HUBERT ELLERDALE

A TALE OF THE DAYS OF WYCLIFFE.

BY

W. CHAD RAYNOR.

FRONTISPIECE.

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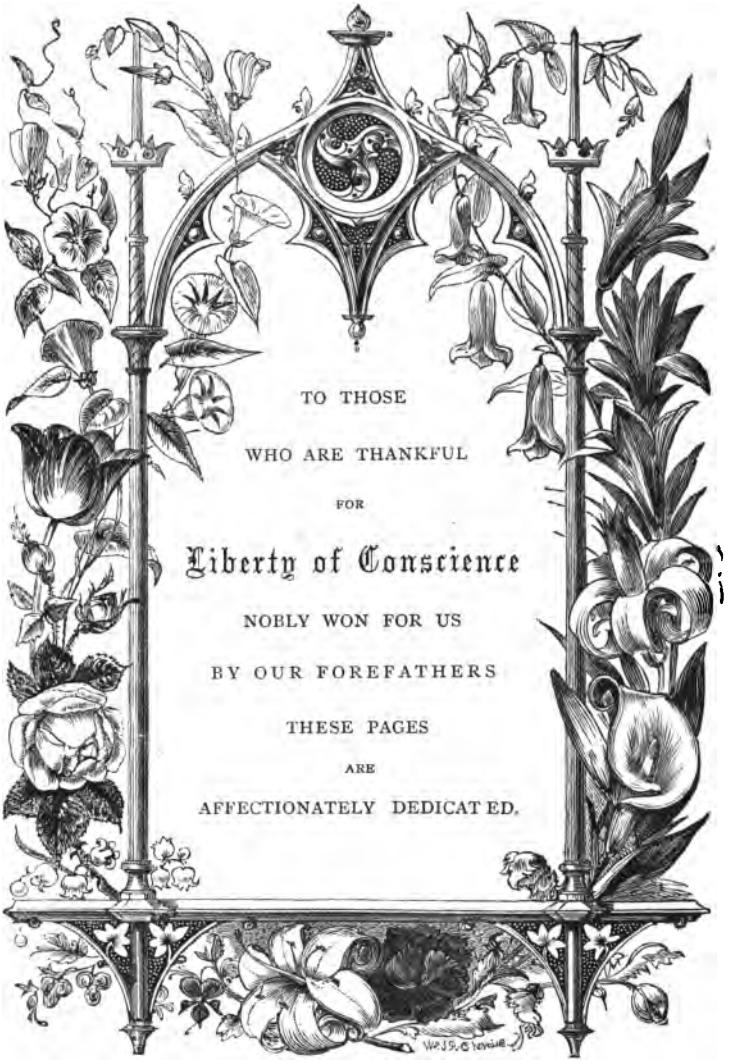

VIEW OF OXFORD.

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HUBERT ELLERDALE.

CHAPTER I.

"Yet could they not,
Though moral night around them drew her pall
Of blackness, rest in utter unbelief."

POLLOK.

"ARE the horses ready, Gurth?" asked a young man of two-and-twenty, who for the last five minutes had been pacing up and down a hall, dimly lighted by the sunbeams that struggled in through its stained-glass window.

"Aye, master," replied his groom.

"Strap this parcel on the pack-horse, then; I shall be with you directly."

"You seem in a hurry to go," said a lady, in a tone of soft reproach.

"I do not wish to keep my friend waiting," said her son, colouring slightly, and stooping to kiss her.

"Which friend do you mean?" asked the lady, with an arch smile—"Oswald or Edith?"

"Oswald, of course," he replied, laughing.

A slight movement of her head showed that Dame Ellerdale knew better.

"Your mother will not detain you, nor does she blame you for loving sweet Edith Walden; but, mind, she will expect her son's wife to be not only comely, but good and noble," said the lady, holding his hand and looking fondly in his face.

Well built, and of an engaging countenance, Hubert Ellerdale was a young man a mother might pardonably be proud of, the most attractive part of his face consisting in his fine brown eyes, which seemed to carry the impression that he was at once truthful and sincere. His close-fitting doublet and hose showed off his figure to advantage.

"You rate me high enough, my lady mother, if my bride is to be perfection; but it so happens that my gentle Edith is all you could desire."

In another minute he was on his favourite chestnut, and his servant also mounted, and leading a sumpter-horse, they rode forth into Eastcheap. It was early morning and but few of the Londoners were astir, so they settled into a brisk trot.

Except at noon, the streets must have been rather dark, for the structure of the houses was such as to prevent too much sunlight finding its way into their narrow courses; not only that the thoroughfares were narrow, but because in most cases each storey jutted out beyond the lower one, the roofs thereby almost touching each other. Quaint and very picturesque must have been those beetling houses of mediæval London, with their small latticed windows peeping out from wood and

plaster walls, the woodwork—sometimes fretted—generally painted black. But the most salient characteristics of Old London were its gabled roofs; and, as the houses in the same street were of all sizes, so their pointed gables were extremely diversified, some barely reaching the second storeys of contiguous buildings, others leaping high up into sight of the open sky above.

On leaving the walled city by its western gate, our horsemen pushed forward more rapidly towards the village of Charing. No Fleet Street or Strand existed then. The country through which they were passing was a pastoral one. Fields of meadow and ripening corn lay stretching away on their right, where now a network of streets and alleys preclude a vestige of verdure; whilst on their left, a like scene extended down literally to the river's *strand*, broken, however, here and there by the embattled mansions and "pleasaunces" of the nobility. Passing through the village of Charing—where stood a beautiful cross erected by the first Edward to the memory of his queen—they proceeded for a few miles along the highway, and then stopped in front of a substantial residence, fortified in accordance with the warlike habits of the period and encompassed by a moat.

Vaulting from his saddle, Hubert Ellerdale throws the reins to his servant, and the drawbridge having been lowered, is admitted beneath a massive gateway. In the courtyard he is accosted by a young man of his own age, who is superintending the equipment of a pair of pack-horses.

"So you've turned up at last! I am almost ready to start."

"Where's Edith?"

"In the tapestried chamber. She is rather disconsolate, but whether on my account or some one else's you must find out for yourself."

Young Ellerdale wastes little time in acting upon his friend's advice. The chamber in which he finds the disconsolate damsel is a pleasant one, the two latticed windows looking out on yellow cornfields, beyond which flows in lazy quietude the Thames. The walls of the apartment are hung with rich tapestry on which are delineated various scenes in English history, and it is therefore called the tapestried chamber *par excellence*, for most of the other rooms in Walden Manor are similarly decorated. The polished oaken floor is lightly strewn with rushes.

The maiden is seated at one of the open casements, her sweet Saxon face just a little marred by some expression of disappointment—one of Nature's children, innocent of the deceit and falseness of towns and cities. She might, perhaps, be eighteen years of age, and is lightly clad in a gown whose simplicity is in harmony with her own simple nature. Her hair is golden, like the yellow corn that glistens and waves under the summer sun in a field beneath the window at which she is sitting, and her eyes blue as the sky overhead. Her cheeks are tinged with a healthy brightness caught from many a ramble over the surrounding meadows, and her lips are ruddy as the wild cherries that grow by the riverside.

> "Her form is fresher than the morning-rose,
> When the dew wets its leaves, unstained and pure
> As is the lily or the mountain snow."

Such in brief outline is Edith, only daughter of a knight descended from the powerful Saxon Thanes of Walden. A little rain-cloud has been passing over this fresh morning rose, but like a sunbeam in a passing shower, a smile lights her pleasant face as she rises to greet the intruder on her solitude.

"And so you and Oswald are really going to-day?" she asks, the sunbeam disappearing as rapidly as it had come. "It will be a weary time for me until you return."

"It will soon pass, dearest, and then——" But Ellerdale does not finish his sentence, that is to say, not in *words*.

"You have a beautiful day for your ride," she said, seating herself by the open casement and bidding him avail himself of the remaining portion of the little settle, chairs being less numerous than now.

"What a pity," she continued, "my poor Ella has sprained her pastern, else my father and I might have accompanied you for a few miles."

At this moment the father himself entered. He was a fair specimen of the "fine old English gentleman," a stout, good-natured, hale old man, whose beard had apparently not become white through grief or misfortunes—though the loss of his wife, when Edith was but ten years old, had cast a gloom over him for a time. He was certainly not a warrior in his appearance. And yet this knight—for knight he was—had fought at Crecy and Poictiers, and bravely too; but many years had passed since then, and Sir Cedric Walden—Thane of Walden he preferred being called—had so long settled down to peaceful habits and to enjoying the good things of life, that he would have now found it quite

impossible to accoutre himself in armour he had worn when following the Black Prince to battle.

"Well, Hubert, so you are off again to old Alma Mater. I hope you and Oswald won't stay there much longer, else the books will knock all better notions out of your head. Look at me. I know nothing of your Aristotle, and your Latin, and what not, but I'll warrant I am none the worse for my ignorance. And above all things," said the knight, slapping the young man's shoulder, "beware of John Wycliffe."

A glance of intelligence passed between the lovers at the mention of a name that just then was stirring England to its core, but neither said anything, for the Reformer was looked upon as worse than a heretic by Sir Cedric.

Oswald now appeared, equipped for the ride to Oxford, and he and Hubert bade the knight and his daughter adieu, both the young men kissing the maiden, one because she was his sister, the other because she was his affianced bride. Ten minutes later the young men were in the saddle on the road to the classic city, followed by their servants and the pack-horses.

Travelling in the fourteenth century was no slight undertaking. Many were the inconveniences and perils incidental to a ride through even two or three counties. A few packs of wolves and wild boars still infested the country to the detriment of the solitary traveller; but a greater scourge were the outlaws and vagabonds that plundered the wayfarers, who were generally killed if they offered resistance. Merchants and others, for better safety and comfort, often travelled in large companies, in oriental fashion, the scattered inns and the

hospitable monasteries serving as caravansaries. Men always rode on horseback, the stage-coach being an innovation of a much latter date, though we are told ladies of high rank travelled in carriages, of a very crude construction, when the state of the roads allowed.

