, as you promise—and no one doubts you will fulfil your word,—I know not what more I have to desire. Nought, in fact, remains for us but to bid you good even and return home, trusting we shall be none the worse neighbours for what has this day occurred."

"I thank you," said Sir Guy. "I shall retain no unpleasant recollection of to-day's work. It grieves me, indeed, to forego things on which I have been accustomed to look with reverence from my earliest years; but I make the sacrifice for the sake of peace, which is of more value in my eyes than any ornaments, however holy."

Harlow bowed respectfully, and quitted the chapel, followed by his myrmidons, who appeared somewhat crest-fallen, if not ashamed, at the result of their enterprise.

Sir Guy now returned to the Castle, and held a consultation with Father Eustace, whom he had dissuaded from entering the chapel, knowing that the probable result would be a painful, and perhaps an unseemly, dispute with Parson Harlow. The attendance of the Seneschal was next desired, and a more particular inquiry made as to what had passed previously to Sir Guy's entrance. The brothers could not restrain their annoyance at the part Oldfield had taken. "But after all," Sir Guy remarked when the Seneschal had quitted the room, "it is of little consequence what so well-known a zealot as Lawrence may have said or done. Hugh's misconduct is the serious thing. He must not remain here, Eustace. For some time past I have noticed that he is growing every day less amenable to control. Nor can I understand the cause."

"The cause is not far to seek," said the Prior. "I marvel, my good brother, you have not discovered it long ere this. It is Walter Powell who is at the bottom of this."

"How," said Sir Guy, turning round in surprise, "Walter Powell in fault! Why, he is as well-conducted a lad, and as peaceably inclined, as ere a one in England! I have heard you say as much yourself, if I mistake not."

"It is not unlikely," said Eustace. "I did not say that I accounted him in any wise to blame. He is a noble youth, and warmly attached to Hugh; and Hugh himself would love him, but that he deems he finds too much favour in Grace's eyes."

"Grace!" exclaimed Sir Guy. "What, a rivalry

between these boys for Grace's favour! Why she is little more than a child. And they too are but boys. It cannot be."

"It is though," said Eustace, calmly. "I have noted it this many a day. You are right, brother, Hugh must not remain here. But methinks it were well if Walter also were to quit Wyndford."

"That may be managed easily enough," said his brother. "In fact, I have received only to-day a request from Sir Herbert to send him over to Ireland without loss of time, unless I am myself particularly anxious to retain him."

"That is fortunate," said the Prior, "since his removal can be managed without attracting any special notice. But Hugh must not be suffered to remain either. It will not be so easy, I fear, to dispose of him."

"I will send him abroad to my old companion-in-arms De Quesnel," said Sir Guy. "He will give him a ready welcome for my sake. He shall depart as soon as the needful letters have been despatched."

CHAPTER IV.

THE tilt-yard at Wyndford presented a gay and splendid scene one bright summer morning in the year of grace 1567. Her Majesty the Queen, now in the thirty-fifth year of her age, was paying a brief, but long promised visit to her father's early friend and companion-in-arms, Sir Guy Wyndford. The good knight, still hale and hearty, though the last five years had

told visibly upon him, had exerted himself to the utmost to make fitting entertainment for his royal mistress, and he had been ably seconded by Hugh de Spencer, who had returned about a month previously from the French court, where the term of his four years' service had been completed. It was now the day after the Queen's arrival, and the entertainment chosen for the morning was a tilting-match, at which Elizabeth herself was to preside.

The tournament had ceased to be the favourite amusement of the knights and nobles, for the last generation or two; but it was still occasionally resorted to, and perhaps with all the more zest on account of its rarity. Sir Guy had taken great pains to make the spectacle attractive to his guests. Galleries had been erected on either side of the lists, affording ample accommodation, not only to Sir Guy's more immediate visitors, but to the flower of the county families also; as well as to many of the clergy, Oldaker and Harlow among them, who came in from all quarters to render their homage. In the centre of the northern gallery, richly decorated, and under a gorgeous canopy, a throne had been placed, on which Elizabeth herself was to preside as the Queen of Beauty, and bestow on the successful champion the prize of the tourney,—a sword of Spanish steel, with a jewelled hilt, and rich baldric attached.

Elizabeth may be regarded as having been at this time at the very zenith of her prosperity. True, she had not yet humbled the pride of Spain, or reduced the neighbouring kingdom of Scotland to subservience

to her will; but neither, on the other hand, had she encountered the anxieties and disappointments which beset the later years of her government. Abroad, her alliance was courted by the most powerful sovereigns of the day: at home, the people appeared every year to be more devoted in their allegiance. Only a few extreme men of the Romanizing party continued to plot in secret against her; and even these knew full well that if ever they were to succeed in their designs, it must be by biding their time. To outward appearance, at least, the English people seemed to have laid aside alike their political and their religious quarrels, as had not been the case for many a generation past.

It was with a gracious look on her proud face that she took her place on the throne, to which she was ushered by Sir Guy and Hugh. The latter, now Sir Hugh de Spencer, was attired in the armour in which he was about to appear in the lists, a rich suit of silver mail, with a surcoat of blue velvet, on which his coat-of-arms was worked in seed-pearl and threads of gold,—the gift, it was said, of Catherine de Medicis, made in requital of some gallant service. Elizabeth noted his good mien, as it was ever her wont to do when she was in her more gracious moods, and put many questions to him respecting the beauties of the French court—inquiring also whether, in his eyes, any of the damsels now present could rival them in attractions.

“Come hither, fair maiden,” she said, addressing Grace, who had been presented to her on the previous evening, but was now shrinking timidly out of sight behind some of the gorgeously-attired ladies of the

royal train. "What say you to this champion of English loveliness, Sir Hugh? Is she worthy to compare with the Flying Squadron, as I hear that saucy men are wont to term my sister Catherine's ladies?"

"Aye, Madam, as the rose may bear comparison with the daffodil or the hyacinth," answered Hugh; "or as Elizabeth of England herself, with the Queens of other lands."

"You have profited by your stay in France," said the Queen, well pleased at the compliment. "The English 'Rose' shall sit at my side, and help me to determine the prize. It may be she will not be ill-pleased should you yourself be the winner! But it is time you took horse," she added, "for the contest, I see, is about to commence."

"A goodly youth," remarked Elizabeth, as Hugh retired, "and a gallant too, I doubt not. What say you, Mistress Grace? Do your hopes go with cousin Hugh?"

Grace blushed deeply, but made no reply.

"Her cheeks answer for her, gracious Madam," said a grave and noble-looking man of middle age, who with one or two others was standing behind the royal chair.

"Ha, you think so, Cecil," returned the Queen gaily. "But I doubt you are scarce so learned in ladies' hearts as in French intrigues and Spanish plottings. I would trust you to interpret the meaning of a cypher, but scarcely of a woman's blush. But they are going to run the first course. Who be these champions? I know them not, at least not with their vizors down."

"So please your Majesty," said Sir Guy, "yonder is Sir William Haughton of Earlscliff, an approved cham-

pion if I am rightly told ; and the other is Sir Hugh de Spencer my nephew, to whom your Majesty was pleased to speak so graciously a few minutes since."

"Good faith, and so it is," said the Queen. "But these vizors so disguise a man, that it is a hard matter to recognise even those we know best. Well tilted, I make mine avow," she added a moment afterwards, as the champions met in the centre of the list, and Houghton was hurled headlong from his saddle. "I give you joy, Sir Guy. Yonder nephew of yours will maintain the honours of your race unimpaired, I trow."

"Our race, gracious Madam, is hastening to its end," said Sir Guy, sadly. "I am an old man, and the last male of my line."

"But the honours of a family may be handed on unsullied, nay, with increased splendour, through a daughter, Sir Guy," said Cecil. "You will not dispute that?"

"Had I been disposed to doubt it," said Sir Guy, bowing profoundly to the Queen, "I could not do so in this presence."

"And yet I could wish that my boy had been spared me," added the old man, an irrepressible burst of feeling overpowering for the moment his courtly grace. He withdrew behind the group of courtiers, and presently retired, on pretext of conferring with the Marshals of the lists.

"How called they yonder knight?" asked Elizabeth a few minutes afterwards, as two more champions made their appearance in the lists. The people appear to know him, and the name they shout seems familiar to

me, yet I know not that I have ever seen him before. Can you tell me who he is, Mistress Grace?"

"It is Sir Walter Powell, Madam," returned Grace, the blush again crimsoning her cheek.

"Sir Walter Powell," repeated the Queen. "Of what lineage and estate? Can you tell me more about him?"

"I can, your Majesty," said a grave-looking personage, attired in the square cap, long bands, and sad-coloured robe which distinguished the anti-Romish clergy of the day. "He is the son of Sir Herbert Powell, of Fernleigh Chase in this county, whom your royal father, and yourself too, if I mistake not, ever accounted among the most faithful of your servants."

"Aye, that did I," said Elizabeth, evidently much moved. "He is indeed one of whom I cherish the most honoured remembrance. I remember he was high in favour with the Protector Somerset, until he forfeited it by his earnest intercession in behalf of poor Sir Thomas." She was silent for a moment, as she uttered the name of her early lover—the only one perhaps for whom she ever entertained a real passion. "Sir Herbert is lately dead, is he not, my Lord of Salisbury? He was slain in Ireland by the rebel Tyrone, if I remember right."

"He was, your Majesty, and this youth narrowly escaped the same fate, and has but recently recovered of his wounds."

"And what character does he bear?" asked Elizabeth. "Does he promise to be worthy of the name he owns?"

"There is every hope of it," said Jewel. "He has been carefully reared in all godly ways, as I learn from

worthy John Harlow, the Rector of Gerard's Cross, who has known him from his earliest youth. In very truth and there is Sir John Harlow himself yonder. He has come to render his dutiful homage to your Majesty. May I crave permission to present him?"

"Harlow," repeated Elizabeth. "The name seems familiar to me, and yet I cannot recall where I heard it."

"It may well dwell in your Majesty's memory," said the Bishop. "He had an escape from being burned alive at the close of the last reign, so narrow, that his name was for the time in all men's mouths. He had been fastened to the stake, and the faggots were on the point of being lighted, when the tidings of your Majesty's happy accession were brought to the spot—by this very Walter Powell, then a mere boy, if I mistake not."

"Aye, I do remember," returned the Queen. "And so that is Master Harlow yonder. And who, I pray you, is that somewhat stout female at his side? and who be those children, by whom they are accompanied?"

"They are his wife and family," returned Jewell, in a somewhat less assured tone. "A worthy lady is Mistress Harlow, and a pattern of Christian living to all around her; even as St. Peter says—"

"I nothing doubt it, my Lord," said Elizabeth drily. "But I will not trouble you to present him to us. Since our sex has already done so much for him, he cannot need my countenance. Sir Guy," she continued, for the Knight had now returned to his station near her chair, "when the tournay is over, I shall pray you to bring hither Sir Walter Powell, in whom I rejoice to recognise

the son of a man whom I ever honoured and revered, an intimate of your own, if I mistake not."

"My earliest and truest friend," returned her host. "His son has ever been to me as my own. He was, indeed, bred up for many years with Hugh and Grace."

"Aye, indeed," said the Queen. "And was Walter Powell Grace's playmate, as well as your kinsman Hugh? And the prize of this day's tilting will lie between these two, I see, for they have overthrown all their antagonists. Which has your secret wishes, Mistress Grace; or do you account of them both alike, as girls ever deem it maidenly to affirm?"

Grace, who had been sitting under the shadow, as it were, of the Queen's chair, scarcely heeding the conversation, and gazing with a face of intense interest on the tilt-yard below, started when she heard Elizabeth's question, and answered demurely that "she hoped that the prouest knight and the most skilful in arms might win the day."

"Discreetly worded, damsel," said Elizabeth, a good deal interested in her young companion. "And I suppose I must not further ask which of the two you account the prouest and most skilful?"

"The event of the encounter will answer it, Madam," remarked Cecil.

"Aye," said Elizabeth; "but it may be not in accordance with the damsel's judgment. Well, they are both gallant youths, and both may well merit a maiden's favour."