Before nightfall our collegians reached Great Marlow. It was half-way between London and Oxford, and a convenient resting place, especially as it boasted of having one of the best hostelries in the neighbourhood: a quaint old building, the first story of which jutted out in half-closed balconies beyond the lower rooms, and higher up in the gabled roof were casement windows that suggested pleasant apartments behind them. Having seen their horses comfortably stabled, the young men and their servants repaired to the supper-room. Fortunately they had arrived just in time. The long board bent under the weight of food and dishes with which it was loaded, and seemed to entreat the hungry travellers, of which there was a goodly array, to relieve it of some of its burden. The company was a mixed one, and amongst it were several members of the religious orders.

Curfew, though still existing in some parts of the country, was not in force at Great Marlow, so the travellers had the privilege of gossiping after supper. One of their number elicited much commiseration, having been attacked on Hounslow Heath by robbers.

"Better lose your money, Master Ferndale, than your life," said the host.

"It shows us how uncertain life is, and how it behoves us all to be absolved of our sins," said one of the company, whose smooth face and long yellow hair lent to his appearance an air of interest; but something

in his eyes, as he picked out each of the travellers, without moving his head, seemed to belie the sanctity of his admonition. "If any of you want absolution," he continued, having first noticed that several faces betrayed a consciousness of sin, "I am ready to bestow it, provided you do not carry base coin with you, for I shall want good money in exchange for what I have the power of granting you."

"Who and what are you that you dare grant absolution?" demanded a friar, confronting the man.

"I have my credentials here in this wallet," said he with the flowing locks, glaring savagely at the mendicant, and producing a document bearing upon it the signature of the Pope.

The friar was silenced, and the pardoner continued—

"I declare to you all whence I come. I come from Rome, and here I show you my bulls, and warn you that no one be so bold as to disturb me in the holy work of Christ and the blessed Virgin."

But his wallet had other contents besides the "pardons from Rome all hot," as Chaucer has it. "See," he exclaimed, altering his voice from one of authority to one of persuasion, what precious relics I have here. This is a piece of the blessed Virgin's veil, and here is a gobbet of Saint Peter's seal, and these are bits of the real cross, and here I have some relics of holy saints. It is not often you have a chance like the present one. It is a lucky thing that you happen to have a pardoner among you."

Finding the company rather slow at coming forward, he cast his lynx-eyes on the man who had been robbed of his money, and, smiling blandly, asked him to name

his patron saint. This being done, the pardoner produced a small bone which, in consideration of the man's misfortune on the road, he offered for a single groat. The money was supplied by a friend, and now Master Lynx-eyes carried on a brisk trade for a few minutes, selling pardons for a groat apiece, and the relics at prices proportionate to their alleged antiquity.

"And do you, my young masters," he asked, "scorn alike pardon and relic?"

Not caring to be thought an unfaithful son of the Church, Walden purchased a small crucifix, but Ellerdale, with an excited flush on his face, and pointing at the man's wallet, exclaimed—

"I would not give you a single groat for all that is there."

"Wretch! do you dare insult me?" demanded Lynx-eyes, waxing wroth.

The company crossed themselves, and those standing nearest to Ellerdale moved further from him. The friar, who had been quite cast into the shade by the rival and more attractive vendor of pardons, thinking this a favourable opportunity to restore regard and reverence for himself, held aloft a crucifix, and confronting Ellerdale, said—

"Son, recall what you have said."

"Recall what?" replied the young man, hesitating.

"Your contempt for these holy relics, that have been touched by the sacred hands of our liege lord, the Pope."

Ellerdale obeyed the injunction, hurriedly, but not very reverently, and beckoning to his friend, he retired to their night chamber, followed by Oswald Walden.

"Disciples, I suppose, of that arch-heretic, John de Wycliffe," said the friar, seating himself with the air of a very holy man. He had so far regained the company's respect that attention was now divided between him and the pardoner. The latter, however, seeing no further chance of selling his rubbish, put on his little black velvet cap, to which was attached a *vernicle*, or head of Christ, and soon after left the room, having probably made more that evening than many a parish priest in a couple of months.

The pardoner of the Middle Ages has been generally accounted the greatest scoundrel and cheat that Holy Church ever fostered; but the sumpnour seems to have been as despicable. What wonder, when men like these deluded the minds of the people, and when friars, monks, and priests were steeped in frivolity and vice, that a John Wycliffe should stand forth and denounce their iniquity, and that seeking for purer light he should discover the whole Romish system to be corrupted? What wonder that he raised a voice so eloquent, so passionate, that its echo did not die away until Martin Luther arose to take his place? It is no fanciful epithet that we bestow on Wycliffe when we call him "The Morning Star of the Reformation," for five centuries ago night reigned supreme in England. Our ancestors were asleep, rocked in the cradle of superstition, when the morning-star arose, and sending a clear and genial ray over the land, caused them to rouse themselves. The faint, flickering streaks of light that were to prelude the dawn of day became discernible, though the Papacy ever and again sought to smother the approaching light with its night-clouds.

CHAPTER II.

"Nature's wealth and learning's spoil
Win from school and college."

MONTGOMERY.

ELLERDALE and his friend were astir early next day, perhaps from a natural love for riding in the fresh morning hours, but perhaps too from a lurking fear that they might be assailed by the pardoner and a strong contingent of the travellers. They dined at ten o'clock at a village hostel, and reached the city of colleges before sundown.

Some have liked to compare Oxford to their first view of Rome; and, situated as it is on a gentle eminence, its numerous spires and towers standing out boldly against the sky, it certainly presents a delightful view, the waters of the Isis and Cherwell that nearly encompass it adding to the charm. But the Oxford of the fourteenth century was very different to the Oxford of to-day; for it must be remembered that most of those colleges that call forth our admiration have put on a guise very unlike those wherein Wycliffe electrified the minds that were contending about the philosophy of Aristotle. What should we think of the "city of

palaces" were we to see those original rambling wooden halls with their thatched roofs?—Oriel, Queen's, and one or two of the smaller halls excepted.

Another striking difference between mediæval and modern Oxford, to any one contemplating it from the surrounding country, is the absence nowadays of the great wall that then enclosed it. "Oxford is a city most strongly fortified and unapproachable by reason of its very deep waters which wash it all around, being on one side most carefully girt by solid outworks, beautifully and very powerfully strengthened by an impregnable castle and a tower of vast height." So runs a description from a manuscript of the time of King Stephen. Of the high antiquity of the city there are many evidences, though it may be doubted whether literature flourished there ever since "certain excellent philosophers with the Trojans coming out of Greece, under the command of Brute, entered and settled in Britain." However, so early as the times of the Conqueror it included more than seven hundred houses, most of which, we are told, were unoccupied during the greater part of the year, from which we may infer that the houses so reported were those occupied by students, and this vacancy was restricted to the interval of terms.

"There's the old place at last," said Oswald Walden, rising in his stirrups, and shading his eyes with his unoccupied hand. They had reached a part of the road whence "Oxenforde" burst on their view in all its strength of fortifications and embattled walls.

"I wonder whether Dr. Wycliffe has commenced his course of lectures yet," said Ellerdale—the sight of the classic city reviving in his mind thoughts that had for

some time past been dimmed by the fair face and graceful form of Edith Walden.

"What! troubling your brain already about that Gospel-doctor?"

"I am longing to see him again, and hear his lectures."

"Well, here we are at the Bocardo, so let's drop Wycliffe and his new religion, if you don't mind," said Walden, as they passed under the celebrated gateway —the most strongly-protected of the city gates—since here the protection of the river, wich served as a moat elsewhere, was wanting.

A somewhat turbulent crowd that had assembled at the tower of St. Michael's, the angry glances of the numerous friars and monks, and small knots of excited townsmen, made our travellers aware that something important was about to transpire, and they were not long in learning what that was. The reformer was to commence his theological discourses on the following day.

"Shall you go and hear him?" asked Ellerdale of his friend next morning, as they were leaving their college dormitory.

"I feel rather curious to hear him speak, but I give you my word it shall only be this once."

Half an hour before the appointed time, they had seated themselves in what Vaughan designates "the great room of that huge house of wood and plaster and thatch, where Wycliffe gave his lectures."

Many young men are already there, and as the hour approaches the hall becomes rapidly filled; nor are they only students who are present, for men long

familiar to the halls of Oxford, old and middle-aged, are there.

There is a buzz of expectancy as the time draws near, which immediately sinks into profound silence as a door opens. And then, when a venerable-looking man, in height above the middle stature, enters, leaning on a long white staff, a loud and ringing cheer greets him who dares stand out alone yet fearless in a world steeped in falsehoods and a perverted faith, and point the finger of scorn at the powerful hierarchy of Rome, —who dares to unclasp and remove the dust and cobwebs from a long-hidden Bible, and declare it to be the one and only rule of faith to all who bear Christ's name.

Standing for a moment in the doorway, a smile lights up his face, for he feels with prophetic instinct that those cheers augur well for his beloved England, coming as they do from those who are to be England's future teachers. Though not much over fifty, there are many lines in his broad, massive brow; his eyes are large and expressive with a mingled look of sweetness and brilliancy; his finely-cut aquiline nose and compressed lips lend to his general mien firmness and dignity; his grey hair and beard flow in long curls over his simple robe, which is girded in at the waist by a plain belt, and falls thence in ample folds to his sandalled feet.

Acknowledging the hearty welcome, he ascends a slightly elevated platform on which is the professor's chair, and, after standing there for a minute or two waiting for the cheers to cease, he commences his discourse. There is a dead silence during most of the

lecture, except when his ardour carries him beyond the limits of his argument. The University swarms with friars, and many of their students have come to hear him speak who can ill brook his severe denunciations against the mendicant orders. The dissentient voices, however, are completely overcome when, on taking his seat, he is greeted by another outburst of applause. All his regular pupils, who comprise the larger part of the audience, flock around him to shake hands with their "Gospel-doctor." Last of all comes Hubert Ellerdale, his face still retaining the glow his teacher's words have called forth.

"I am glad to see you here again. I expect great things of you."

"In what way?" asked Ellerdale.

"I expect you, and many more of my pupils, to follow closely in my footsteps, and rouse the people from their lethargy," said the schoolman, leaving the class-room.

"I fear you have placed your faith in a most unworthy vessel, if you think that I can follow, even at a distance, your footsteps."

"And why not?" asked the warm-hearted doctor, his own ardent temperament chilled by his pupil's faint-heartedness.

"It is not every one who is endowed with the courage and wisdom to be a leader," returned Ellerdale, thoughtfully, as they emerged into the High Street.

"'Be strong, and of a good courage,' was an oft-repeated command of God to His leaders of old. Jesus Christ is our wisdom, and, if you have it not, ask Him, and it shall be given you; but you must ask in faith,

nothing wavering, else you will be as a wave of the sea tossed and driven by the wind."

"I am ever wavering," said Ellerdale, sadly; "when I pray to the blessed Virgin I have doubts as to whether my prayers are heard, and when sometimes I address, as you tell me to, the Saviour Himself, I feel Him to be too holy and far off to listen."

"You dishonour Him who gave His most precious life for you when you seek other intercessors than Christ Himself. Fear not, my son, to approach God through the Crucified One, and cast to the winds that ungenerous and foul creation of Rome, that would tear the crown from the meek Victor's brow, and place it on that of the Virgin Mary."

"Are we then nowhere told in the Bible to pray to the Virgin?"

"Nowhere, but, on the contrary, are told that the Saviour is the only mediator between God and man."

"And must I not invoke the saints either?"

"No; by so doing you dishonour Him who has said, 'My glory will I not give to another.'"

At this moment some friars passed them, and, scowling on the venerable face of the Reformer, crossed themselves ostentatiously, as though in presence of the arch-fiend himself. They had arrived at Quatre Voix, and here the distinguished schoolman and his pupil parted company. Standing near a picturesque conduit, close to the old church, Ellerdale found his friend Walden waiting for him.

"What did you think of the lecture?" he asked.

"I heard so much that was strange and perplexing that I never wish to hear Dr. Wycliffe again."

Ellerdale looked disappointed.

"Now don't look so miserable, Hubert; I wish you had never listened to that man's nonsense, or philosophy, whichever you like to call it, for it has taken all the spirit out of you. There are to be grand matches to-morrow at shooting with the long-bow and arc, assaults at the pel, running at the quintain, and I know not what all. You must come with me, and let's see whether this learned doctor has knocked all the manliness out of you."

"Very well, but I fear you'll find me indifferent company, for I must confess that our professor of theology has set me thinking about things very different from sword or longbow exercises. We must stand aside," he added, as a religious procession approached them with all the pomp and magnificence of the sensuous ritual of the day; for Archbishop Sudbury had commanded strenuous efforts to be made to prevent the townsmen lapsing into the "heresy" that was rapidly spreading there.

CHAPTER III.

"This Book, this holy Book, on every line
Marked with the seal of high divinity,
On every leaf bedewed with drops of love
Divine." POLLOK.

As the term progressed, Wycliffe became more and more sought after. His celebrity attracted "a vast concourse of students, and his opinions were gradually, though silently, imbibed by a host of pupils." He was attracting not only England, but Europe herself, by his bold lectures at the University. At first, aware of the deeply-rooted prejudices then existing, he had contented himself with lecturing on logical and metaphysical questions; but gradually sounding the minds of his audience, he had for some time left the cold atmosphere of conjecture and Platonic opinions, and boldly launched into the pure waters of Gospel truth, as revealed in the long-closed Bible. He had further increased his fame by upholding the rights of the King of England against the Pope. So we can readily believe he stood forth in the public eyes as the most prominent object of the day for esteem or hatred.

By the end of the term Ellerdale had become an earnest believer in the tenets he taught.

"What is Dr. Wycliffe like? Is he a very stern man?" asked Edith Walden of him one morning as they sat alone in the tapestried chamber.

"Stern when a friar or a monk tells him the Bible is a lie, but full of sweetness and tenderness when he talks to us about the Gospel; and so gentle does he become under the influence of the sublime words of Christ, I have seen his eyes moisten when he has touched upon some more than usually loving promise of the Saviour."

"Is the Bible then so pathetic?"

"It is full of pathos."

"Have you any of the sacred writings? I should like to read them with you."

"No; I wish I had. They are very scarce and costly. Dr. Wycliffe told me once he would not part with his at any price."

"Then you have not read them yourself?"

"Only some portions of St. John's writings. Dr. Wycliffe allows us to read his Bible sometimes, but always remains with us, lest anything should happen to it."

"What are these writings chiefly about?"

"Mainly concerning the Saviour; oh, Edith! if you could only hear our doctor read some of the passages where Christ Himself speaks, your heart would melt with love for God."

"I always used to think these writings were dull and gloomy," said Edith, gazing wistfully out on the furrowed fields; then, suddenly looking up into her lover's face, she added, falteringly—

"And, Hubert, Father Ambrose told me, not long ago that they are dangerous."

"Yes, most of the priests and friars call them dangerous, because they know, if they are read by the people, their eyes will be opened to the unscriptural state of the Church, and the false position of the clergy themselves."

"Oh, Hubert! you almost make me afraid and unhappy."

"And why should you be afraid and unhappy?" he asked, taking her hand in his, and looking down upon her affectionately.

"It seems so dreadful to talk as you do of holy Church, and of the clergy holding a false position."

"But it need not make you unhappy to hear me speak thus, for, when you learn the sweet promises Christ gives us in this inspired Book, you will be so happy and contented, that you will be able to do without the priests."

"We cannot be good and happy though, if we follow not the precepts of the Church."

"There are priests in London who have embraced the new tenets, and teach only the Gospel of Christ."

"But I do not live in London, you see."

"I hope you soon will," he said, smiling.

She returned his look with one of equal tenderness, but the smile suddenly vanished, and she looked up into his face very seriously.

"What is it my Edith would say?"

"I am too wicked; the sweet promises you say the Bible holds out cannot be meant for me."

"And who has told Edith that she is too wicked?"

"No one has told me that I am too wicked to accept those promises, because no one has ever told

me about them before; but Father Ambrose says I am very wicked."

"It is for a higher One than the priest to judge of any one's wickedness," said Hubert, warmly, and taking the maiden's hand in his, as if he at any rate did not think her so very wicked; "but even supposing you are as you say, that is the greater reason why you should gladly take refuge in the gracious words of Christ."

"Tell me some of them."

He repeated a few of the most tender and encouraging of the sublime utterances of Him, to whom alone, he tried to teach her, she should go as an intercessor for her sins.

"But can it all be true?" she asked, pensively. "The thoughts you have put into my head seem too beautiful."

"They are not thoughts, they are sure promises."

"They seem too sweet," she said, turning her face to the window, and, looking up at a patch of blue in the cloudy winter sky, she repeated very softly to herself, "'Ask and ye shall have, that your joy may be full.'"

"If you will trust Him."

"Well, you are a pretty couple!" exclaimed her brother, bursting into the room. "I have been looking about for you everywhere, and there you are sitting like a pair of turtle-doves. We are all waiting for you."

The new Oxford term had commenced; but as young Walden, who had done with the University, was about to win his spurs, in accordance with the chivalry of the times, by joining an army that was to be sent against the French warrior Du Guesclin, he had insisted on Ellerdale spending a week or two with him. This particular morning had been set apart for

a hawking match. Father Ambrose, the resident priest, who cared more for sport than matins and early mass, was to try a new bird he had purchased against one of Sir Cedric's.

"We are ready," said Edith, apologetically—smiling, blushing, and with a tear in her eye.

Oswald might be slightly rough at times, but at heart he was a kind and considerate brother, and he pretended to see neither the tear nor the blush, finding it difficult, however, to account for the former.

"Never mind, sister mine," he said, kissing her warm cheek, and drawing her arm in his.

They formed an interesting picture, these three, as they went down a broad oaken staircase to the hall beneath, and thence into the courtyard. Oswald was unmistakably Edith's brother; he had the same attractive mouth, and his hair and eyes were of the Saxon hue. The darker skin and brown eyes of Ellerdale suggested a touch of Norman in his blood.

Crossing the drawbridge, they found quite a little company awaiting them. The knight and his seneschal, Father Ambrose, a monk, and others, were mounted, and their horses pawing the ground impatiently. Some retainers were on foot, as were also the falconers and lads with greyhounds coupled in leashes. After helping Edith into her saddle—side-saddles were now coming into use—Oswald and Herbert jumped into theirs, and the party rode off.

Perhaps the most striking figure in the group was the monk. He rode a horse whose golden bridle-bells "jingled in a whistling wind, as clear and loud as his chapel bell." Notwithstanding the sanctity of his call-

ing, his sleeves were edged with the finest fur, and though jewellery was forbidden in monastic rules, his hood was fastened with a curious gold pin, a love-knot in the greater end; he did not wear the sandals that we associate with his order, but the fashionable supple, long-toed boots. Suspended from the belt that girt together his otherwise monkish garments, hung a cross and beads. His smoothly shaven face shone "as he had been anoint." To sum up Chaucer's monk of the period, "he was a lord full fat and in good point."

The priest and Sir Cedric headed the party, each with a hawk perched upon his wrist; but they had only proceeded a few hundred yards, when another company of horsemen approached them from the direction in which they were going.

"They appear to have something pressing on hand, judging from their pace," said Father Ambrose, pointing to the advancing horsemen.

"The foremost rider looks not unlike my lord of Lancaster," returned the knight, drawing rein and bringing his horse to a walk.

"And, if I mistake not," said the priest, "the man who rides beside him is the great heretic, John Wycliffe."

"Wycliffe, said you?" asked the monk, who was close behind them.

"Aye, the apostate priest."

"Then I hope his horse, which appears to be somewhat unmanageable, may stumble in his path, and that yon presumptuous scholar may break his proud neck."

"Make way for our lord of Lancaster," said Sir Cedric, drawing aside in the narrow road, but looking

with no friendly eye either on the Duke or the Reformer.

Father Ambrose followed the knight's example. Not so the monk, who, letting the Duke pass, by a rapid manipulation of his reins, immediately confronted Wycliffe.

"You shall get out of my way, John de Wycliffe, or, by the Mass, I will throw you from your seat;" and, when the Reformer, with no sign of anger on his face, had drawn aside and passed him, the monk called after him, "May all foul fiends beset thy path."

He would probably have said more, but his angry feelings were cut short by a blow from the flat edge of a sword, delivered by one of the Duke's followers.