The lists were now again cleared, and the two successful champions of the day prepared to run the final

course. Greater interest was evinced by the crowd in this contest, than in any which had preceded it. Both belonged to the immediate neighbourhood, and were representatives of families of wealth and distinction. Each, therefore, enlisted a considerable amount of sympathy among the spectators. Besides this, the spirit and address evinced by both combatants had been so remarkable, as well as so nearly matched, as to render the issue of the combat extremely doubtful. A breathless silence pervaded the multitude when the knights had taken their stations. Presently the trumpet sounded, the chargers sprang into full action, and all bent eagerly forward to watch the issue of the encounter. The result was such as to justify the general expectation. So fierce was the shock with which they met in the centre of the lists, that the girths of Walter's saddle gave way, and he was forced backward over his charger's croup to the ground; while Hugh's steed staggered and fell, his rider only escaping, by his dexterous horsemanship, from being crushed under his weight. Both knights recovered their feet at almost the same moment, and drawing their swords, were preparing to re-commence the combat on foot, when Elizabeth, throwing down her wardour, forbade it to proceed further.

"Enough," she said; "we must not endanger further the lives of champions so brave and skilful. To Sir Hugh de Spencer, who was unseated by his horse rather than by his antagonist, I award the sword and baldric; but Sir Walter Powell shall receive the like gift from me; which, it may be, he will not account of less value."

"You are not dissatisfied with my decision to-day, I trust, Sir Guy," said the Queen, later in the evening, when the banquet had been concluded, and she sat in her chair in the great hall, watching the masques and dances, which had been prepared for her entertainment. "It gave your nephew the honours of the day."

"I cannot agree with your Majesty," returned the old man. "The honour of the day must surely rest with him whose gift came directly from the fount of honour itself. Good wot! I should have grudged such a triumph to any one, save the son of my oldest and dearest friend."

"You have lost none of your courtly craft, Sir Guy," said Elizabeth, with a smile. "But I would speak a word with you respecting your granddaughter, Grace. She is a lovely and graceful maiden. If your family tree bears but one blossom, it is at least a goodly one."

"Your Majesty judges kindly, and I believe rightly," said Sir Guy. "Grace is a good, as well as a comely girl."

"I doubt it not," said the Queen. "But she is now of an age when maidens especially need help and guidance. Would it not be well that she should take a husband? You are growing old, and life is uncertain."

"Your Majesty is right," said Sir Guy; "and before this I should have endeavoured to find a suitable alliance for Grace, but that, under the conditions of her father's will, she cannot enter into wedlock before her one-and-twentieth year."

"In sooth, and is that so?" rejoined Elizabeth. "How came your son to impose such a condition?"

"Reginald was possessed with the idea that Grace would prefer a religious life," said Sir Guy; "and he would not, he said, have her hurried into matrimony, before she was of an age to determine the question for herself."

"But we have got rid of our convents," remarked Elizabeth, though with something in her voice which sounded like a sigh.

"Aye, in this land," said the old Knight, "but not everywhere."

The Queen was silent. The topic was one she was unwilling to pursue. After a pause of a few moments, however, she resumed, "Anyway, Mistress Grace, if I mistake not, has already determined the question at issue. She will enter no convent, be assured of that."

"I do not understand your Majesty."

"I mean that her affections are already bestowed, but not upon Heaven," said the Queen.

"And to whom then does your Majesty suppose her preference to be given?" asked the old man anxiously.

"Why, look you, Sir Guy," said her Majesty, "the damsel was brought up with two youths—so you have informed me—your nephew Hugh, and young Powell, was she not?"

"Even so, gracious Madam," was the answer. "But neither I nor Eustace could ever discover that she liked either of them better than the other."

"That may well be," returned Elizabeth. "An elderly monk and an elderly soldier, whatever may be their other excellencies, are scarce the most likely interpreters of a maiden's secret. But I am woman enough

to be interested in it, and I fully solved the question to-day. She cares more for Sir Walter's little finger than for her cousin's whole body. You would ask what makes me think so—I will tell you. I watched her closely when the final encounter took place. When they met in the middle of the lists, and both knights rolled over in deadly peril, the colour forsook her cheek, and there was a look of horror in her eyes. But they followed every movement of Sir Walter Powell, as though she believed that it would be his death, if she withdrew her gaze for a single moment. But of Hugh she took no more notice, than if he had been one of the grooms who was helping him to regain his legs."

"I trust it may be as your Majesty judges," said Sir Guy. "It was Sir Herbert's wish, and my own too, that our children should marry, though neither of us would have done aught to force their inclinations. But I know not,—there may be obstacles—"

"Obstacles? of what kind?" asked Elizabeth. "Do you mean those that arise out of her father's will, the delay of three years or so before they can marry?"

"Not entirely," answered the Knight, "though those would have to be considered."

"Does not the youth himself desire the alliance?"

"He is devoted to her," said Sir Guy. "It was but yesterday that he entreated me for permission to address her, as urgently as though it had been his life for which he was pleading. But there are differences in matters of Faith—"

"How, Sir Guy," broke in the Queen sharply; "are they not both members of our English Church, born and reared in one and the same Faith?"

"Surely yes," answered the old man. "But our Church now holds men of widely different opinions. Some entertain strong views as to the power and authority of the clergy, the deference due to Rome, the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, the reverent use of the crucifix, and the like; while others are wont to think lightly of these things, if not utterly to deny them, while they magnify preaching, and the private reading of Scripture, and the like."

"There are differences to some extent in all Churches," said Elizabeth. "It has ever been so since the Church was first set up. To some extent it is reason to permit them, though it is also reason to restrain them within proper bounds. It is only by mutual toleration and forbearance that unity can exist at all. It has been the happiness of my reign thus far, that many mutual concessions have been made, and so no breach has taken place among us. The one party have consented to wear the vestments and use the Office, which they account half Popish, also to the use of the ring in marriage, and the Cross in Baptism. The others have foregone the Latin Service, the Celebration of the Mass, the presence of the crucifix, and the lights, and other matters of the same kind. We have ourselves surrendered with reluctance many things for the sake of peace. You too, unless I have been misinformed, have done the like."

"I have, your Majesty," said the Knight, "moved thereto in no small measure by your Majesty's wise and pious example; and Eustace is at full accord with me in the matter. Unity is in truth so rare a jewel, so he is wont to affirm, that men could hardly do ill to sell all that they have, wherewith to purchase it."

"You say well," said the Queen, with a pleased look. "Surely, then, the possible differences in Faith between the young people is no just cause for discouraging their marriage, but rather one for promoting it. If only they were to intermarry, who were of the same way of thinking, how should prejudices be softened, and differences reconciled?"

"I will see my granddaughter and discourse with her on the subject; and as soon as my brother Eustace returns—he is now absent on a visit in the north—" began Sir Guy.

"Do not wait for that," interposed the Queen impatiently. "I would fain hear the conclusion to which you have come, before my departure to-morrow."

On the next day accordingly, when the morning meal had been concluded, and the royal train were busied in preparations for departure, Sir Guy was summoned to the royal chamber, and questioned as to the result of his interview with Grace. The good Knight was evidently much embarrassed.

"Your Majesty may be right," he said, "in what you conjectured yesterday; though I could draw no positive statement from Grace on the subject."

"She does not deny her liking for young Walter?" asked her Majesty.

"She does not," said the Knight. "Good truth, when I pressed her closely on the point, the crimson which stained her cheek was answer sufficient in itself."

"Good," said Elizabeth. "Then let it be thus arranged. Let the young pair be betrothed to one another; I will delay my departure an hour or two, in order to

witness it myself. Then shall Walter Powell be despatched to Ireland, again to serve under Sydney, and win fresh laurels from the rebel Tyrone, until the three years of waiting have expired. If our estimate of this youth be a right one, he will joyfully embrace both offers."

"No doubt of that," assented Sir Guy. "Hugh too, to do him justice, would willingly accompany him to Ireland, but that he has within the last few days accepted service with the Earl of Westmoreland."

"Of Westmoreland, ha!" repeated Elizabeth, with something of doubt in her tone; "a great nobleman doubtless, and a brave one too—I trust, as loyal as he is noble. But no more of him. Do you assent to this plan respecting the young people? If so, I must issue orders accordingly."

Reluctant and embarrassed, Sir Guy found himself unable to resist the will of his imperious mistress, though he would fain have waited—at least, until the Prior had been spoken with. He went therefore in search of Sir Walter Powell, from whom, the reader will not require to be told, he encountered no opposition. The young man, in truth, was in the seventh heaven of astonishment and joy. Grace's objections were not overcome without difficulty, though with less than Sir Guy had anticipated. The Bishop of Salisbury, and Father Oldaker, who had remained at the Castle as guests, were summoned, and in their presence, and that of the Queen, the pair exchanged their troth plights. Well pleased, as it seemed, with her morning's work, and with many professions of her regard, Elizabeth then took her departure.

CHAPTER V.

MORE than two months had elapsed since the royal visit. The quiet now prevailing at Wyndford Castle, presented a curious contrast to the noise and bustle attending Elizabeth's presence. Sir Hugh had taken himself off to the North, after a brief and angry interview with his uncle, on the day following the betrothal. Walter Powell had remained several weeks at Wyndford, awaiting the receipt of the royal instructions, before proceeding to Ireland. Whether these had been purposely delayed or not, the reader must judge for himself; but the consequence had been, that the mutual regard of the young couple had, during that interval, ripened from a mutual liking into a profound attachment. They had had the house very much to themselves. Father Eustace had not returned. A sharp attack of fever had detained him in the North, and he was hardly yet convalescent, though now daily expected. Sir Guy's exertions during the Queen's visit had reacted upon him so severely, that he had scarcely left his room since then, and seldom saw either Grace or Walter, except at the hours of the family meals. Walter and Grace walked, and rode, and read together, scarcely seeing any faces except their own,—unless when John Harlow came to pay a visit to his favourite pupil, and give him tidings of what was being done in London for the furtherance of the Protestant cause, by Grindal, and Jewel, and Sandys, and Parkhurst, the objects of his especial admiration and reverence; or, perhaps, to grumble at the high hand, with which Archbishop Parker lorded it over the Church,—another

Pope, as he was wont to call him, though without any claim to infallibility.

At length, in the seventh week after the betrothal, Walter's instructions were received, and he took his farewell, amid the general good wishes of the household—old Lawrence Oldfield forming a solitary exception to the rule. After the young man's departure, a still greater cloud of dulness seemed to settle down on the old house. Sir Guy's health did not amend: indeed, he grew visibly, though slowly, weaker; and the old servants began to shake their heads, as they noticed the feebleness of his step and the pallor of his cheek. Grace herself could not fail to remark this, and the reflection tended much to increase the depression which hung over her after the departure of her lover.

One morning towards the end of September, she was sitting alone in one of the summer-houses adjoining the mansion, when she was startled from the reverie into which she had fallen, by the sound of footsteps. Looking up she beheld Parson Harlow, who had called at the Court, desiring to see Sir Guy. Learning from the servants that he was unequal to receiving visitors, he had inquired for Grace, and had been directed to her presence.

The young lady rose as she perceived his approach, and greeted him respectfully. She regarded him with very mixed feelings. She knew him to be a warm and sincere friend of her lover Walter, whom indeed he loved as his own son; and this pleaded strongly with Grace in the Parson's favour. But then, on the other hand, he was the supplanter of Father Oldaker,

and his treatment of her grandfather in the matter of the chapel had been disrespectful, to call it by no severer name. Further, he was for ever making some attack, covert or open, on her beloved Father Eustace, the object of her deepest reverence and affection.

The Rector probably understood tolerably well the nature of her sentiments towards him. Indeed, his own feelings as regarded her were of the same mixed character; though what in her was dislike, in him was pity. He saluted her kindly, expressing his sorrow at learning her grandfather's continued, and he feared increasing, debility. "Doubtless he is growing old, Mistress Grace," he said; "and the old, more than any others, must be prepared for the great change. But he can ill be spared by many, and by none less than yourself."

"It would be a great grief to me were he to be taken from me," said Grace simply.