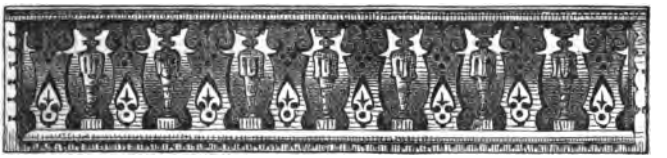
Little interest was taken in watching the rival powers of the hawks after this incident. The birds were cast off, but the party soon returned to Walden Manor to discuss the probable reason of Wycliffe's ride to London, and how he was in such princely company.

"Perhaps they are instigating a revolt amongst the Londoners," suggested Sir Cedric, as they sat over their dinner.

"The Londoners are too apt to embrace the heresy, but they will never associate themselves with the duke," observed Father Ambrose.

"The vile denouncer of our sacred orders is hatching more mischief, you may be sure," said the monk; "very likely they are going to pillage one of our monasteries."

Each of the company had his say, excepting Ellerdale; and, though no one exactly agreed with his neighbour, they were so far unanimous in their opinions, that whatever had brought Wycliffe from Oxford, it was for no good purpose.



CHAPTER IV.

"I had rather stand
A Prophet of my God, with all the thrills
Of trembling which must shake the heart,
. . . . than bear the palm
Of any other triumph."

B. M., *Ezekiel.*

"FAREWELL, my Edith, and do not let the bitter hatred all here bear to him who would revive God's pure truth, influence you against him."

"You need not fear. I can never do aught but bless the man who has been the means of making my Hubert good and noble, and put such happy thoughts into my own weak heart," said Edith, looking up fondly and proudly into the face of her betrothed.

"You overrate me, dearest. Once more, farewell." And leading his horse across the courtyard, in a couple of minutes he was in the saddle and on the road to London.

It was the morning after the incidents of our last chapter, and Oswald and his father were again away with the priest and monk to resume the hawking-match. On entering the metropolis, Ellerdale found the citizens in a state of considerable excitement. It was rumoured that Wycliffe was in the Savoy, the London palace of

the Duke of Lancaster; but few had seen him, for the duke—who was unpopular with the English Commons, and with the Londoners in particular—had approached his palace on the Thames by water, having embarked in a barge at Westminster. If, however, John of Gaunt, as his grace was generally styled, was disliked by the citizens, Wycliffe, on the contrary, was highly esteemed, and consequently a tumult of feelings was raised in their breasts on its becoming known that the Reformer and their princely enemy were under the same roof.

Finding that he could gain no satisfactory information, Ellerdale picked his way through the narrow, crowded thoroughfares to his home in Eastcheap. The house itself was a large one, built in the form of a quadrangle, of which three sides were inhabited—the fourth, that faced Eastcheap, being only a thick wall, with small outlets leading to mercantile offices, and a large entrance-gate. Leaving his horse with a servant, he crossed the small courtyard, and ascending a flight of stone steps, entered a spacious hall, lit by four stained-glass windows, whose walls were decorated with weapons and ancient armour. The parts from which passages led into the interior were hung with tapestry, and, pushing his way through one of these openings, he entered a large dining-room, where he found seated a number of the city magnates.

In most houses the hall was still the dining-room, but the wealthy merchants were becoming luxurious in their habits, and liked to have a separate apartment for meals. Civic dinners, even in the days of Walworth and Whittington, were attended with considerable magnificence; and, though our aldermen of to-day

might blush to see their brethren of bygone days taking turtle soup in pairs from the same dish,* and using fingers instead of forks, some of the dishes might rouse the envy of our aldermen of the nineteenth century. What would they say to roast swan and cygnet, swimming in wonderful sauces, and to such delicacies as beaver's tail and boiled porpoise?

Ellerdale found the city merchants not so interested over dinner as was their wont. They were carrying on a sharp discussion, and one of the first words he heard was the name of Wycliffe.

"Ah! here is Hubert. He knows Master Wycliffe, and can perhaps tell us something," said Wilfred Ellerdale, Hubert's father. Hubert's elder brother, Ralph, was also there.

But the company soon discovered that the fresh comer knew less about Wycliffe's recent movements than themselves. After listening attentively to their conversation, Hubert gleaned the following facts:—

The two houses of Convocation, that were convened early in February, 1377, had met with a determination to deal a decisive blow at the intrepid Reformer. They received accusations against him, as a person holding and publishing many erroneous and heretical doctrines, and the nineteenth day of the month was fixed for hearing his defence. He was in the discharge of his duties as professor at Oxford at the time, and received

* In the romance of *Lancelot du Lac*, a lady complains to her husband that she has not eaten off the same dish with a certain knight for several years; and Hallam quotes from another romance an account of a feast at which each of the knights had a lady by his side eating off his plate.—*Brown's "Chaucer's England."*

the summons with great composure, for he had long been expecting such a trial. The Duke of Lancaster, becoming possessed of the meditated proceedings against him, offered him his countenance and assistance (they had met in the previous year at Bruges, where Wycliffe had defended Edward III.'s prerogatives against the encroachments of the Papacy, and where a close friendship had been commenced between them). Knowing Wycliffe to be shielded by this powerful patronage—the duke was now eldest surviving son of the king, the Black Prince having recently died—the clergy had done their best to imbue the popular mind with prejudices against John of Gaunt, in which they were but too successful, the public ear being open to any slander against him; for, owing to misunderstandings and misrepresentations, he was already much disliked by the citizens, who fancied he was meditating an abridgment of their liberties.

London was early astir on the morning of the nineteenth of February. The news of the coming trial had spread like wildfire, and long before the appointed time the thoroughfares leading to St. Paul's Cathedral, where the trial was to take place, were crowded with the excited populace.

"Think you he will recant his opinions?" asked Ralph Ellerdale, as he and his brother picked their way on foot through Fenchurch Street.

"No; he will accept martyrdom rather."

'Then, if he suffers, woe to the new faith," said Ralph, who, though not so zealous a disciple of Wycliffe as his younger brother, had a leaning towards the reformed tenets.

Crossing the Langbourne, which ran alongside Fenchurch Street, Hubert pointed to it, and said, "Just as that stream eventually mixes its waters with the Thames, so will the truth infuse itself inseparably into the minds of the people."

"You are too sanguine," returned Ralph, smiling at his brother's enthusiasm.

When they arrived at St. Paul's, they found it already nearly filled, but, as sons of a leading citizen, they secured places in the Lady Chapel.

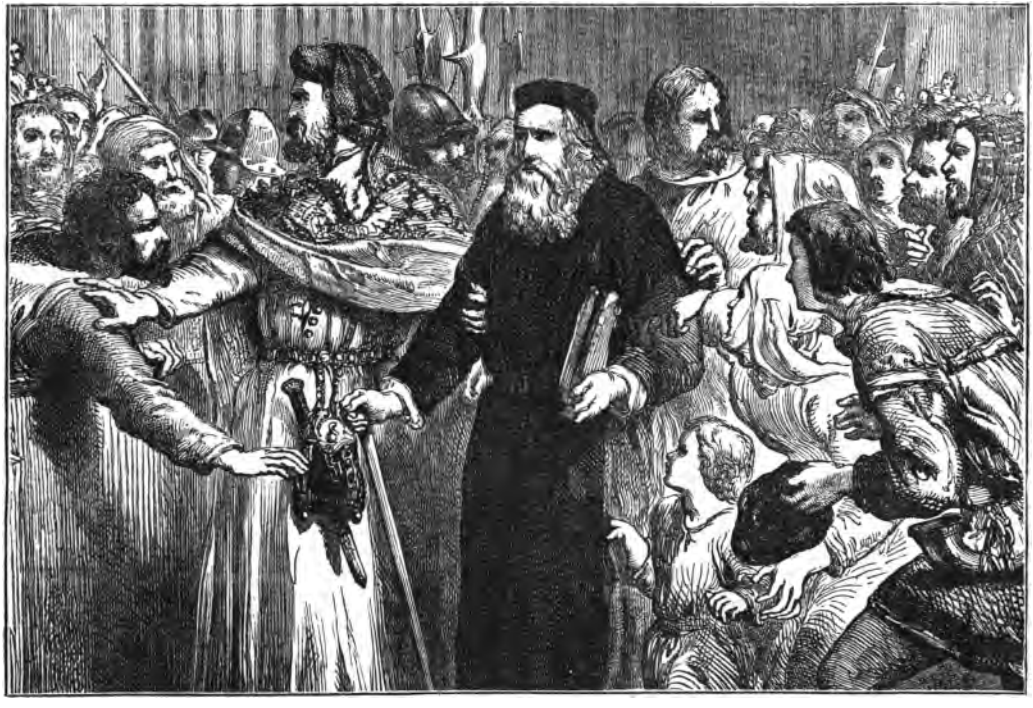
Old St. Paul's must have been an extraordinary and deeply interesting pile. Built in the massive Norman style of architecture, its dimensions were enormous, the space occupied by the edifice exceeding three and a half acres. Its magnificent tower and spire formed a conspicuous landmark.

"For nearly 700 feet," says Knight, in his "Old England," "did nave and choir and presbytery extend in one continuous and most beautiful architectural vista, unbroken save by the low screen dividing the nave from the choir. The breadth and height were commensurate; the former measuring 130 feet, the latter, in the nave, 102 feet. Over all this immense range of wall, floor, and roof, with supporting lines of pillars, sculpture, painting, and gilding had lavished their stores; and their effects were still further enhanced by the gorgeously rich and solemn hues that streamed upon them from the stained windows. At every step was passed some beautiful altar, with the tall taper burning before it, or some chantry, or some magnificent shrine. Then there were the monuments, a little world in themselves of all that was rare and

quaint, splendid or beautiful, in monumental sculpture and architecture."

Imagine this long vista of architectural beauty, with its chapels and chantries, crowded with an excited populace ; a small space in the centre alone remaining unoccupied, in front of which sit, in all the glitter of their pomp and pride, prelates, abbots, monks, friars, and priests. Tapers burn on the numerous altars, and clouds of incense arise as Courtney, the proud Bishop of London, and Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, pass slowly into that small, unoccupied space. But the chief actor in the drama has not yet arrived. Courtney looks impatiently around, indignant that he should be kept waiting by a heretic ; and the other churchmen imitate their principal, adding scornful smiles to their looks of impatience, for they feel that a sure triumph for their sacred orders is at hand. The people murmur. Voices are heard expressing devotion to the Church, and the clergy smile approvingly ; counter-protests come from the adherents of the Reformer, and the clergy frown ; and now and then, above the hubbub, rise ominous cries of " Liberty of conscience ! " " Down with the oppressors ! "

Presently a prolonged clamour takes the place of these fitful outbursts, and all eyes are drawn in the direction of one of the aisles, along which a small group of men with difficulty force their way. An opening is made through the crowd immediately in front of the assembled clergy, and the Reformer stands in their midst. The crowd is a densely-packed one, and Lord Percy, the Earl-Marshal of England, who has befriended Wycliffe, had somewhat roughly forced a



WYCLIFFE APPEARING BEFORE THE PRELATES AT ST. PAUL'S.

passage, adding to mere force his loud voice of command.

The Bishop of London could ill brook this behaviour of the marshal, and, rising from his seat with an angry flush on his cheeks, exclaimed,—

"Had I known, Lord Percy, what masteries you would keep in this sacred house, I would not have allowed you to enter."

"He shall keep such masteries, say what you will," broke in the Duke of Lancaster, who had also come to protect the Reformer.

The bishop did not reply, but, biting his lips, turned his frowning face on the grey-haired man, who stood in their midst, like a rock in a tempestuous sea. He was dressed in the same simple dark robe, girded at the waist, that he always wore; but the quiet majesty of his face needed no costly, gorgeous attire for a foil. Behind him stood his servant, holding a Bible, for it was out of the Word of the living God that Wycliffe meant to answer all the accusations of the prelates.

Whether the compassion for his grey hairs, or in defiance of the bishop, and to show how little he cared for his recent reproof, the earl-marshal handed the Reformer a chair.

"Sit down, Wycliffe," he said, "for you have many things to answer this day."

"Not so," said the bishop quickly; "it is unreasonable that one cited before his ordinary should be seated during his answer. He must, and shall, stand."

The duke again seconded the marshal's motion. "Lord Percy's proposal is only reasonable," he said. "And as for you, my lord bishop, who are grown so

proud and arrogant, I will bring down the pride, not of you only, but of all the prelacy in the kingdom."

"Do your worst, sir duke," returned Courtney, folding his arms and rising to his full height.

"You think your noble parentage* will sustain you; but it shall not," said King Edward's son.

"My confidence is not in my parents, nor in any one else, but only in God," answered the prelate, fixing his eyes on the duke.

The duke was for a few seconds at a loss how to reply to Courtney's last utterance. He felt, too late, that he had said what was unjust and ungenerous; but the hot blood of the Plantagenets flowed in his veins, and yielding himself to unbridled passion, he exclaimed in an undertone to Lord Percy, yet sufficiently loud to catch the ears of the people near him,—

"Rather than I will take these words at his hands, I will drag the bishop from the church."

It was an unfortunate utterance. Immediately after followed a scene of great uproar and confusion, for the clergy and their adherents among the people were indignant that such language should be addressed to their diocesan. What actually occurred at this phase of the proceedings is difficult to decide. The meeting, however, was dissolved, and Wycliffe, who had remained unquestioned and unseated during the unseemly fracas, left the cathedral as he had come. As for the duke and his party, they got away without a collision between them and the people.

* The bishop's father was the powerful Hugh Courtney, Earl of Devon, whose ancestors had sat on the throne of Constantine, and who also boasted a descent from Charlemagne.

CHAPTER V.

"Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet,
Womanhood and childhood fleet."

LONGFELLOW.

NEXT morning Hubert started for Oxford, and Walden Manor being on the road thither, he of course stopped there. The knight had joined in a royal hunt on the other side of the river; his son had left for France; Dame Adeline, who was a sort of duenna to Edith, was indisposed; and Hubert had the satisfaction of having his betrothed entirely to himself. He found her alone in the tapestried chamber, spinning. It was a wintry morning, and a stack of wood sent out a cheerful glow from the open hearth.

"Alone?"

"Yes," she said with a bright smile, "for I guessed you would pass here to-day."

"You must find it very dull and lonely here at times."

"I love the woods and fields too well to be very dull but I confess to feeling lonely sometimes."

"Edith," he said, seating himself, "I wish to have a little quiet talk about the future." And she put her hand in his with the artless simplicity of the country

maiden that she was, and looked into his thoughtful brown eyes with the confidence and love she long had felt for him.

"You know I asked your father last time I was here, whether he would consent to our marriage at the end of the coming term, and that he said he would first like to see me thoroughly established as a merchant. That was reasonable enough; but for some time past my mind has been uneasy, for mercantile affairs have become entirely distasteful to me of late."

"A merchant's life is an honourable one, is it not?" she asked.

"Honourable enough, but an aimless one." He paused, and then, his cheek flushing and his eye gleaming, he continued, "I wish I could follow in the footsteps of Dr. Wycliffe, and reveal to poor deluded souls the long-hidden treasures of the Bible."

"Ah! that would be indeed a noble life. Could you do that and still be a merchant?"

"Yes; many do it."

He traced his fingers through her wavy tresses, and the flush on his cheek died away; the momentary expression of ardour had changed into a look of sadness.

"What is my Hubert thinking of?"

"Of Edith."

"Has she displeased you?"

"No," he said with a smile.

"Then why do you look melancholy?"

He pressed her hand, but was silent; and she gazed into the red glow of the hearth-fire in front of her, and was silent too; then, having sought counsel in the

burning wood, she looked up suddenly in his face, and said,—

"But you should not look sad, for we were talking about the Bible, and you say it is full of the brightest and sweetest promises."

"You are not afraid of Father Ambrose now?"

"No," she answered; "something tells me that he is himself wicked, and not the right one to judge the merits of a Book that contains such things as you have taught me. Oh, Hubert! I have repeated those words of the Lord Christ you last told me over and over again to myself, and I have done what they say I may,—and, oh! how much better it makes me feel to have unburdened my conscience to Jesus Christ Himself than to Friar Ambrose!"

"Dear Edith!"

It was all he could say, for his heart was full, and a torrent of thoughts rushed in upon him. If a few words had afforded her happiness, what joy would be hers when she could drink in the Bible in its fulness! He was pleased to think that her thoughts and aspirations would soon be in unison with his own, and yet mingling with the pleasant were thoughts of sadness.

"You are glad that I am trying to believe as you do?" she asked.

"Yes, dearest."

"Then why are you sad?"

"I have loved you for years, and I have been looking forward to the day when I may call you my wife," was his ambiguous rejoinder.

"And are you afraid the day will never come?" she asked, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"I have hoped to have you some day altogether to myself."

"And so you shall, if you will not shut me up like a nun," she returned, with an attempt at gaiety; but it was only an attempt, for she saw something weighed on his mind.

He did not laugh, nor even smile; and her assumed merriment vanished like the moon behind a driving cloud. She pursed her lips and looked serious, and a tear glistened on her eyelash.

"What is it, my Hubert?" drawing nearer to him, and putting her arm in his. He took her hand, and in a very low voice, more to himself than to her, said,—

"I have loved you since you were a child. Love for you infused into me fresh impulse at the University, and when last summer your father was pleased to think me not altogether unworthy of you, I redoubled my energies." Then rousing himself and looking very earnestly into her face, he added, "And you love *me*, Edith?"

"You know I do."

"Forgive me, dearest, I do not for a moment doubt your love. I do not know why I asked you. I trust all will go well with us, and that we shall be married ere this year has sped. I have been very thoughtless in allowing forebodings that have flitted across my fancy to cast a gloom on your sweet face."

"You are never thoughtless," answered the maiden, slowly. "Something has made you unhappy; has it to do with Dr. Wycliffe?"

"Well, certainly the events of yesterday were not such as I could have wished. Dr. Wycliffe appeared

before his judges in St. Paul's, but such a scene of uproar and confusion ensued that the meeting was dissolved, and he retired unheard and unquestioned. I should have liked to have heard him defend himself, but his noble friends, by their hot-headedness, prevented it. Dear man! he seemed to me to shine out like a star on a stormy sea, or rather like an angel of light, as he stood in that vast assembly, calm and peaceful, beside those haughty prelates and turbulent lords. I shall not soon forget some words he addressed to the people as he was leaving, 'Let us love one another, my children, for love is of God.'"

Edith knew it was not this that had brought the cloud over her lover's face, but seeing he did not wish to tell her just now what it was that troubled him, she did not press him; besides, he had launched into his favourite theme, and under its benign influence the cloud entirely left his brow, and his old smile returned. They had a long talk about Wycliffe and the Bible, and because he was happy again, she forgot, or pretended to forget, what had passed.

She accompanied him down to the courtyard all smiles and sunshine, and, when he had mounted his chestnut steed, twined a piece of ribbon in the bridle-rein, and fastened another piece in his bonnet, according to the rules of chivalry, and told him she was very happy. Patting the noble creature he rode, and thrusting back the sword that hung by his side, she sought his hand, and then following him across the drawbridge, bade him a final adieu with a smile that lingered with him for many a mile.

As he galloped through Brentford and across the

dreary wastes of Hounslow Heath, he was cheered by that smile, and when he regained the more beaten road, and passed through the quaint old towns of Colnbrook and Beaconsfield, and thence to Great Marlow, where he rested for the night, he still retained in his heart's mirror that last token of her love.

But when he had disappeared in a haze of dust that rose from the hard, dry road, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs had ceased to reverberate along the path, the smile on Edith's face settled into a look of sadness, and when she re-entered the tapestried chamber it had altogether disappeared.

"Why did he repeat so often that he loved me, and why did he look unhappy?" she asked herself. "Does he think me still too much like a child, and would he have me more womanly? He says he would not. Or is he afraid it will take a long time to mould the country maiden into the city matron? I scarcely think so, for he tells me that he hates what he calls the duplicity and falseness of cities." But the more she mused and speculated as to the cause of his sad demeanour, the more difficult she found the riddle to solve.