"I can well believe it," he answered; "yet I doubt not you would strive to bear it with patience. I have this morning received tidings from Ireland," he continued, after a short silence. "Sir Walter is arrived safely, and is in sound health. He has also transmitted this letter, which I have hastened up from Gerard's Cross to deliver." As he spoke he produced the epistle in question—the packet, as we should now-a-days call it—carefully secured with seals and silken strings, and endorsed after the curious fashion of the day, with earnest injunctions to the messenger as to its instant delivery. Grace received it with a mixture

of embarrassment and satisfaction, and then glanced furtively at her companion—perhaps to ascertain whether it was his intention to leave her now to the undisturbed enjoyment of its contents. But if she had any hope of this kind, it was destined to disappointment. Nothing was further from Parson Harlow's intentions than to leave her, until he had delivered his mind of certain admonitions and remonstrances; which the present condition of things rendered it a matter of duty for him to make. His zeal had been greatly quickened by a brief interview, which he had just had with the Seneschal, Oldfield. It will readily be believed that there was but little love lost between these two worthies. If Parson Harlow, like a good Christian as he was, had forgiven the extreme anxiety evinced by the Seneschal, in the first chapter of this tale, to carry out the sentence passed by the Privy Council upon him, Lawrence—who regarded himself as an equally good Christian, though taking a different view of the same transaction—had never forgiven the Parson for his escape. He greeted the latter on all occasions with a sullen scowl, and returned his salutations with an inarticulate growl, that might express either a benediction or an anathema. On the present occasion they had met near the entrance-lodge. On making inquiry after Sir Guy's health, Harlow was informed that the good Knight was but ill at ease both in body and mind, lacking, as the Seneschal pointedly remarked, the spiritual consolations to which he had been accustomed. "Father Eustace is away," he had said, "and Father Oldaker cannot now often visit him."

The Parson was not sure whether this reply was intended as a taunt, or as a complaint. Wyndford Castle was situated within the bounds of Gerard's Cross, as the reader has already heard; and although of late years Sir Guy had never attended any services except those in his own private chapel, this was generally attributed more to his increasing infirmity than to any disinclination to Harlow's ministry; and in the absence of the family Confessor, the Vicar of Gerard's Cross would be certainly looked upon as the proper person to act as spiritual adviser. Did Oldfield mean that the Knight had desired Harlow's ministrations? If so, of course it would be his duty to render them. Nay more, might there not be an opening here for bringing the pure light of the Gospel to illumine the eyes of one who, he had too good reason to fear, was now sitting in spiritual darkness, and the time of whose departure was drawing near? At all events, the opportunity was not one to be thrown away.

"That were pity," he said, in answer to old Lawrence's speech. "If, in his brother's absence, Sir Guy needs the visits of a spiritual adviser, it may be that my ministrations would not be unwelcome to him. If you think such would be the case—"

"But I don't," answered Oldfield, his eyes twinkling with malicious satisfaction. "I judge the good Knight would regard your ministrations, as you call them, as being in truth no ministrations at all."

"How, Sir," exclaimed Harlow sharply, for the imputation was one which touched him very nearly. "No ministrations at all, say you? Know you not

that I am an ordained Minister of Christ, the validity of whose orders not even the Pope could deny. My title is beyond dispute."

"Aye, but it may be that you have forfeited your title by your heresy. Though you escaped the sentence of the law, Master Rector, you cannot escape the sentence of the Church. But I would say nought uncivil, Sir John Harlow," he added, "so I will even bid you good morning." So saying, he turned off with an inward chuckle, well pleased at having had the opportunity at last of venting the spleen he had been so long cherishing in secret.

Commanding himself as well as he could, but very considerably ruffled nevertheless, Parson Harlow resumed his way; nor had his wrath entirely subsided when he found himself in Grace's presence. As soon as he had delivered the letter into the young lady's hand, he proceeded according to his favourite phrase to improve the occasion.

"Mistress Grace," he said, "there is a word which I would fain say to you. It has long been on my mind, and I can scarce hope to find a more favourable opportunity for it than the present."

He paused, as if expecting a reply; but Grace only bowed her head in acquiescence, and he went on. "You were saying just now that your grandfather's loss would be a grievous one to you. Doubtless it would—for many reasons, some of which you in all likelihood do not fully apprehend. Chief among them is the fact that you would be left without guardian or protector, and that for three years to come. For

I have learned from Sir Walter that your marriage cannot take place, until—”

“Good Sir John,” interposed Grace, rousing herself to put a stop to the conversation, which she felt to be alike useless and disagreeable, as well as likely to become still more so, the longer it was protracted, “I know you ever mean me kindly, and I thank you. But you need not so distress yourself. It is my hope that my grandfather’s life may long be spared; nor do the leeches forbid the hope, though doubtless they be somewhat anxious. But even should the sad event occur, which may the Saints and the Blessed Virgin forbid—”

“Which may God and His Blessed Son forbid,” corrected the Parson sharply. “They, of whom you speak so thoughtlessly, can render but small help, I trow.”

Grace looked hurt and distressed, but she made no rejoinder to this remark, and resumed her speech. “Should my grandfather be taken from me, I should not be left without guardian or protector. There is my uncle Eustace, the friend and guide of my youth: while he lives, I should not be unprotected.”

“It is even that that I feared,” said Harlow. “Your uncle is a good and a pious man, and there is no man that honours these qualities more than I do. He is also wise and learned, and loves you as his own child. But—” he paused.

“Proceed, I pray you,” said Grace with some covert malice, for her gentle spirit was roused at what she felt to be an unwarranted interference. “These are not

reasons, I presume, why you should fear to entrust me to his care?"

"Of course not," rejoined Harlow, rousing himself. "But there are reasons, nevertheless, and grave ones, why I *should* fear it. Whatever may be his other merits, your uncle is surely one who is still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity; for no gall is more bitter, and no bond more iniquitous, than those of Rome. I know that he and Sir Guy have in many things conformed to the teaching of the holy men who now (praise be to God!) hold sway in our Church; or at least they have seemed to do so. The Mass is no longer celebrated in your chapel; some, at least, of the sacrificial vestments have been laid aside; the English Communion Service is used there. But, I fear me, ye regard the reformed rite as being but a maimed and mutilated Mass, after all. The crucifix has been removed from the wall of the church; but it still stands in the private oratory, and ye bow down before it as of old. The candles are not lighted during your celebrations; but they still stand on the table, in token that you would fain have them lighted if you could. You have accepted Her Majesty the Queen as the Supreme Governor of the Church, and have affirmed that the Pope has no authority in this realm; but in secret you render him your homage nevertheless. What is this but obedience of the lip, not of the heart. Oldaker too, who, as I learn—"

"I pray you say no more," said Grace in a tone of displeasure, "or I must ask your permission to retire. I am no competent judge of these things; yet it cannot

become me to sit by and hear my grandfather and my uncle, to whom my reverence is due, so spoken of. Nor do I know by what title you can claim thus to address me."

"You forget," said Harlow, "that I am the near friend, almost I might call myself the father, of your future husband, Walter Powell. It is in his name, and for his sake that I speak."

"What is it, then, that you wish?" asked Grace, who, notwithstanding her distress, was a good deal moved at this mention of her lover's name.

"I wish that some steps should be taken to place you under the guardianship of some worthy and pious man, in the event of your being left a second time, if I may so express myself, an orphan. This was what I wished to have said to Sir Guy this morning; but as I have been unable to see him, and may not find an opportunity hereafter, I am constrained, however reluctantly, to address you on the point. I say again, I cannot be satisfied, and I feel assured Sir Walter would not be satisfied, with the guardianship of your great-uncle."

"Has he said as much to you?" asked Grace.

"He has not," answered Harlow. "We have never spoken directly on the point. But from my long and intimate knowledge of him, I may venture to speak confidently on the subject."

"It may be that I know him as well as you do, Sir John," returned Grace. "Unless I am wholly mistaken, he regards my uncle with no less reverence than I do myself. Wherefore should he not? Are we not all

faithful children of Holy Church, of which my uncle is the honoured Minister."

"Children of the Church," repeated Harlow impatiently. "Men may call themselves so,—aye, and often do so call themselves, while in truth they have scarce any point in common. You may be called upon, and that ere long, to choose between your lover and your uncle, or rather I should say, between the Faith of your lover and your uncle—"

"I will not believe it," exclaimed Grace impetuously. "I pray God at least such may never be the case—"

"Amen," said a voice close at hand; "and if ever you should be called upon to make such a choice, may God guide you to a right decision." Harlow and Grace started, and looked round. Leaning on the arm of Lawrence Oldfield, his features pinched and shrunk by recent illness, they beheld the familiar figure of Father Eustace. The Parson recoiled a step or two at the sight, but Grace sprang up with a cry of joy, and threw herself into her uncle's arms.

"Welcome, welcome!" she cried. "I had feared I was never to see you more. And how worn and ill you look. But our pure air and careful nursing will restore you ere long, I nothing doubt; and my grandfather too. Have you seen him yet, uncle?"

"I have not," said the Prior. "I met Oldfield here as I entered the gate. He told me of Sir John's visit, and his urgent wish to see me. I came hither therefore before entering the house, thinking it better to speak with him alone. Conduct my niece within, Lawrence,"

he continued, "and I will speak with Sir John Harlow at once."

An hour afterwards the Prior was sitting with Sir Guy, who had just awakened from slumber, and hearing of his brother's return, had earnestly desired his presence. Father Eustace started back involuntarily at his first sight of the Knight's features, assured that, sick as he himself had been—sick well-nigh to death—his brother's case was of a far graver character. The latter greeted him with much emotion. "I am most thankful you have returned," he said. "I had begun to fear that we should meet in this life no more."

The Prior did not reply. He was well habituated to the sick chamber, and refrained from speaking words of encouragement, which he knew could have but little hope of fulfilment. After a brief pause the other resumed. "There is much that I have to say to you. Have you heard of Grace's betrothal?"

"I have—within the last hour," said the Priest shortly.

"Ah, and you do not approve it?" continued the old Knight.

"It was at the least somewhat sudden," remarked Father Eustace.

"Yes, but do you know all the circumstances? There had been a distinct promise, made years ago between Herbert and myself, that if the young people liked one another, they should marry,—that you are aware of. But further, I had found that there was, at the least, a mutual inclination between them. Walter, who knew nought of Reginald's will, entreated permission of me to make his proposals to Grace, on the day

before the tournament. Then the Queen herself laid her commands on me—for it was little less—to assent to this betrothal, and would not hear of my delaying till you could be consulted. And lastly, I discovered that the girl was at least not averse to the step suggested. I felt that I had no sufficient ground for refusing to accede to Her Majesty's desire, so kindly and urgently expressed. I felt, too, that I was growing old and feeble,—though not then the wreck I am now—and that to affiance her to Walter would be some protection, at least, from the importunity to which she might otherwise be subjected. Walter is a brave and noble-hearted lad. You yourself have ever thought so."

"He is all that," said the Prior; "yet I cannot approve the union."

"I feared you would say so, yet let me hear your reasons."

"Walter has been the friend of Harlow; and of late, at all events, has been much in his company. I have reason to fear that he has imbibed his opinions. Indeed, if Harlow himself may be trusted on the point, he has certainly done so."

"I feared you would say this," repeated Sir Guy; "and I urged it to the Queen, when she pressed me to consent. But she answered that both Walter and Grace were members of the English Church, and such might surely live together in unity, in spite of minor difficulties; which had always, she said, existed, and always must exist, even among those who hold in all essentials the same faith."

"Such is her theory and her wish," returned the Prior.

“She would form one comprehensive Faith out of the tenets of the Catholic and the Lollard, to which both might yield a general assent, mutually tolerating each other on the points where they differed. Aye, but Elizabeth is not England. I have myself been led away by my aspirations after unity—that brightest of all the jewels in the Church’s crown—to believe in this, though against my sober judgment. These ten years have I clung to it, though I have felt it slowly yield like a rotting branch under my grasp. I still hold on, though I know that ere long the bough must break. Yet I am not alone in this. The late holy Pontiff seemed almost to partake of the same belief, so unwilling was he to declare the formal severance, which has long in fact been accomplished.”

“The present Pope will scarcely be as patient,” remarked Sir Guy.

“Be sure he will not,” assented Father Eustace. “Michael Ghislieri is a different man. He will not brook to have his legates refused admittance to the kingdom, his faithful adherents banished from the Court, his decrees set at nought, the doctrines and rites of which he is the guardian, despised and neglected. It cannot but be that ere long he will issue the command to all the faithful in this land, who at present conform, or seem to conform to the Established Church, ‘Come out of her, my people, and be ye separate.’”

“It will not be issued in my day,” said Sir Guy.

“God grant it may not,” returned the Prior, “nor (if I may so pray) in mine either. It may be that, of His mercy, He will take us both away from the

evil to come. But the word will surely be spoken, before Grace's wedding-day can arrive. Then what will Walter do? and what must she do? Remember, my brother, husband and wife may not differ on points so solemn. 'Can two walk together unless they be agreed?' The maiden should be prepared to say to the husband that she chooses, 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'

"And you think that Walter would not obey the Holy Father's command?" asked Sir Guy.