Recalling, however, what he had said about their being wedded before the year was out, her thoughts ran into another groove. Would she make him a good wife?—her heart responded that she would be ever a very loving one, but would she be a real helpmeet to him? Her life had been spent almost entirely in the country; could she fall in with the ways of the town? When she had said she loved the woods and fields too much to be dull, though she might feel lonely, she had

spoken from her heart. Clad in a simple, unbraided gown, and wandering beside mossy banks laden with the odour of primroses and violets, she was far happier than she could be were she dressed in a silken or velvet *cote-hardie*, and walking along the narrow streets of London, whose overhanging houses almost shut out the sky. Far rather would she stroll beside the silvery Thames and watch the plovers skim its surface, and feed the wild swans and cygnets, whose every haunt she knew, than sail in a gilded barge on that same river a dozen miles further on, where, turbid and foul, it flowed through the metropolis. She would far rather listen to the carol of the birds than the cultured minstrelsy of the town, and to the poppling and splashing of the river than the noise of the London streets.

Now, though Edith was as true to Hubert as was ever maiden to her betrothed, it was not without many a little sigh that she thought of the familiar country paths, the groves, and fields to which she must say farewell. But in the midst of her unfavourable comparisons between the unknown city and her rural haunts, his recent sadness rushed in every now any then upon her reveries. "Oh!" she thought, "if only he will be happy and satisfied with me, it matters little indeed where I shall live"

Seated there at her spinning-wheel, she wove many a fanciful idea in the threads as they shot through her slender fingers; but the spinning progressed indifferently, and the spindle often ceased revolving as she stopped to seek an answer to her thoughts in the fitful shapes that issued from the hearth. Suddenly a convent bell told her that it was ten o'clock, and, that being the

dinner hour, she laid aside her distaff and went down into the hall below—a capacious room, the walls of which were hung with many sets of arms and body armour. The hunting party had just come in with hunters' appetites, and were seating themselves at a well-furnished board, at the top of which smoked the head of a huge boar that had been slain on the previous day. There was a goodly array of dishes, for, though the men of the fourteenth century dined early, they also breakfasted early.

"We were wondering what had become of you, my child. But you look pale. Are you not well?—or perhaps Hubert has been here?" asked her father, mischievously.

"Yes, he has."

"My daughter must not think too much of this world's follies," observed Father Ambrose, who had been one of the hunting party.

Edith raised her eyes, but instantly lowered them again; for the priest had a way of looking full at her that she did not like.

"You must not let human weaknesses interfere with your soul's welfare," continued her father confessor. "I have not been perfectly satisfied with you of late. You have not been so confiding in me as you used to."

He kept his eyes on the maiden, but the words were meant for Sir Cedric's ears.

Edith coloured, but said nothing. For a moment she returned the steady gaze of the priest, with a flash that might have meant hate, or simply resentment. Father Ambrose noticed the light in her eyes, and stored it in his memory.

The knight however, did not choose to hear anything said amiss about his daughter, of whom he was dotingly fond.

"She has always been a considerate and loving child to me," he said, "and has ever paid those devotions to holy Church that have been accounted necessary. It would be well were we all as good as she."

Father Ambrose did not reply. Hiding his discomfiture in a deep draught from a tankard of ale, he probably thought it better to say no more on the subject, at any rate for the present.

CHAPTER VI.

"The heart has tendrils like the vine,
Which round another's bosom twine,
Outspringing from the living tree
Of deeply-rooted sympathy." BOWRING.

ELLERDALE had been wont to extol the City of Colleges in terms expressive not only of admiration but of tender affection. He had thought the walls, and the river moat that surrounded them, fairer than anywhere else, and the meadows and groves that reposed outside, and which crept close up to the city walls, more beautiful; even the hoary castle, synonymous as it was with thraldom, had seemed to him a nobler structure than any beside. And the old churches that raised their spires and towers all through the town—how had he not reverenced those venerable piles, that had taken him back in imagination to the times of their early erection, when religion was purer than now that rival popes cursed each other, and when monks, friars, and priests were alike lost to all that was pure and Christ-like. The halls of learning, too, were dear to him, overrun though they were with friars and students for the mendicant orders.

But now the classic city had lost its charm. As he rode through the heavy gateway and under the city

walls, he felt more like a captive than one coming there to learn more of the liberty proclaimed by the Gospel. The castle looked cold and prison-like, and the city walls like prisoners' chains. The colleges seemed but so many hotbeds of vipers that were to poison the minds of the people; for, in his present mood, he ignored the fact that Wycliffe and his noble band of followers had been nurtured in them. The churches, too, looked sad and gloomy, and only added to his discontent; for they called to mind the priests who officiated there; and, as he thought of the unnatural vow those men subscribed to, a shudder passed through him, and his heart grew sick. He felt completely miserable, when a student of his college accosted him.

"Glad to see you back again," said John Purney. "I was afraid you had left us, and gone off with Walden to the wars."

Rousing himself, Ellerdale greeted his friend as graciously as his gloomy thoughts would allow. He had now arrived at his hall, and after seeing his horse comfortably stabled, he supped with Purney at a neighbouring hostelry,* where they procured a room to themselves.

"Have you ventured a ride from London alone?" asked Purney, who had been surprised to see his friend arrive without an attendant.

"Only a dozen miles or so, and I was nearly paying dearly for it, for some outlaws gave me chase on

*At one time many of the halls were themselves old Norman *hostels*, and the students fared as best they could, each according to his means, among the townsfolk; but during the reigns of the later Plantagenets regular colleges and halls had been established, and the students had less freedom than formerly.

Hounslow Heath, whom, however, I distanced. From Colnbrook I have journeyed with a band of merchants."

"Have you seen or heard aught of our Gospel-doctor?"

"Yes," and Ellerdale related all he knew. And then Purney told him how one morning, while their beloved schoolman was explaining to his pupils that the indulgences of the Church were founded on the subversion of all scriptural doctrine, a couple of the Bishop of London's subalterns had burst rudely into the class-room, and presented him with a summons to attend at St. Paul's, there to answer a long list of heresies of which he stood accused; how Wycliffe had dealt with them far more courteously than they deserved, and how he had told the emissaries that he would not fail to obey the summons.

"Did he finish his lecture?" asked Ellerdale.

"No, he retired with the emissaries, but not before he had bidden us a most affectionate farewell. Of course we all felt indignant at the summons—though, as you know, he had been expecting it—and we flocked up in a body to shake hands with him, and wish him God-speed. Dear, kindly heart! he was much affected by the sorrow we evinced at the possible contingencies awaiting him; but his eyes were still moist, when they seemed suddenly to flash fire, as he bade us, with a brave smile on his lips, not to attribute his tears to dread of martyrdom: he grieved lest he should leave us as sheep without a shepherd. However, commending us to God, he promised us his sincerest prayers, and besought ours in return."

"Did you then fear he might meet with violence at the hands of the Church?"

"Yes, for we had been reading only the day before about the cruel treatment of the Waldenses and Albigenses, whose views appear to have been very similar to Dr. Wycliffe's."

"I have always thought the princely patronage with which he is favoured a sufficient foil against the machinations of his enemies," said Ellerdale; "but, if aught should befall him, think you his disciples are sufficiently imbued with his spirit to carry out his projects?"

"I hope so; for my own part, I am determined to do my utmost to further the reformed tenets," said Purney.

"I should also like to."

"As a preacher?"

"Yes."

"You are not fearful?"

"No."

"Yet you seem somewhat dismayed," continued Purney, looking inquiringly into his friend's face, which was very pale.

"I thank God that I am not dismayed at the prospect of persecution; yet, when I meditate putting on the priest's cassock, there is one thought that causes me much disquiet."

"And what is that?"

"Have you ever loved a maiden, pure and good, who reciprocated your love?"

"Yes, I did once love a maiden, pure and good, who I believe cared for me in return," answered Purney, a shadow passing over his open countenance; "but she is dead now. Why do you ask me?"

"Because priests must not marry."

"Ah! and that is what disturbs your peace."

"Yes."

For several minutes neither of them spoke. Ellerdale watched his friend's face eagerly, to see whether there were a gleam of hope; but he saw none.

"I am aware that the celibacy of the clergy is a moot point, but I fear you must strive to overcome this weakness, if you wish to become a priest."

"It seems to me very hard," said Ellerdale, "that a priest's home may not be lighted with the rays of sunshine that a good woman ever carries with her; for such a home can have little of evil in it, the very essence of a good woman's nature being such as softens and soothes the troubles and anxieties of life, and renders it nobler and purer. I cannot think that God intended priests, whose hearts, I hope, are not less tender than other men's, to shun the companionship of those who brighten life's journey by those gentler, and perhaps holier, influences with which He has endowed them."

"In my heart I agree with you," said Purney; "and yet I must counsel you to try and forget this maiden."

"I have tried, but cannot."

"Do you then hold her dearer than delivering the message of peace to the people?"

"I do not see that delivering the message of peace to the people has aught to do with my loving Edith Walden."

"Only inasmuch as the Church has judged it inexpedient for priests to marry."

"The Church has made a gross mistake, and inflicted on its clergy a cruel wrong," said Ellerdale, impatiently,

"That may be; still, if we desire to join it, we must abide by its laws."

"And what is the consequence of those laws? Do not our clergy fall into sins, compared with which marriage is as the pure white snow in the mud of our streets?"*

"It is too true. But, setting aside this question of marriage, I thought you meant to be a merchant?"

"The desire to tell others about the great truths I have myself learnt has grown upon me ever since I first attended Dr. Wycliffe's lectures. True, I might be a merchant, and yet teach the reformed tenets; but London is well supplied already with laymen who are defending Wycliffe, and it seems to me the Church wants cleansing rather from within than without."

"Your aspirations, then," said Purney, "are in unison with my own. You wish to be less a priest than a teacher."

"Yes."

John Purney shook his friend warmly by the hand as they rose to leave the hostelry; for the college gates were closed early. "I am very glad," he said, "to find you have resolved to devote your life to Christ. With respect to the question that lies so heavily upon your heart, I should advise you to speak to our Gospel-doctor."

A few days after, the Reformer was once more in his place in the class-room; and before many weeks had

* The 15th and 16th canons of the "Constitutions of Otho," passed by a council held in London under Otho, the Papal legate, in 1237, show into what a slough of immorality the clergy had fallen since the final establishment of celibacy early in the century by Gregory VII.

elapsed, Ellerdale found an opportunity of acting upon his friend's suggestion.

Of all his pupils, Wycliffe was fondest of John Purney; and one day, when he had asked Purney to spend an hour or so with him, to look over some translations of one of St. Paul's epistles, this favoured pupil asked him whether he might bring Ellerdale with him —a request willingly gratified.