"I am but too well assured that he would not," answered the Prior.

"They must be separated then," said the old man with a sigh. "It is pity, for they dearly love one another, and their love has grown mightily since the day of betrothal. It is indeed unfortunate that I yielded to the Queen's importunity; but it avails not to speak of that now. If their union is not to be permitted, the sooner they are parted the better."

"Let us not be hasty," rejoined Father Eustace. "It may be that Grace may choose to cast in her lot with Walter, even though his decision be what we fear."

"How, my brother!" exclaimed Sir Guy in astonishment; "would you have her regard the obedience she has vowed to her future husband, as outweighing the obedience she owes to the Church of God?"

"I would not," said the Prior. "Yet were she to choose, as I have suggested, I should not consider, as some do, that she thereby forfeited wholly the grace of God. There would be loss of spiritual privileges of course, fewer helps, greater temptations. But as the

kingdom of Israel, though cut off by its rebellion from the true worship and the consecrated priesthood at Jerusalem, nevertheless so kept up its intercourse with God, that he had seven thousand faithful children among its inhabitants,—so surely, the people of England, even should they wholly separate themselves from Rome, which is the Jerusalem of Christendom, may still remain, if they will, the servants of Christ; and the faithful may hope all things of them!”

“Therefore,” resumed the Prior after a pause, “I would have you weigh this matter well. You and I are not men to fear the future, or deceive ourselves. It is not likely that either of our lives will be long protracted; but yours to all appearance is nearly ended. It is necessary that some arrangements should be made respecting Grace. This afternoon, immediately after my return, I encountered John Harlow, who had come hither to speak to you on this same matter.”

“Harlow,” exclaimed Sir Guy impatiently. “What ails him, that he needs to interfere?”

“I do not blame him,” said Father Eustace. “He is a sincere friend of young Walter Powell, whose interests he honestly believes he is serving by the demand he has made—in his behalf, if not in his name?”

“A demand, ha!” repeated the Knight, something of his former vigour returning to his voice; “and what I pray you does he demand?”

“That Grace should be placed under the guardianship of some godly man, as he expresses it, who will influence her to choose the same path in this matter, which Walter himself is likely to follow.”

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"Himself belike," said the Knight quickly.

"No; to do him justice, such was not his thought. The person he proposed was Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, before whom, as he informs me, the young pair exchanged their troth plight."

"And does he think," said the old man somewhat indignantly, "that I should prefer him, or any other stranger, to you?"

"You must consider Grace only in the matter," said Eustace. "She is at present little more than a child in these matters—dutiful and obedient, and so far all that we could wish. But she knows little of the differences of the Churches, and it is time that she should now be taught. If Harlow's request is complied with, I have little doubt that his wish also will be fulfilled. The Bishop of Salisbury is both a learned and a pious man, to whom she cannot but hearken with reverence and affection. I shall be well content that you should do this, if your judgment inclines that way. If, on the other hand, you prefer to place her in my charge, I will undertake the office; but you know what my teaching must needs be in respect of the weighty matter of which we have been speaking."

"I do not hesitate a moment," said the old Knight. "You have been her truest friend, her most faithful counsellor; whatever she knows, that is worth the knowing, has been learned of you. Nay, the dear girl herself would scarce forgive me, even when I was in my grave, were I to consign her to any other teacher."

"That is determined then," said the Prior. "Well, I have not sought this, and I will not shrink from it.

But you are exhausted, I fear; this conversation has been too trying for you."

"I shall be better now that it is settled," said the Knight. "The matter has long been a source of trouble to me. Leave me now, brother, for I need sleep. To-morrow the necessary steps shall be taken for carrying out my purpose."

CHAPTER VI.

THE old Knight lingered on, contrary to the expectation of the leeches, not only through the winter months, but those of the spring ensuing, and it was late in the summer when the hour of his release came at last. There was great lamentation at Wyndford, for Sir Guy had been a kind and generous master, and all felt it to be uncertain who might take his place. The betrothal of Grace to Walter had long been a matter of general notoriety; but rumours had been circulated of late, and gained credence as time went on, to the effect that this engagement would after all not improbably be cancelled. Sir Hugh de Spencer, the young lady's cousin, who had gained much renown in arms in Scotland and elsewhere, was likely, it was thought, to prove a more acceptable suitor—if not to Mistress Grace herself, at least to her guardian the Prior. The youth in question arrived from the North to attend the funeral, officiating as chief mourner in the absence of Father Eustace; who was too much bowed down by sorrow and infirmity to be present himself. Hugh learned

with much satisfaction of the arrangement, which assigned Grace to her uncle's guardianship. A day or two after the funeral, when Father Eustace was sufficiently recovered to attend to business, Hugh solicited an interview.

"I must shortly return to the North," he said, where my presence is urgently required. But I would fain speak with you ere I take my departure, on a subject very near to my heart, as I doubt not it is near to yours also—my cousin Grace."

"What of her?" asked the Prior. "You know that my brother has appointed me her sole guardian. You may safely leave her to my charge."

"There is no one in whose charge I would so willingly leave her," assented Hugh. "But there is this engagement, made a twelvemonth ago with Walter Powell. Surely you will not permit that to stand."

"Why should it not, Hugh?" inquired the Father. "It was made with her own consent, and with her grandfather's approval, nay, by his wish."

"I cannot allow either of those statements," said Hugh. "Sir Guy hardly approved, and certainly did not desire it. Lawrence Oldfield told me that he resisted the Queen's importunity, until she completely overbore his resistance. I will speak more on that point anon. And still less could it be said that the contract was made with Grace's consent. She had no time to think of the matter, and simply yielded to the will of the Queen, and of her grandfather, as she supposed. Oldfield declares—"

"You will do well to close your ears against Law-

rence Oldfield's reports," said Father Eustace somewhat sternly. "He is a zealous son of our Church no doubt; but his zeal overpowers his discretion, and sometimes perverts the truthfulness of his statements. Why should not Grace have consented to her betrothal with Walter?"

"Because I am assured that until the day of the tournament she had no special regard for him. She knew that I had long loved her, at least as well as Powell. I had hinted as much to her only the day before the Queen's visit, and she heard me in silence indeed, but surely not in displeasure."

"My son," said the Prior, "a maiden's demeanour on such occasions is a page hard to decipher. I so far assent to your opinion, that I doubt whether before the day of the tourney she had seriously regarded Walter as her lover. But in the six weeks that followed there can be no doubt that a deep affection grew up between them, and still exists."

"And a fancy which has grown up in six weeks only, may it not also be rooted up in six weeks?" urged Hugh. "I am assured that her first preference was for me. Suffer me to come and reside here at Wyndford. I am deeply interested in what is now passing in the North; but I will willingly resign all my schemes and hopes to gain, or rather I should say to regain, Grace's affection. Nay, hear me, Father; I know that you yourself disapproved—that you still disapprove—this hasty and ill-omened betrothal."

"You have been told that also by Oldfield, I suppose," remarked Father Eustace.

"Not by him only," returned the youth. "Everyone believes it. Is it possible that they could believe aught else?"

"Hugh," said the Prior, after a silence of some minutes, "I will speak plainly, and without reserve to you on this subject. I did *not* approve the betrothal. It was made during my absence: and the attachment, of which I have spoken, had grown to its height before my return to Wyndford. I did fear, and told my brother, that the religious differences of these unsettled times might render such a union an unhappy one—"

"And who can doubt that you were right," broke in Hugh impetuously; "or rather, that you are still right in entertaining such a belief? The religious differences of which you speak, which have been growing every year more marked, have now reached such a height that neither party can overlook them. There are persons who still claim, after some strange fantasy of their own, to call themselves true children of the Catholic Church, who are nevertheless in open rebellion against her authority. They refuse the ministrations of the Catholic clergy; they absent themselves from confession and from the Altar; they speak in terms of irreverence and contempt of the Holy Father; nay, of Holy Church itself: and among these Walter Powell is one of the foremost."

"What proof have you of that?" inquired Father Eustace. "I have known, for a long time past, that his belief is not such as I should desire to see in my ward's husband, but never what you now impute to him."

“Popular rumour says as much, at all events,” said Hugh; “and it is scarcely likely to be mistaken in such a matter. I will not name Lawrence Oldfield, since you have forbidden me to do so. But surely you yourself cannot doubt the truth of what I affirm.”

“It is likely, I fear,” said Father Eustace, “though I have no proof of it. But see here, Hugh. Whatever I might have desired on this subject—and I will candidly say I wish things had fallen otherwise—nothing but some very grave and sufficient cause would induce me to take the step you desire, of annulling this betrothal. Grace is no longer a child. However she and Walter may differ on certain points of Faith, there is no acknowledged severance between them. Were you to speak to her on the subject, she would probably deny that she and Walter did so differ.”

“You are right there,” muttered Hugh. “I have spoken with her, and she did deny it. But it only needs that you should point out the truth to her, and she would speedily be convinced of it.”

“And that is what I cannot do, Hugh. As yet, remember, notwithstanding all that has passed, we are, in name at least, a united people. There is no open disruption in our Church, and I for one will never consent to act as though it had already taken place. ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ Besides, do you forget that, all other points conceded, the Queen herself would hardly permit this engagement, made by her own special desire, to be cancelled, unless with the express consent of the parties? As loyal subjects—”

“Loyal subjects!” repeated Hugh scornfully. “Eli-

zabeth herself is no loyal subject to the power set over her—some men think, no lawful Queen of England at all—”

“Hush, Hugh!” exclaimed the Prior. “I cannot hear this.”

“It is what all England will have to hear ere long,” rejoined Hugh. “Has not the Holy Father declared—did not that faithful Pontiff Paul IV. declare, at the time of her sister’s death, that she was not the rightful sovereign of England, and could never become so except by dutiful submission to the Holy See? And what has been her course ever since? Has she not persisted in her rebellion, trampling the decrees of the holy Synod of Trent under her feet, requiring all the gracious forbearance of the late Pope with insolent contempt—meriting, if ever a sovereign did, the sentence which will speedily be pronounced against her, which will cast her down from the throne she is unworthy to occupy, and place there the true heir in her room.”

“The true heir!” repeated Father Eustace, in evident surprise. “To whom do you refer?”

“Surely to Mary, the wronged and suffering Queen of Scotland,” returned Hugh. “She is King Henry’s undoubted heiress, if, as all faithful Catholics believe, no real marriage ever took place between him and Anna Boleyn.”

“This is treason, Hugh,” said Father Eustace. “Whatever may be thought of the marriage you speak of, the crown has been given by the free voice of the people, represented by both houses of Parliament, to Queen

Elizabeth. Profound as is my respect for the Holy Father, I cannot allow that he has the power to depose a sovereign who is the free choice of her people. That claim has never been admitted by English Churchmen, nor of late years has any attempt been made to enforce it by the Pontiffs themselves."

"But an attempt will be made now," returned Hugh. "I know that it is in contemplation ere long to take this very step you deprecate. If Elizabeth does not return to her allegiance, a bull will be issued by the present Pope, deposing her from the throne, absolving her subjects from their allegiance, and seating Mary in her place. All faithful children of the Church, in England, as well as in Spain and France, will be commanded to assist in the enforcing of this decree. Philip of Spain, the most powerful prince of Europe, will put forth the full strength of his kingdom for the purpose; and some of the greatest nobles of England—Northumberland, Westmoreland, and many others—will raise Mary's standard. Elizabeth will have no power to resist. The new queen will undo the work of this reign, even as the other Mary undid that of her brother Edward. England will once more become Catholic. Heretics like Walter Powell will no longer be tolerated. Then what will become of Grace, if she should have wedded one, who must needs become an outcast alike from his Church and his country?"

"Hugh, I have heard you now," said the Prior, "and it avails not to protract this conversation. Your secret is of course safe with me, but I would earnestly dissuade you from taking part in the plots you speak of. It is to my mind nothing less than rebellion, and rebellion

is as the sin of witchcraft,—an unlawful tampering with the powers of evil, to attain some visionary good. Even if I felt sure that the attempt would prosper, I should dissuade you from it. But, believe me, it will not prosper. You do not rightly apprehend the character of Elizabeth of England: she is wise, far-seeing, and resolute beyond any sovereign of her day. They who attempt to outwit her, will find that her sagacity is far keener than their own. They who assail her by force, will find that they have ventured within the spring of a lioness.”

“You will do nothing then to aid me in this matter?” said Hugh. “I do not mean in the attempt which faithful Catholics are about to make, to rescue Mary from her captivity, and place her on her lawful throne—on that point, after what you have said, I speak no more. But you will do nothing to prevent the union between Grace and her heretic lover?”

“I have only to say once more,” said the Prior, “that I do not account Walter as a heretic. I see no need, as things now stand, for doing so; and I will not deal with him on the assumption that he will become one. If the decree you speak of should indeed be promulged, it will be a sore trial to all faithful hearts; but Heaven will lend us strength to meet it. And now farewell, for this conversation has wearied me. I pray you let it not be resumed.”

“I obey, holy Father. It grieves me if I have offended you. I shall yet hope that, after a further consideration of this matter, you will be minded to think differently of it. Meanwhile, I will to the North again, and bear my part, I trust, like a man. Should we triumph, I shall be able to help and protect my

cousin: should we fail, I at least shall trouble her no more."

He quitted the room as he spoke, and Father Eustace, leaning his head on his hand, sank into a gloomy reverie. He was grieved for Hugh, for whom he entertained a warm affection, and who, he could not doubt, had embarked on a course which must needs end in his ruin. But what he had been told respecting Walter Powell pained him still more deeply. He had refused to attach credit to Hugh's words, but in his heart he could not conceal from himself that there was probably but too much truth in them. Still, he saw no way of escape from the difficulty in which Grace's unhappy betrothal, and still more unhappy attachment to Walter, had involved her. She would, no doubt, ask counsel of him in this difficulty; and what was he to tell her? There was no help for it. He could but teach her to do her duty as a faithful daughter of the Church, and pray for help and guidance when the hour of trial came.

Meanwhile Hugh, quitting the Prior's apartment with a hasty step, was proceeding straight to the stables, intending to rouse his followers, and set forth immediately for Westmoreland, when he encountered the old Seneschal, who had guessed the purpose of his visit to Father Eustace, and been hanging about the passages with the intention of exchanging a few words with him before he quitted the Castle.

"I crave your pardon, Sir Hugh," he said, "if I appear to intermeddle in your affairs. But I loved your father, and I have ever loved you."

"I know it right well, Lawrence," said Hugh; "and I know also what you would ask me. But I fear I can tell you nothing, but what it would give you pain and grief to hear."

"Aye, I feared so," rejoined Lawrence. "It was the work of this heretic woman, who has usurped the lawful throne of Mary Stuart. They may tell you otherwise, but I know such is the fact."

"It may be," said Hugh. "In truth, I do not doubt that it was so. But I fear it cannot now be amended. The Father will hear nought on the subject."

"Aye, but the time may come, when he will hear it—or rather, the time may come, when he will hear neither that, nor aught else."

"Ha! you think—" exclaimed Hugh, and then paused.

"I think that the Father's days on earth are numbered," said Oldfield; "that before many months are past—it may be many weeks—he will follow his brother. Then in whose guardianship will the Lady Grace be left?"

"I know not," said Hugh, startled at the question. "Has it not been provided for?"

"I do not think that it has," said the Seneschal; "but I have had it in mind, nor shall I forget it. Return to the North, Sir Hugh; and be assured that nought shall be done that can favour the heretic Powell, if it be in my power to prevent it. I will send you word from time to time of what is passing. I learn from John Harlow, who is for ever coming up here with his reports from Ireland, and his letters for Mis-

tress Grace, all that concerns Walter Powell. Whenever anything reaches me, of which it can profit you to be told, you shall not be kept in ignorance of it a day."

Somewhat fortified by the reflection that he had a friend at court, ready to serve his cause to the utmost of his ability, Hugh took his departure; and again the old cloud of dulness settled down on Wyndford Castle. The autumn and winter of 1568 passed on; the spring of 1569 succeeded. Father Eustace and Grace, in their retirement, heard the strange rumours with which England was now distracted. The unfortunate Queen of Scots, who had been compelled in the previous year, after the fatal battle of Langside, to take refuge in England, was beginning to attract the attention of the people as a possible claimant, not only of the Scottish, but also of the English throne. The first evidence of this was her removal from Bolton,—a neighbourhood containing too many Roman Catholic families of distinction to make it, in the opinion of Elizabeth's ministers, safe to permit her residence there. She was removed to Tutbury, in Staffordshire, and placed under the custody of the Earl of Shrewsbury. Then the report was circulated of a proposal having been made to her that she should renounce her right to the throne of Scotland—a measure which would, as a matter of course, have involved the abandonment of her claim to that of England also. She had refused her consent, it was said; demanding either to be restored to her throne, or permitted to leave England for France. But both these alternatives had been refused; and all men were beginning to believe—what only a few far-sighted persons had hitherto conjectured

—that Elizabeth regarded her as so dangerous a rival, that she meant to retain her permanently in captivity.

The rumours now multiplied, and grew more alarming. The leaders of the Romish party were reported to have been roused to the utmost pitch of indignation by this high-handed proceeding. Foreign courts, too, saw in it a serious obstacle to the success of their designs. It was generally believed that Mary's liberation would be forcibly effected. An outbreak was daily expected in the North. The Romish party were everywhere secretly arming. Spanish troops had been sent to the Netherlands, to take their part in the enterprise. Not long afterwards came the tidings that the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland had been summoned before Lord Sussex to explain their conduct, which appeared suspicious. The Earl, it appeared, could discover no evidence of treason, and they were permitted to depart; but no one believed that they had been really innocent of the offence charged against them; and the levying recruits, the collection of military stores and arms, and the private meetings of the leaders of the party, went on,—the purpose for which all was designed being so thinly disguised, that no man could be deceived about the matter.

The good Prior heard all with a saddened heart. Whatever might be the issue of the struggle now impending, it could not be one favourable to the hopes of peace and unity, which he still continued to cherish, though in defiance, as it were, of all rational expectation. It did not restore his cheerfulness when, one day late in the autumn, Sir Walter Powell arrived unexpectedly

at the Castle, having landed at Bristol a few days previously, on his way to join Sussex's army.

He remained only one day at Wyndford; but that one was enough to add greatly to Father Eustace's trouble. The young lover was full of zeal for Elizabeth's cause, and of indignation against the rebellious nobles, who had so thanklessly requited her wise and gracious rule. It was most friendly of Sydney, he said, —whose good opinion he had been fortunate enough to win in the campaign against the Irish rebel, O'Neale, —it was most friendly of Sydney to allow him to leave Ireland, where there was now nothing of importance stirring, and devote his sword to the overthrow of the traitor Earls. Not that his sword could be needed; Sussex was strong enough to crush the rebellion twice over. It could not be otherwise. The people of England had learned how great were the blessings they enjoyed under Elizabeth's rule, and would stand by her against all enemies, at home or abroad. But it would be the greatest of privileges to strike a few stout blows in behalf of Elizabeth and freedom.

The Prior smiled at the enthusiasm, with which he could not find fault; but it disturbed him nevertheless. Walter spoke with all the unguardedness of youth and generous feeling, and the manner in which he occasionally expressed himself, shewed a careful observer that many, at least, of Hugh's statements respecting him were unquestionably true. He forebore to press him on any dangerous topics which arose in the conversation; turned it aside when such topics appeared to be imminent; and allowed it to drop altogether

when it could not be diverted. He noted with satisfaction that Grace did not seem to be in the least aware of his uneasiness. To her Walter's visit was one of unmixed delight. It now wanted little more than six months to their wedding-day: and in the two years and a-half which had elapsed since their betrothal, she had come to regard him already as her husband. Father Eustace watched them, as they walked together on the smooth stretch of turf along the margin of the brook, beneath the spreading planes,—she leaning on his arm, and hanging on every word he spoke, as though it conveyed some rare and precious secret; and he, in his turn, glancing down upon her with a smile of assured protection and idolizing love; and the load ever gathered heavier at the Prior's heart as he gazed.

“Must they be parted?” he murmured to himself; “so fond, so true, so noble-hearted! I could almost wish their marriage-day had already passed, so that it could not be her duty to separate herself from him! She suspects nothing as yet—does not doubt that he is as faithful a child of the Church as herself. Yet she must learn it, and that ere long, I fear! Well, I will not anticipate evil. As I have said so many times to myself during these last two years: ‘sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’”

The next morning Walter Powell, with a glad farewell—for he anticipated a speedy and joyous return—took his leave, and journeyed to the North, to join the levies of Sussex, now amounting to six or seven thousand men.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a clear November day when Walter Powell, riding at the head of his troop in the vanguard of Sussex's army, crossed the river Wear by an ancient bridge long since destroyed, and entered the city of Durham; where he was to be quartered for some weeks, it was expected, at the least. Walter noticed with admiration the noble Cathedral, occupying the most imposing site of any of our English Minsters. A more picturesque combination of the works of nature and art than that which the lofty heights exhibited, crowned partly with woods, and partly with the massive masonry of the Norman architect, can hardly be conceived. The Castle too, in which the troops were to be lodged, and the Episcopal Palace, from which Bishop Pilkington had, fortunately for himself, been absent for some time past, were stately and noble structures. But they now presented a most forlorn and unsightly aspect. The Palace had evidently been recently spoiled and seriously injured; the doors and windows had been shattered; and the furniture, hacked to pieces or partially burnt, cumbered the courtyard. The Cathedral too, though the walls and roof had undergone no injury, exhibited a most desolate appearance. The great west doors stood wide open, and shewed the floor littered with fragments of books, ecclesiastical vestments, and the like; while at the east end the altar had been torn down, and apparently shattered into fragments.

"The sacrilegious villains," exclaimed one of the officers of Walter's troop, as he noticed these tokens of violence; "and these are the men who are for ever taunting us with irreverence for holy things!"

"We will give them a lesson," was the answer, "and one that will not speedily be forgotten. We have a long array of prisoners, and among them the traitor priest, Plumtree. I know it is the Earl's purpose to have some threescore of them at the least, and Plumtree at the head of them, hanged without further ceremony. Our first duty, when we are established in our quarters, will be to set up the gibbets."

"I will help with all my heart," was the rejoinder.

Stirring events had taken place since Walter's departure from Wyndford. The prompt measures taken by Elizabeth had forced the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland to unmask their true designs before they were ripe for execution. It became impossible to wait for the help from the Low Countries promised by Alva; some of their partisans in the southern counties had not fully made up their minds to join them; others had only half completed their preparations; others could not receive the summons in time. These drawbacks, however, the leaders considered to be of less consequence, because they were possessed with the idea, that the restoration of the Mass in England would be so popular a measure, as instantly to draw vast multitudes to their standard. They designed first to detach a sufficient force to Tutbury, to effect the release of Queen Mary from her captivity, and place her at the head of their musters; while with

the rest they marched on Durham. But they found themselves baffled at all points. The sagacious Elizabeth, on the first rumour of the intended rising, had removed Mary to Coventry out of their reach; and the Commons, greatly as many of them desired the re-establishment of the Mass, entertained in general too sincere an attachment to their Queen, or too wholesome a dread of her resolute character, to provoke a struggle with her. Not more than four thousand foot-soldiers and fifteen hundred cavalry mustered on Clifford Moor on the 22nd of November; and this was a force with which it would be idle to attempt any encounter with the royal troops. They conducted themselves, however, with as high-handed a violence, as they could have employed had the whole country been at their mercy. On their first entry into Durham, they tore to pieces and trampled under foot the Bibles and Prayer-books which had been placed in the Cathedral, and they broke in fragments the Communion-tables, which had been introduced there. They then celebrated the Mass after the Romish fashion, and restored the Sacrament to its place over the Altar. From Durham they moved northwards, carrying standards on which were emblazoned the crucifix and chalice, the five wounds of Christ, and the like. They conducted themselves in all the villages, much as they had done at Durham, everywhere destroying the Bibles and Service-books, and celebrating Mass on altars which they erected for the purpose. Finding however that few, if any, were disposed to join them, and hearing that Sussex at the head of seven thousand men, and

another army, under Lord Warwick and the Lord Admiral Clinton, were advancing against them, they retreated in haste to Hexham, and shortly afterwards to Naworth. Here they dispersed without striking a blow. The two Earls fled into Scotland, where Northumberland was seized by the Earl of Murray, and confined in Mary's old place of imprisonment at Loch Leven; while Westmoreland escaped in disguise to the Netherlands. In less than six weeks from its outbreak, this formidable rebellion was completely quelled. It was judged, however, wiser to retain a considerable force in the North, the border-country being in a very disturbed state, and numerous bands of rebels being still at large there. Sir Walter Powell therefore, with the companies to which he was attached, took up his abode, as the reader has been told, in Durham, as the headquarters of the army. There he remained for many weeks, chafing not a little at the inaction to which he was reduced. No doubt a complete success had been gained over the rebels; but with the exception of a few score, who had been hanged at York, or by his own orders at Durham, they had totally escaped punishment. What was worse, most of their leaders were still at large, doubtless to plot fresh treason against their sovereign.