On a bright April afternoon, the two students repaired to a prominent beetling house, situated in the heart of the town. In a small room of the same, with an atmosphere redolent of musty books and manuscripts, might have been seen, a few minutes later, the venerable schoolman, seated between these two pupils, speaking to them in that affectionate, considerate tone of voice which characterised the quieter moments of his busy life.

"And so you think the clergy should marry?" he abruptly asked Ellerdale, with a smile that at once elicited his pupil's confidence.

"It is hard, I think, that they should be debarred the society of those who, by their gentler and finer feelings, promote one's better impulses."

"It is not only hard, but unscriptural. The Bible nowhere commands celibacy, nor even advises it."

"Nowhere?" exclaimed Ellerdale, his recently contracted brow resuming its normal aspect, and the whole expression of his face indicating relief.

"Neither in the Old nor the New Testament. God knows that priests are frail like other men, and ordained in the old law that priests should have wives; and in the new law He never forbade it, neither by Christ, nor by His apostles, but, on the contrary, approved of it.

Even Peter, so unduly exalted by Rome, was a married man: and Paul—though he never married, probably because of his perilous life—not only admonished bishops and deacons to be blameless and faithful husbands, but asserted that he had the power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the rest of the apostles. In the purer days of the Church, celibacy was not dreamt of; but now, through the hypocrisy of friends and false men, many bind themselves to priesthood and chastity."

"And why does the Church insist on this violence to human nature?"

"For the same reason that she invented her confessions, her indulgences, her assoilments; to elevate her clergy in the eyes of the laity. My present views have grown upon me only after many years of anxious study, else I might myself have married. But," continued Wycliffe, his manner changing from the considerate friend to the ardent reformer, "when the Bible can be read everywhere, in our mother tongue, then, and not till then, will the eyes of England be open. What think you of that translation?" he added, turning to Purney, who had been glancing over some manuscripts.

"It appears to be very accurate," said Purney, who was an accomplished scholar, "and if you will permit me, I will take it away with me, and look over it attentively."

Although the subject was a very interesting one, Ellerdale paid but little attention to the conversation that ensued between Wycliffe and Purney, so engrossed were his thoughts in another channel; and later in the day, when, alone with Purney, his opinions were asked on a certain translation of his own, his answers were vague and monosyllabic.

CHAPTER VII.

"Not a pastoral song has a pleasanter tune,
Than ye speak to my heart, little wildlings of June."
CAMPBELL.

IT is one of nature's gala days—a morning in the "leafy month of June." The birds are singing in all the groves, for the warm summer sun and a sky undimmed by a floating cloud gladden everything that derives its life from nature's God.

Skirting a meadow, over which rests a rich perfume from the "wildlings" of the field and hedges, and availing herself of the shelter afforded by a succession of oaks and elms, strolls a maiden. She is clad in a plain white gown, girt in at the waist by a band whose pale blue is in harmonious keeping with the fair azure above her; a coverchief is folded lightly about her head to shade her face from the sun, so lightly that some wayward tresses have escaped from the linen, adding thereby to the sweetness of her face and to the contour of her graceful form.

She wanders along a narrow beaten path, now stopping to listen to the loud carol of the lark and endeavouring to trace his tiny outline in the sky, and now to watch the bees sucking the pollen from the

woodbine; now stopping to cull some favourite flower, and now tripping lightly along and raising her own voice in emulation of the little singer aloft. Another field she crosses, and then enters the cool recesses of the wood, whose shaded paths resound with warblings from hundreds of little throats, so overjoyed with their mere existence that their song is one continued outburst of rapture. Her own terminates abruptly as she listens to their various quaverings, the very discord of their voices, intermingled in endless variety, sounding yet as richest music. She wanders on, picking here a wateriris and there a spray of myosotis, until she emerges from the thicker part of the wood, and, seating herself on the trunk of a fallen tree, directs her eyes along a dusty road that stretches for several miles in front of her. Except for some slight curves in it, the road lies almost in a line before her, and she follows it narrowly, until it becomes lost in the grey-green mass of trees, which themselves disappear in that haze with which a summer sun obliterates remote objects. After looking long enough on the road to allow any traveller who may chance to be on it to emerge from its hidden curves, she withdraws her gaze and looks back on the less glaring green on the trees behind her.

"Not yet," she murmurs softly to herself; "I wonder whether he will come this morning!"

"It was a delicious morning, one tending to a delicious idleness. The scenery around her was captivating, and she heeded not the time as she sat there patiently watching for the first appearance of life, the varied tints of the trees affording her pleasant objects of study when her eyes wearied of dwelling on the white, sunlit

road. Tiring of her idleness, she went in quest of flowers amongst the undergrowth, rushing back every now and then to her point of vision, fearful lest she should have been away too long. At last, having gathered to her heart's content, she sat down by the fallen tree and wove her flowers into a chaplet for the gardener's little daughter—floral wreaths being then much worn by the young and fair.

Suddenly a clatter of horses' hoofs! Instantly dropping her flowers, she jumped up and listened. Finding the sound proceeded in a contrary direction to that from which he whom she expected should come, she retired behind some shrubs until the horsemen passed. There were three of them, and as soon as they had disappeared in the first curve of the road, she reseated herself, looking up occasionally as the reverberant beat of the horses' feet touched some harder ground, or when they reached those parts of the road visible from where she sat. Soon the clatter ceased, or came but faintly at intervals, and three dusky objects, scarcely moving, were all she saw.

She had readily caught the first indication of the sound she had been expecting; it is not surprising that now she failed to perceive the approach of two pedestrians, who were coming through the wood by the path behind.

"There she is," observed one of them, a lady of some fifty or sixty summers, "the most beautiful object in a very beautiful picture, thoughtless as ever, exposing herself to the view of any rude horseman who may pass this way!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the other, in a tone of voice

expressive of profound disapprobation; "beautiful, certainly, in respect to her outer casement of skin, but I fear for the beauty of the soul within."

The latter speaker was Edith's aunt, the lady Isabel, prioress of a neighbouring convent; the former, her duenna, or rather companion.

Thoughtless Dame Adeline had called her fair charge. Thoughtless, apparently, seated so near the road, her coverchief fallen back on her shoulders, the shade of the trees seeming to her a sufficient protection from the sun. Thoughtless? Ah no, she was at that very moment so absorbed in thought, as to remain utterly unconscious of the tread of approaching footsteps. Thinking perhaps of her lover? Yes, but of something more—pondering on things intimately connected with that very soul the prioress had just treated with contempt. A few days previously Hubert had sent her, by a trusty servant, a fragment of St. John's Gospel; the man had at the same time intimated to her the probable arrival of Master Ellerdale in London three days later.

"You must be careful what you say to her," said Dame Adeline, addressing the lady Isabel; "she is spirited and wayward."

The prioress was about to reply, when Edith caught the rustle of their feet amongst last year's autumn leaves. She looked up with a startled expression, half frightened, half defiant.

"Good morrow, child," said her aunt, touching the girl's forehead with her lips, but without the pressure that is the heart's pledge; "we have had some trouble in finding you."

"I would have remained at home had I known you were coming."

"Are you not afraid of robbers or wild beasts?" asked her aunt.

"My father is too well known for robbers to venture so near the Manor, and as for wild beasts, he has so often had this wood scoured for my better safety—for he knows how much I am attached to this retreat—that nothing but the smallest animals ever come here now."

"You are fond, then, of the woods?"

"I love them very much," said Edith, earnestly, relieved that her aunt should have chosen a topic so congenial to her nature.

"You must come and see my beautiful groves, from which a high strong wall precludes any beast of prey. Would you like to, child?"

"Have you many flowers there—wild ones, I mean?"

"Yes; you will come?"

"I don't know," said Edith, looking intently at her chaplet, and altering the position of a flower.

Entering the Manor courtyard, the knight of Walden met them, and intimating to his daughter that he wished to speak with her alone, bade her follow him to her room. Throwing himself, not into an easy chair, but the easiest the chamber afforded, he motioned Edith to be seated.

"You know, my child, that Father Ambrose has for some time complained to me of your religious notions, and hitherto I have paid little heed to anything he has said; but to-day I have heard what seriously displeases me."

Her eyes remained fixed on the rushes that covered the floor, and she said nothing; but her heightened colour and a self-condemnatory look in her face was a significant answer.

"Hubert Ellerdale has been here."

She raised her eyes, and was about to say something; but her father's stern, angry look, so unlike his usual one when speaking to her, unnerved her, and she bent them again on the rushes.

"He has confessed himself a disciple of Wycliffe."

"Is that all?" she asked, looking up; but the agitation of her bosom, which she tried in vain to conceal, attested to a consciousness that there was a good deal in that "all."

"Yes, Edith, that is all. I wish it were not so much."

"Is he here now?"

"No."

"You have not sent him away?" And a flash of indignation gleamed in those blue eyes of hers.

"I have."

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed, looking at him beseechingly, the flash dying away in two brimming tears.

The old knight was affected by this silent token of affection for the young "heretic," but suppressing his kinder feelings, continued,—

"Are you, too, poisoned by the subtle reasonings of this John Wycliffe?"

"Yes, if you call that poison which deepens our love for the Saviour," she softly replied, her eyes not bent on the rushes, but looking earnestly into her father's.

"Then my sister has come here most opportunely."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, starting, the flush that had tinged her cheeks suddenly disappearing and leaving her very pale.

"I mean the convent cell is better than marriage with a heretic."

A little scream shot through the room. The prioress and Dame Adeline heard it in the hall below. Divining the cause they entered the chamber where they found the knight bending over his daughter's prostrate form, and, all unheeded, imploring her forgiveness.

"Go, Isabel," he insisted, addressing the prioress; "I shall see you again. Here, Adeline, you know better than I what to do. Be gentle with her," he added, as he placed his child's heavy head in the hands of the dame.

It was only a swoon, and in a few minutes the maiden was seated by an open window; but her face was very white, and though she was looking out on the fields she loved so well, her gaze seemed insensible to what was there.

Sir Cedric took her hand in his. She removed her vacant gaze from the fields to her father's face, and then, her reason returning, she fell into his arms and wept.

"Father," she said, nestling her soft face in his sunburnt neck, "tell me that you did not mean what you said just now."