The condition of his old companion and playmate Hugh de Spencer, was also a matter of sore trouble to him. He had always known that Hugh's opinions, which differed widely from his own, exercised a strong influence on his actions: nor was he surprised at learning that Hugh had been induced to join his patron Westmoreland in the late treasonable outbreak. He grieved

greatly for him, and was anxious to exert what influence he possessed with his father's friend, Lord Hunsdon, in his favour. But Hugh, it was generally believed, was hiding somewhere in Scotland, probably in one of the midland counties. It would be extremely difficult to communicate with him; and even supposing this difficulty to be overcome, nothing could be done, unless Hugh were willing to make submission and return to his allegiance. Knowing what he did of his old play-fellow's character, this was more than Walter could venture to hope.

But the letters which continually arrived from Sir John Harlow were a source of still greater anxiety. "My beloved son in Christ," wrote the parson in one of these epistles, received towards the close of January, "it grieveth me sore to transmit unto you tidings, which must needs afflict you, yet it becometh not me, as your faithful friend and pastor, to hide aught of the truth from you. The good Prior, for out of custom I still give him that title, though (the Lord be praised for the same) there be no monks now, over whom he hath any rule—but the good Prior Eustace groweth daily weaker, declining, to my thought, more rapidly than did his brother Sir Guy some twelve months ago. I would fain converse with him respecting the health of his soul, not feeling altogether sure of its condition in the sight of the All-wise; but though I make frequent visits to the Castle, I prefer my requests in vain. I am further informed that Nicholas Oldaker cometh oftentimes from Salisbury, and is ever admitted to the sick chamber. Whether this be due to the ill-will of Lawrence Oldfield—who hath ever been the bitter enemy, not of poor John Harlow

so much, as of the doctrine which he preacheth—let others judge more certainly, but to me, at least, it seemeth to have much likelihood. As Mistress Grace is for ever with her uncle, I fail to obtain an audience of her also. She ever requesteth me to send up for her perusal the letters which I have received from you, but that she cannot be spared from her uncle's bedside to confer personally with me.

“My son, I fear all this bodeth thee no good. For Oldaker—he is an honest man in most things, but leaneth too much on that rotten staff of Rome, which has been to so many the occasion of falling. And for Oldfield—it were hard to find his match for bigotry and unscrupulous devotion to the same bad cause. Greatly do I fear, lest these two should persuade the Prior Eustace, in the weakness of his last moments, to execute a deed constituting them the guardians of the Lady Grace; and the more does this fear possess me, because I doubt she has a blind trust in them, which would make her the ready tool of their designs. It wanteth some weeks still to the day when she will become her own mistress, and until then she would be at their disposal. Were they to convey her straightway after her uncle's death, to Spain or the Netherlands, it is like she would not be permitted to return thence, unless as the wife of a Papist. If thou couldest obtain permission to return hither for a brief space, all might be amended. But for me, I am well-nigh powerless to counteract their plotting.”

Walter perused this epistle with feelings of the greatest perplexity and chagrin. Though not inclined to endorse all Parson Harlow's surmises, he could not but acknow-

ledge that there was much that lent them likelihood. He believed Father Oldaker to be both honest and friendly; but Grace's unbounded devotion to her uncle, and Lawrence Oldfield's bitter dislike to himself, had been in no degree overstated. Father Eustace again, he was well persuaded, would do him no injury; but, as Harlow had urged, men at their dying hour, were sometimes induced to lend a willing ear to what they had before resisted. If Grace should be placed at Oldfield's disposal, he would be certain to employ his power, without scruple, in the manner most unfavourable to Walter's union with her. After an hour passed in anxious thought, he resolved to take Harlow's advice, and solicit permission to return for a brief interval to Wyndford.

He was just rising from his chair for the purpose of making his request to Lord Sussex, when his attention was called to a sudden disturbance in the street, and saw a man mounted on a foaming horse, splashed like himself with mud from head to foot, who had just arrived from the North, with the startling intelligence of the murder of the Regent Murray in the streets of Linlithgow. Whether, as many have affirmed, this crime was connected with the recent outbreak in England, or not, at all events it aided the rebels in the execution of their designs. A similar, and more dangerous rising followed immediately in Scotland: the English refugees joined the standard of the malcontents: and the Scottish executive having been found unequal to the suppression of the insurrection, it became necessary for the English troops now quartered in the North, to march into Scotland and take order with the rebels.

Under these circumstances, Sir Walter Powell could not, with propriety, prefer his petition to the Earl. Instant and energetic preparations had to be made for the campaign now imminent—orders having been sent for the troops to march as soon as they could be got ready. The danger to Elizabeth's throne was, in truth, still very serious, notwithstanding the defeat of Northumberland and Westmoreland. Mary had numerous and powerful partisans in Scotland, who had hitherto been kept down by the able rule of Murray, but now were emboldened to a display of open violence. In England also, there were many families of rank and influence, who, if they were not devoted adherents of Mary, at least desired the restoration of the Romish faith. A very large proportion of the commonalty secretly sided with them. Philip's Lieutenant in Flanders, the Duke of Alva, had an army ready to cross the channel, whenever a favourable opportunity for doing so should offer itself. France, whatever professions she might make to the contrary, was bitterly hostile to the English Queen. The Pope, as was well known, was only waiting for the right moment to give the signal for a crusade of all the Roman Catholic powers against her. These were dangerous elements, which rendered it a matter of imperative necessity to trample out as speedily as possible the flames already kindled.

The young man was glad to have his time fully employed: and for the next few weeks he had little leisure to bestow on the letters which still continued to arrive from Wyndford. Before his departure for the North, he received two pieces of information—both of them of

importance. The first was that Father Oldaker had resigned his cure in Salisbury, having had (so John Harlow conjectured) some differences with his Diocesan. He had gone to London—some said to solicit a benefice from Archbishop Parker, whose views were more in accordance with his own; and others, to make preparations for leaving England altogether. But he had himself, previously to his departure, written kindly to Walter Powell, and all apprehensions of his possible enmity to him had been dismissed.

The other piece of news was that Sir Hugh de Spencer had at last shewn himself at the head of a band of rebels in Haddingtonshire, who had proclaimed Mary Stuart Queen of both the British kingdoms, and invited all loyal subjects to join her standard. It was now of course impossible to attempt any intercession in his behalf. The best that could be hoped was that Hugh would be made prisoner, or escape into some foreign land. At all events, Walter trusted that he and Hugh might never meet in the field as enemies.

The fear of such a contingency somewhat damped the satisfaction with which he set out from Durham one morning early in May, and took, with his soldiers, the road to the Scottish frontier. He had the command of the vanguard, and was directed to proceed with the utmost caution, especially when he approached the border-land of Roxburghshire. The whole of Teviotdale, as this district was called, was at the time in a state as wild and lawless, as though it had been in the occupation of a savage people. The soil, so rich and fertile by nature, watered by abundant streams,

and at this day highly cultivated, was then overgrown with wood, or left bare and desolate. To have raised crops or planted orchards, would have been simply to labour for the benefit of the neighbours on the other side of the border; who, when the harvest season arrived, would inevitably have made an inroad on the cultivated lands, reaping and carrying off the harvests. Horned cattle constituted the sole wealth of the inhabitants, for which the rich pasture-lands afforded a plentiful provision; and the herds were guarded day and night with the utmost care—the whole population holding themselves in readiness at all times to resist a foray, or make reprisals when assailed.

In the reign of Elizabeth this part of the country was in a more unhappy condition than it had been in any previous reign. The suppression of the monasteries—the lands belonging to which had heretofore, as a general rule, been exempted from pillage—had removed the sole protection against high-handed violence which the locality had enjoyed. The effect of this state of things was, that the residents were now, one and all, to speak the plain truth, a band of robbers, ready at all times for violence, and paying very little regard to the persons, who might be unwise enough to venture within their reach.

Warned, as he had been, of the danger likely to be encountered in a country like this, Walter Powell proceeded with the utmost caution. He directed his men to keep closely together, and made, from time to time, a personal examination, to make sure that the hack-buteers had their matches burning, and would permit

neither the tale nor the song with which soldiers on a march were often suffered to beguile the tedium of the way; but which, in the present instance, might distract their attention from the perils by which they were environed.

It was well he had been so vigilant. As the troops were passing along the edge of a marsh bordered by rocks, a shout was suddenly raised, and a band of moss-troopers, in number about equal to his own, issued forth from what seemed to be a deep cavern in the hill side, and assailed them on their flank. They had to cross the bog in order to do this, but it was evident that they were acquainted with paths through it, by which it might safely be passed, though any stranger would have found himself in a moment plunged up to the saddle-girths in the soft earth of the swamp. They came galloping at headlong speed, wild, fierce-looking figures, equipped with steel caps and coats of mail, consisting of small oblong pieces of iron overlapping each other. But for Walter's precautions, his party would have been thrown into instant and irremediable disorder. As it was, however, the attack proved unsuccessful. Drawn up in a compact line, his spearmen received and broke the charge, while the hackbutters poured from their muskets a discharge which emptied many a saddle, and caused the entire body to retreat to their fastnesses with all the speed in their power. Powell shouted to his men to forbear from pursuit, but he could not restrain their impetuosity: and the whole plain, as far as the edge of the morass, was presently filled with a crowd of horsemen, engaged

in a series of single combats. Finding that the ranks were hopelessly broken, Walter himself followed to support his men with the few that had obeyed his orders. In the *melée* which ensued, he found himself singled out by a horseman, the leader, as it seemed, of the attacking party, who assailed him with a vigour and determination, which required all his prowess to resist. Several times the duel between him and his antagonist was broken off by the intervention of other combatants on both sides. But the unknown always renewed it, with a fierceness which shewed that, for some reason of his own, he was resolved to bring the encounter between Powell and himself to a mortal issue. Deadly thrusts were exchanged, heavy blows struck and parried; by one of these Powell's horse was so severely wounded, as to be unable any longer to support its rider's weight. It reeled and staggered, and Walter in a few moments would have been at the mercy of his enemy, if one of his men had not at this moment discharged a heavy blow, which alighted on the stranger's neck. The blood burst forth in a stream, and the wounded man fell helplessly to the ground. Walter leaped from his saddle to demand his surrender; but perceiving that his adversary was too severely wounded to continue the combat, he desired his followers to raise the fallen man's vizor, and render him what help might be possible. They obeyed, and to Walter's astonishment the features of Hugh de Spencer were disclosed.

"Hugh," he exclaimed, "what, you here in this wild country! I had been informed you were a hundred

miles away in Kirkaldy's army. Surely you know I would not have raised my hand against you, and I deemed you would have done the same by me. But it may be that you knew me no more than I did you."

"I knew you, Walter Powell; it would profit nothing to deny it—more, I accepted this service, intending that this very encounter should take place."

"And wherefore?" inquired Walter, in a tone of mingled surprise and regret. "Are we not old play-mates? Were we not almost as brothers? Can these sad and miserable divisions have so changed your feelings, that you should voluntarily seek my life?"

"Divisions, Powell—religious divisions you mean? Nay, they have but little to do with this matter. I could have forgiven you for your heresy, if heretic indeed you be, as some men say you are—I could have forgiven that. In truth, this moment assures me, that though I may have alleged this as a cause of quarrel, I have cared in truth but little for it. I am dying now, and it would avail me little to deny the truth."

"And why then,"—began Powell.

"Why did I hate you?—why did I seek your life?—that is what you would ask? Walter, can you really doubt why it was? You were the favoured lover of the woman on whom my heart, since my earliest childhood, has been set. I was assured that while you lived there was little hope of my gaining her myself, though I might succeed in separating her from you; and if you were removed, she would certainly be mine. But you must needs have known this for many a day past."

"You are mistaken, Hugh, I did not know it," said

Powell; "and I grieve to hear it now. If I have been your rival, I knew not that I was so."

"Then I have done you wrong," said Hugh; "and Lawrence Oldfield, who assured me that you hated and dreaded me as a rival, has deceived me."

"He has; but think not of that. Shall we not try to staunch your wound? One of my men has some skill in surgery."

"It would but torture me to no purpose," returned Hugh. "I have but a few minutes to live; but I would fain atone to you for my injustice. You must forgive me, Walter; I have done my utmost, for a long time past, to prevent your marriage with Grace Wyndford. Oldfield continually instigated me to it, assuring me that nothing but wretchedness to her, as well as to myself, could follow from your union. I half-believed it, and half-persuaded myself to think so; and we should have succeeded, and that speedily. There had been no hope of our doing so while the Prior lived, but now—"

"While the Prior lived," repeated Sir Walter. "He is still living, is he not?"

"He has been dead nearly a week," answered Hugh. "I received the tidings from Oldfield the day before yesterday. Had you continued at Durham, I doubt not you too would have learned the fact ere this."

"And Grace?" exclaimed Powell.

"Grace will be left in a great measure to Oldfield's influence. Of late she has come to rely much on him, mainly on account of his devotion to the Prior, and—to do him justice—to herself also. I know what his designs are, though not exactly the means he will take to carry

them out. But, be sure, all that lies in his power at this critical moment he will essay. And there is no one to withstand him. By craft he compelled Father Oldaker to leave the neighbourhood, because he would not abet his purpose. But I can add no more. My breath is fast failing me. I would there were a Priest, to whom I could make my confession; but that may not be."

"I will go seek for one," said Walter; "though I have but little hope that, in this wild country, my search can be successful."

He turned to depart, but even as he did so, a cry from his followers warned him that his errand would be vain. Hugh had sunk back exhausted by the exertions he had made. Suddenly they beheld his face overspread with a ghastly pallor; and, before they could again raise him, his spirit had passed away.

The Earl of Sussex, with the main body, was now approaching. Leaving one of his subordinates in command of the men, Walter galloped back to meet him, and, soliciting an interview, related the information which had just been communicated to him. Unwilling as he was at such a moment to leave the army, he said, he must nevertheless ask permission to ride southward with all the speed he could employ, and defeat the plots which, as he knew only too well, had been hatched for the destruction of his happiness. Lord Sussex, with whom he was a favourite, heard him with indulgent kindness. "Go," he said, "Walter, by all means; and do not return till you have stopped all the fox-earths of these traitors. Her Majesty herself would be the

first to bid you God speed. But never fear, lad. It is the end of May now—before Midsummer-day we shall have you back again a married man, it may be; if you can make up your mind, that is, to leave your bride so soon.”

CHAPTER VIII.

It was a bright day, early in June. The sunlight poured down into the narrow streets of the picturesque old London of the day, bringing out the quaint carvings and colourings of the projecting gables, and sparkling in the glass of the leaded windows; which, even at mid-day, scarcely dissipated the gloom of the lower stories of the houses. Walter Powell, as he mounted Ludgate-hill in search of the residence of Father Oldaker, (who had recently removed from Salisbury to take a cure in one of the city churches,) paused for a moment to contemplate the scene which presented itself, and which was, in some respects, new to him. It was in truth ten years since he had visited London, his long absence in Ireland and the North having allowed him no leisure, even for a journey to the capital. The first thing that struck him was the woful change in the appearance of St. Paul's Cathedral. When he had last beheld it, its lofty and splendid spire had soared into the sky to the height of more than five hundred feet, the most striking spectacle that had ever met his eyes. Now, what a contrast! The entire spire, nearly three hundred feet in height, had totally disappeared. The tower indeed remained, surmounted by a low wooden roof. But even

the tower had been sorely injured by fire ; and the whole proportion and beauty of the building was so marred, as to present—to any one, at all events, who remembered the glories of the former house—an absolutely unsightly spectacle. Bishop Pilkington, after the fashion of the theologians of his day and school, had attributed the destruction by lightning of this glorious work of art to the wrath of God, who had been offended at the superstitious mummeries, and profanations of holy things, which had so long been perpetrated within the Cathedral walls : while the Romanists, not to be behindhand, as peremptorily affirmed that the disaster was the just judgment of God on the English people for their rejection of lawful authority and Catholic doctrine. Walter Powell—though, if compelled to side with either party, he would have chosen the former—was not disposed to take either view of the matter, contenting himself with deploring the loss of so noble a monument of sacred art, and hoping that the good citizens of London might be minded ere long to do somewhat for its restoration.

But in truth the matter soon passed away from his mind, which was occupied with other subjects of the deepest interest to him. He had returned with all possible speed from the North, and had reached Wyndford the last day in May. Proceeding straight to the Castle, he had demanded an interview with Grace, which the Seneschal at first seemed inclined to refuse him. “Mistress Grace,” he told him, “had been sorely distressed by her uncle’s death, and further, so exhausted by long watching and anxiety, that she was

in no fit condition to receive any one; especially a visitor whose presence must needs cause her so much agitation as Sir Walter."

"You forget," said Powell, "that Mistress Grace is my betrothed wife; and that the time is now arrived when I may claim her as such. You know," he added, in a more peremptory tone, observing the dogged look on Oldfield's features, "you know, I say, that Mistress Wyndford's twenty-first birthday has now passed."

"I am aware of that," answered the Seneschal shortly.

"Then she is mistress of her own actions," said Walter, "and no one can prevent my seeing her."

"No one but herself," corrected Oldfield. "But she is, I repeat, in no fit state to receive visitors; and is indeed about to remove hence, in order that change of scene and climate may restore her."

The young Knight said no more. The intimation just made to him corresponded so closely with both Hugh's and Harlow's warnings, that he resolved to take instant measures to defeat the schemes, which he was now well assured were in contemplation. Leaving the apartment, he went straight to the offices, and summoning Grace's favourite waiting-maid, he directed her to go at once to her mistress's chamber, and solicit for him an interview. The damsel, who sympathised with the lovers, and had no particular affection for the sour old Seneschal, complied without demur; and before Oldfield was fully aware of Walter's movements, the latter had been introduced into the young lady's apartment.

A long and trying interview followed. Grace, though not so utterly broken down as Oldfield had represented,

was nevertheless in a state of much agitation and distress. Some conversations she had had with her uncle during the last few weeks of his life, had greatly troubled her. Finding his end near at hand, he had felt it his duty to speak to her more solemnly than heretofore, on the paramount duty of faithful obedience to the Church,—the “Pillar and Ground of the Truth,” as the Apostle had called it,—to which all other considerations must needs give way. “Beware,” he had said, “lest any one tempt you to close your ears to the voice of the Church. Remember what the Lord Himself said—alas, you may have need to remember it—‘If a man will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican.’”

“Surely, my father,” she had said in reply, on one of these occasions, “I am scarce likely to be so tempted. They whom I love best”—her cheek crimsoned as she spoke—“are faithful children of the Church, even as I am.”

“God grant they may continue so,” returned the Prior feebly, for the excitement of the conversation had been too much for him. Grace saw the change in his face, and was obliged forthwith to summon assistance. The topic thus interrupted was never resumed; indeed, the Prior lived but two days afterwards. But the words seemed still to linger on Grace’s ear. There was some meaning in them which she could not fathom. She was still brooding over them, when her lover’s arrival was announced.

As soon as their first greetings had been exchanged, Walter urged that their marriage should at once be

celebrated. He intended no disrespect, he said, to the good Prior's memory, whom he had loved and honoured with all his heart, though in some things he had been constrained to differ from him. An expression of surprise and pain came over Grace's face as she heard these words.

"Differ from Father Eustace!" she repeated. "In what, I pray you?"

"Nay, in nothing that can affect you or me," answered Walter hastily. "Trust me, I would not offer him even the shadow of disrespect. But remember how we are situated. You are left without a friend or protector in the world; for I care not to disguise from you, that I cannot leave you in the charge of the Seneschal, Oldfield, who, I know, bears me no good will; and I am almost equally unwilling to place you under the care of the Rector of Gerard's Cross, who, I am aware, would not be acceptable to you."

"No, Walter, neither Oldfield nor Harlow," said Grace. "I could not endure either. The last did not love my uncle, and the first does not love you."

"And who then is there?" said the young man. "I am bound in honour to rejoin Sussex at the earliest possible moment. No, dearest, let the Priest join our hands. The ceremony may be—nay, I should wish it to be—strictly a private one. Then I can leave you here with a quiet mind, until my return from Scotland."

"I should still be alone," suggested Grace doubtfully; "for Lawrence Oldfield—"

"I do not mean to leave you to him," said Walter. "I have thought over the matter; and it is my purpose,

with your consent, to ask Father Oldaker to take the place in the household which your honoured uncle has left vacant. He is an old friend, whom you and yours have always esteemed and loved. Within the last week or two, as I have learned, he has resigned his cure in Salisbury, and gone to London—it is thought, to serve some small benefice in the city. I doubt not, I could persuade him to accept the office of Chaplain here.”

After some further entreaty, Grace was induced to yield. Powell had journeyed without loss of time to London, and was now on his way to discover the lodgings of Father Oldaker, which, as he had been informed, lay somewhere to the eastward of St. Paul's.

Walter moved onward through the Cathedral-yard, which, in those days, was greatly more spacious than it is now. He paused for a moment to contemplate the celebrated cross, at which the great divines of the day were wont to preach; their sermons being listened to by an eager audience, which shewed how deeply the people were interested in the controversies of the times. Then, turning to the left, he was about to resume his walk, when a crowd of persons came rushing down the lane leading to the Bishop of London's palace, dragging with them two men, respectably attired; one an Englishman, the other, by his complexion, evidently a foreigner, and probably a Spaniard.

“Down with the traitors!” they shouted. “Drag them before the Lord Mayor!” “Hang them to the nearest post!” “Down with the Pope and all his followers!”

“What have these men done?” inquired Walter of

a well-dressed man,—a shop-keeper probably, or, it might be, a notary. “Have they attempted her most gracious Majesty’s life, that the crowd proposes to hang them as traitors?”

“In one sense they have done so, worthy Sir,” answered the man. “For some days past it has been rumoured in the city that that head and fountain of all evil, the Pope, had issued one of his proclamations (or bulls, as he calls them), declaring her most sacred Majesty to be no true Sovereign of England; releasing her subjects from their obedience to her, and requiring all faithful men—so he presumes to style his own followers—to hold no more intercourse with those who still continue to acknowledge her.”

“Aye, indeed,” said Walter. “But we have so often heard, during the last few years, that the Pope purposes to take such a step, that most men have ceased to believe that it will ever really be taken.”

“Aye, but it has been taken now,” was the answer. “I myself read it from end to end, fixed upon the gates of the Bishop’s palace; and so may you, if the indignation of the citizens has not already caused it to be torn down. There is to be no more shilly-shally now. The Pope plainly tells us, that henceforth a man must submit himself to the yoke of Rome, or be accounted as an heretic, by all who do so.”

The words fell with an ominous sound on Walter’s ear. For himself, the Papal sentence troubled him but little; but how would it affect Grace? She had been Father Eustace’s pupil, and had imbibed, he well knew, his convictions, until they had become her own. And

there was, unhappily, little doubt what course he would have pursued in such a crisis, had he still been living. Well, he would not anticipate sorrow. He would return at once, as soon as he had seen Father Oldaker, to Wyndford. Grace must be told what had taken place; but she might still be his.

He hastened on, found the Priest with little difficulty, and told his errand. Oldaker shook his head. "I will go with you, Walter," he said; "and should Grace consent, will willingly celebrate your marriage. But, I fear me, unless you yourself should change your views on these subjects, she will never be your wife."

"You will not yourself attempt to dissuade her from it?" asked Walter.

"I promise you I will not. I will simply inform her of the publication of the bull. It is a marvel that neither she nor you had heard any rumour of it. It has been known with certainty in London for several weeks that it had been issued. But in the North, and at Wyndford even, these tidings may be a long time in reaching men's ears."

They journeyed down to Wyndford together, and were received by the grim Seneschal with unusual courtesy,—a circumstance which, Powell surmised, boded his cause no good. Early the next day Oldaker was admitted to an interview with Grace; who, as he was informed, for the last few days had been more depressed than ever, nor had she once quitted her apartment.

The colloquy lasted but a short time; and then

Oldaker rejoined his friend with a saddened expression of face, which at once told its tale.

"Walter," he said, while the tears stood in his eyes, "you must prepare for disappointment. I grieve for you; but it would be alike cruel and useless to deceive you."

"But you cannot have learnt her mind in this short interval," remonstrated Powell. "You can scarcely have had time even to tell her what has occurred."

"There was no need," said Oldaker. "The whole had been made known to her four or five days ago,—the very day, as I judge, after you quitted Wyndford. The bull itself has been submitted to her—by whom, I do not know with certainty, but, I doubt not, by Oldfield. He, from his connection with some of the leading men of his party, would have no difficulty in obtaining a copy of it."

"Of course it was Oldfield," exclaimed Walter impatiently. "But it signifies nothing who it was. Is her mind fully made up, think you, to separate herself from me?"

"I fear so," said Oldaker shortly.

"She will not refuse to see me, and permit me to plead my own cause?" inquired the young man.

"No, she has even some hope, I think, though scarcely known to herself,—you best know what ground there may be for it—that the mournful necessity may be avoided by your submitting yourself to the Church of Rome."

Powell shook his head. "Not even to gain her," he

said. "But I will still attempt what argument and entreaty may do. Is she ready to receive me now?"

"Yes," said Oldaker. "It is best for you both that the interview should not be delayed."

Walter went to the door of Grace's chamber, and was admitted.

She was sitting on a low couch, leaning her head on her hand. Prepared as he was to find her sad and depressed, the young man was startled nevertheless at the change in her since they had last met. Her features were bloodless and sunken, and it appeared as though her tears had worn channels on her cheeks. Her drooping figure and listless attitude seemed to be that of a person utterly worn out by long-continued suffering. Walter knew not how to address her. It seemed like cruelty to increase her misery, as he feared his words must do. He must speak, however; and after a pause of a few minutes he began:—

"Grace, you know the purpose of my visit."

"Yes," she answered, in a low clear voice, but one which expressed unutterable sadness, "it is to bid me a final farewell."

"No, Grace. Three years ago we plighted our troth to one another. It was a solemn and sacred promise, and neither of us should break it, unless for a reason as sacred and as solemn."

"There is such a reason," said Grace.

"And what is it?"

She looked at him with her mournful eyes, which were now glazed and tearless, as though her power of weeping had been exhausted, and then said, "If a man

will not hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.'” Walter, those were nearly the last words that my beloved uncle spoke to me, and he spoke them with a significance, I remember, which I could not understand. Now their meaning has come home to me but too plainly. I hear his voice, methinks, repeating them even now.”

“And you mean, or you suppose him to have meant, that I am one who will not hear the Church, and therefore all thought of me must be banished from your bosom?”

“Is it not the truth, Walter?”

“Grace, it is not. I am an unworthy son indeed of the Holy Catholic Church—in which I profess my belief, whensoever I recite the Apostles' Creed—but in faithful obedience to it I yield to none.”

An expression of joyful surprise lighted up her face for a moment. “What, beloved of my heart, you really mean it! You will obey the Church as she speaks by the voice of her divinely-appointed ruler? You will repudiate these usurping Bishops, these false Priests? you will submit yourself to the rules and ordinances of the ancient Faith? you will renounce your allegiance to this heretic Queen, whom his Holiness has deposed and excommunicated? Oh, what joy—”

“Stop, Grace, you mistake me. The Queen is my lawful sovereign, to whom I have sworn allegiance. No man has power to absolve me from it, even if I desired to be absolved. The Church of Rome is not the Catholic Church, but only a single branch of it; nor is it the one to which I owe, or can render, obedience. The Pope is not the ruler—”

"How can that be?" interrupted Grace. "There is but one Church, as there is one Lord and one Faith. Christ set up but one kingdom upon earth. How should a kingdom have more than one supreme ruler?"

"It *has* but one," said Powell, "but that Ruler is no earthly one, being even the Lord Himself. I am no priest, no divine, but I can certify as much. It is His Kingdom, not that of any man. Have you forgotten the words of holy Paul: 'The Head of the Church is Christ;' or of the Lord Himself addressed to the Apostles, 'ONE is your Master, and ye all are brethren'?"

"Do you mean then," said Grace in evident surprise, "that God has committed no authority to men in spiritual things, as He has in temporal?"

"I do not," returned her lover. "Christ has clearly appointed men to have rule in His Church, and exercise authority in matters of faith and discipline. I do not reject the rule of the Bishops of my own Church, but only the power of the Bishop of Rome, as supreme over them."

"I cannot understand why you should do so," returned the maiden. "Is there not the same necessity for the various branches of the Church—to use your own phrase—is there not the same necessity for them to be directed by one central authority, as there is for individual members of those Churches to be governed by their several rulers? How can order and concord be maintained without it? Why should authority and obedience stop at the point you fix on?"

"Because God Himself has ordered that it should stop there," answered Walter. "I know what you

would say," he added hastily, as he saw she was about to interrupt him—"I know what the Church of Rome says of the Supremacy of St. Peter, and the texts of Holy Scripture which she interprets in support of her view; and if you will go into these in a candid and unprejudiced spirit, I cannot doubt what your decision would be. But Almighty God has not left a question like this, to be determined by the sense put upon two or three doubtful texts. He has divided mankind into nations, His intention being visibly displayed in the distinctions of race and language and national character, which are all of His making. These prevent the possibility of mankind becoming, in accordance with the theory of Rome, one harmonious whole under one earthly ruler. Such a ruler must belong to one race, one people only, and could not govern all impartially."

"And the Unity of the Church then, which Christ hath both commanded and promised, you hold to be an impossibility!" cried Grace.

"No, not the Unity of Brotherhood, which is the Unity enjoined. Brethren may be of one mind in a house, though no one of them has the mastery over the others."

"But there is not even the Unity of Brotherhood in this unhappy land," rejoined the maiden. "Christians are arrayed in two camps, the one against the other, and each must choose to which of them he will belong. Walter, it is vain to pursue this question further. I am not qualified to enter on the argument you proposed to me just now. You have spoken of an allegiance which you owe, from which nothing can release you.

That is my case also. I have been bred up in dutiful obedience to the Holy See. More than that, those whom I have loved and revered from my cradle have lived and died in that Faith. I will not separate myself from them, though the wreck of my earthly happiness be the alternative. You do not persuade me; I fear there is as little hope of my persuading you," she added, with a pleading look.

"True, Grace. Though my earthly happiness also will, I feel, be lost for ever when we part, yet I too cannot change. The allegiance I have vowed to my sovereign, no earthly consideration shall induce me to renounce. The usurpation of Rome is a tyranny my heart and conscience command me to resist. I *will* urge you no further. Farewell, and if we never meet again on earth, may we meet above."

She threw herself into his arms, and one long passionate embrace was exchanged. Then Walter turned to the door, and she sank again exhausted on her couch.

Oldaker was awaiting him in a private chamber. He saw in a moment from Powell's face the result of the interview. "I feared it would be so," he said, pressing the young man's hand. "We have fallen upon evil times. Of all the bitter fruits of religious strife, there are none so bitter as partings like these. This is indeed a fulfilment of the words, 'I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword.'"

"We must bear it as men," said Walter shortly. "It is but for a time. I shall set off without delay for the North, and scarcely, I think, return to England again—

at all events, not for years to come. May I leave Grace in your care? There are but two other persons to whose charge she could be entrusted, and there are grave objections to both. She has some kinsmen, I believe, but so distant, that I doubt whether she has ever heard their names."

"I will willingly do your pleasure," said Oldaker. "In truth, I was not unprepared for this. The good Prior foresaw the possibility, if not the likelihood, of what has occurred—greatly as the thought grieved him—and he spoke with me respecting it. Grace, too, this morning said somewhat on the subject. She wishes to be conveyed abroad, and enter a convent, of which she has heard, in the south of France. I will accompany her thither, if such be your wish. I can do so with the less difficulty, because it is my own purpose henceforth to leave England, and reside abroad."

"I thank you," said Powell, "it will be one burden removed. But may there not be a difficulty? The Privy Council will not permit her wealth to go to the endowment of a foreign convent. If money should be needed—"

"It will not," said Oldaker. "Grace will take with her such jewels as belong personally to her, and these will more than suffice for her admission to the convent. The remainder of her inheritance she will voluntarily surrender to the heir-at-law."

"It is well," returned Powell; "and now I am anxious to quit these old walls, which I shall behold no more. Farewell!"

A few words will tell the reader all that he requires

to know. As soon as her strength permitted, Grace Wyndford crossed the sea, under Father Oldaker's escort, and was shortly afterwards admitted to the convent of St. Therese in Languedoc. There she lived a calm and peaceful life, almost to old age. If the great sorrow of her youth continued to cling to her through life, it was not discerned by those about her. Mistaken though her reasoning may have been, and needless though the sorrow she inflicted on herself, both had nevertheless proceeded from an honest sense of duty, and as such had brought their blessing. Walter's trial came sooner to an end. He served in Scotland until the conclusion of the rebellion; and then, at his own request, returned to Ireland, where he remained for several years; until, in the insurrectionary outbreak of the Earl of Desmond in 1579, he was slain in a skirmish with the rebels. His life, too, did not appear to his friends as that of an unhappy man. He was grave and quiet, but to all appearance contented, and even cheerful; and why should it have been otherwise? He was one of those who had forsaken what was dearer than houses, or brethren, or father, or mother, or sisters, or wife, or children, or lands, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, and is it not written of such that "they shall receive an hundred-fold?"

In taking leave of this question, it is proper to remark, that the view so often taken by writers, viz. that the severance between ourselves and Rome was mainly caused by the unwise and intolerable arrogance of Pius V.—seems to me to be a mistake. So vast and so disastrous a movement could not, in truth, have

been the work of a single ruler, especially of one whose tenure of power was but a brief one. Had it been his policy only that was pursued, it would have been assuredly reversed by his successors. To understand the matter rightly, we must consider the entire ecclesiastical history of England, from the eleventh century—when Rome first put forth the claim of Papal Supremacy, as distinct from its Primacy—to the close of the sixteenth, when the alternative of absolute acceptance or rejection of that doctrine was forced upon an English sovereign. It had been resolutely ignored by the early Norman kings, until the time of the abject John and his feeble son. It was resisted, having then gained some hold, by the Edwards, and, less vigorously, by the Henrys. But it slowly made its way, becoming in every generation more distasteful to the English people, as the fires of persecution were kindled for its maintenance, until, under the Tudors, it had grown to be intolerable. This might have been foreseen from the first. All other differences between the Churches might have been adjusted: the question of Papal Supremacy, never. It is well known that Pius IV. would have permitted, would even have sanctioned, the use of our Book of Common Prayer, containing, though it does, the denial of every doctrine at issue between us and Rome, if his sovereign rights had been acknowledged. But once admit those rights, and the very life of the English Church, as a teacher and guardian of the truth, would have been compromised, and ultimately destroyed. The Papal claims once asserted, one of three things must of necessity follow: Rome

must withdraw her pretensions, England must submit to them, or disruption must ensue. The astonishing success of the Papal power during five centuries of usurpation, forbade the thought of any abandonment of its high-handed policy; the character of the English people, which had deepened and strengthened with the growth of its liberties, rendered submission still more impossible; and so the catastrophe became inevitable.

In truth, the blame should not be laid on either Pius V. or Elizabeth—on the Rome or the England of the 16th century—so much as on those who put forward, and who maintained, a false theory of unity. Our Church has ever held, that she derives her commission directly from the great Founder of the Faith; that He left no viceroy to assume His place; that Scripture, primitive Church history, and—what has been too little insisted upon—the analogy of the temporal government of the world, repudiate such a theory. No single argument could be advanced in favour of the sway of one Spiritual Ruler of the Church, which might not be urged, with equal force, in favour of one temporal sovereign of the earth. It appears at first sight, as though an empire like this would be an incalculable blessing to mankind. Would it not prevent wars—so we might argue—facilitate intercourse, diffuse knowledge, promote universal brotherhood? Yet Almighty Wisdom has not ordained this; and oftentimes in the history of the world, His Hand has visibly interposed to prevent such a consummation—witness the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries; witness the calamitous failures of all great

conquerors, from Nimrod to Napoleon, when they aimed at universal sovereignty. It was to prevent the possibility of such a centralization of power, that the miracle of the confusion of tongues was worked in the infancy of the world. We could not yield to the claims of Rome, without going counter to the providence of God.

This tale is the record of one instance, among ten thousand, of the evils which that unhappy theory has occasioned, of the strife it has provoked, of the loving spirits it has torn asunder, of the faithful hearts it has broken. May the day yet come, when Rome shall voluntarily renounce, or be forced to abjure, pretensions she should never have advanced; when the sister Churches shall again take loving counsel together against the common foe; when the saying of the Lord Jesus shall become the rule of Christendom, "One is your Master, and ye all are brethren."



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