"I did mean it."

"But you do not now?" and a shiver ran through her.

The knight motioned Dame Adeline to leave them alone.

"Why do you not answer me?" continued Edith, her face still against his, perhaps, from the childlike impulse that trusts to winning a cause by caresses and confidence. Nor did she feign affection. She had ever been a devoted and loving daughter.

"Well, then, I do not mean it," he said, drawing her closer to him.

"If you only knew what peace and comfort there is in these sacred writings that Dr. Wycliffe is bringing to light, you would yourself renounce the idolatrous worship of Rome."

"Tempt me not, my child, and in the name of all the saints beware what you say. Our family has for generations been faithful children of holy Church, and Edith must not disgrace it."

"Our ancestors were Saxons," she replied, "and Hubert tells me the noble Saxons once held the same faith as the Wycliffites."

Sir Cedric gloried in his descent from the thanes of Walden, and rejoined shortly—

"They were loyal sons of the Church. Take heed how you say aught against them."

Mention of her Hubert's name instantly recalled to Edith's memory the face of her lover, that had for the moment been dispelled by visions of a convent cell; and now her spirits sank as rapidly as they had risen.

"You have not forbidden Hubert to come and see me as he used to?" she asked.

"Yes, I have. I cannot allow him to seduce your mind with his strange and wicked notions."

"But we are bethrothed, and I have always thought betrothal just as sacred and binding as marriage itself."

"When I sanctioned your pledging yourself to him, he was a faithful son of holy Church. Now it is very different."

"But he and I believe alike," she pleaded.

"Your aunt will show you your folly, if you persist in believing the new religion."

"For pity's sake, say no more of my aunt; the convent would kill me."

"Say no more to me, then, of Hubert."

"Oh, father, it is cruel, cruel." But she saw there was no relenting in his face; so, with his leave, she left the chamber and was soon roaming, but with feelings sadly altered from those in which she had indulged earlier in the day.

"You are training your daughter nicely, are you not, Thane of Walden?" commented the Lady Isabel, entering the room whence Edith had issued ten minutes before. She found her brother seated at the window gazing intently on a white object that was gliding across a meadow, upon which shone the hot rays of the moonday sun. Though walking hurriedly, as if anxious to leave her unhappy thoughts behind her, his daughter tripped not along with her usually light buoyant touch of the ground, and this time no song accompanied her footsteps.

"I have done my best, Isabel," replied Sir Cedric, rising.

"Is that the best you could do?" said the prioress, pointing to Edith's retiring figure—"to let that vain, froward child run loose anywhere she likes, to be laughed at, if not worse, by any gay gallant who may chance to pass her."

"No one dare touch her," said the knight, haughtily; "and, mark me, sister, no one in my presence shall call her either vain or froward."

"She has an evil disposition."

"She has not," returned Sir Cedric, angrily.

"Is she not a disciple of the notorious Wycliffe?"

"Only so far as she has been influenced by Hubert Ellerdale," said the father at at a loss how to shield his child.

"And are not you, Cedric, Thane of Walden, ashamed to let her remain a heretic? Have you become so lost to the dignity of our noble descent, as to forget that our family has counted abbots and canons amongst its number, to say nothing of my unworthy self?"

He did not reply. He always had the worst of it when he disputed with his religious sister.

"Have you counselled her to alter her ways, and to seek assoilment from her sins in our sacred cloisters?"

"Would you at the same time deprive the wood-thrush of her wings and of the groves she loves to haunt? I have forbidden my child to have any further intercourse with her betrothed, and must she also lose her freedom?"

"It were better to die at once, assoiled, the bride of heaven, than linger in heretical freedom."

"I will not listen to her becoming a nun, not at any rate for the present," said the knight, decisively.

"You will live to repent your obstinacy."

While Sir Cedric and his sister were carrying on their wordy warfare, the object of their contention wandered on. This was her great sin, the loving God's woods and meadows better than man's cloistered convent

walls, and the wishing to believe in a religion where faith took the place of sensuous idolatry.

Edith had no heart now to tread that path which led to the fallen tree, past which Hubert had ridden earlier in the day than she had expected him ; so she sought a cool retreat on the banks of the river, taking care always to keep within the limits of her father's demesnes. Here she sat and mused on her unhappy state, allowing the tears to flow unchecked ; mused on Hubert and on Hubert's distinguished master, until her thoughts took flight to his master's Master, and then, as she meditated on His sufferings and troubled life, she grew calmer and more subdued. Her thoughts became gentle and pure as they recurred to that wonderful life, and her heart breathed out its longings and sorrows to Him who had wept on earth. And when she rose from the green turf, and cast loving eyes on the uncultured flowers that nestled by the river's edge, she felt more resigned. "Little wildlings of June!" they spoke to her with greater eloquence than the gay plants in the courtyard, nurtured though these were by the care and assiduity of old Raoul, the gardener. There were some here that grew not in the woods, and she gathered a few sprays for Raoul's sick little daughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Light for the darkened earth!
Ye blessed, its beams who shed,
Shrink not, till the day-spring hath its birth."

SIGOURNEY.

COMMENCING his life's work by attacking the mendicant orders and bringing to light their gross ignorance and profligacy, Wycliffe had next turned his attention to the errors of the Church itself, and, denouncing abuse after abuse, had now raised his voice against its most cherished doctrines. Well aware that the Romish hierarchy—smarting under the frustration of their designs, and incensed at his increased activity since the meeting at St. Paul's—were plotting his ruin, the Reformer determined that what time yet remained to him should not pass by as an idle dream. A voice within told him that the great crisis had come, and he strained every nerve to pour his opinions into the various channels that led to the ears of the people. He gave himself no rest. His days were spent in lectures and controversies, in the pulpit and out of it, and wherever the enemy was strongest. His nights were devoted to study. While the pulse of England beat feebly as she lay reposing in the still hours of night, this indefatigable worker was translating the Book that was to rouse her

from her moral torpor. Little wonder that his hair was white before he had passed the meridian of life.

His night labours were often shared by John Purney, who is also said to have given himself little rest of body, being, as Knighton puts it, "an invincible disciple of his master, Wycliffe, who up to the day he died in prison (which was long after his master had gone to his rest), never wearied in his labours and endeavours to propagate the opinions and doctrines of the Reformer."

For some weeks prior to the incidents of our last chapter, Purney, Ellerdale, and others had been busy transcribing a tractate designed for the people. Impressed with a strong conviction that the crisis had come, Wycliffe had written a short defence of his opinions in the shape of a short treatise; his pupils, having transcribed it into a large number of copies, had volunteered to ride far and wide and disperse them. During the two days preceding his unpropitious interview with Sir Cedric, Ellerdale had been thus employed, and on arriving at Walden Manor, resolutely shutting his eyes to his own interests, had had the temerity to give one to the knight himself!

"And you expect me to give you my daughter in marriage?" asked Sir Cedric, glancing contemptuously at the scroll that had been placed in his hand.

"I have your knightly promise; but I have for some time feared that when you should become acquainted with my creed you would withhold her. I have come here this morning with the express purpose of avowing to you that I have accepted the reformed doctrines."

"And pray what are they?" demanded the knight angrily, pacing the hall where they were conversing.

"In the first place, I believe nothing but what the Bible teaches."

"Go on, sir scholar."

"I renounce most of the dogmas of what we have been pleased to call holy Church."

"That is enough, you need say no more. And let me never see your face again."

"May I not speak to Edith?"

"Not while I can shield her from the contaminating touch of heresy," said the knight, laying his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Hubert involuntarily laid his hand on his, but relinquished it.

"I demand as a right," he said, "to see her."

"Then it shall be in my presence, sirrah."

But Edith could not be found, for she was at that moment seated by the fallen tree weaving her chaplet of flowers, little dreaming that her lover had already passed the spot. After some high words, Sir Cedric agreed that he might come to the Manor two days later to see his daughter, with the proviso that it must be in his presence.

His reception by Sir Cedric had not greatly surprised him, and yet Hubert had hoped it might be otherwise. In case of the knight allowing his relationship with Edith to remain the same, he had been prepared to forego his desire to enter the Church. It was therefore with very conflicting feelings that he set his face once more towards London. But he was glad to be alone, the three companions with whom he had left Oxford having parted from him at the Manor. Urging forward his horse, he started off in a headlong gallop, hoping

perhaps to dispel his bitter thoughts. For three or four miles he did not draw rein, though it was a scorching day and the sun high in the heavens. It was well for the cause he had in hand that his errand was nearly completed, the painful emotions he now had to combat rendering him scarcely a fit person to defend the principles embodied in the scrolls in his wallet. He rode into Brentford flushed and angry, his steed wet and foaming.

"Hast thee been chased, master?" asked the groom at the Brentford hostelry.

"Yes, by ill-luck," replied Hubert, peevishly. "Do not water my horse until I return." And then he went to the house of the resident priest, who was a well-known disciple of Wycliffe; but he was not at home, much, let it be said, to Hubert's satisfaction. After stopping at another place, and quarrelling with an itinerant friar, he returned to the hostelry, and soon after was again on the road to London. He stayed for a few minutes at Charing, and discharged his trust; from a spirit of duty, not love. Pursuing his way past the embattled mansions of the nobility that studded the country between Charing and London, he soon became beware that something important had transpired, by the unwonted stir and gaiety in the pleasaunces; but in his present mood he felt utterly indifferent as to what it might be. He rode heedlessly on, until entering the city he found it so gay with banners and triumphal arches, ribbons, and bunting flaunting from all the houses, that he was constrained to ask the cause.

Edward the Third had died, and his grandson, a boy of ten, had been crowned king.

He had food for his mind now, and thought upon

the vanity of human greatness. In his vigorous manhood accounted the greatest warrior of his age, surrounded by flatterers, and adored by the multitude, the victor of Crecy had been deserted in his old age and dotage by all except a woman, who, waiting until his last minutes of unconsciousness offered a fit opportunity, had robbed the dying king of his finger-ring, and then left him to die alone. All his victories forgotten, the multitude were now rendering homage to the Black Prince's son. How true the words of the poet, "The path of glory leads but to the grave."

To Hubert the rejoicing seemed incongruous, and was unquestionably not in character with his own gloomy thoughts; so, choosing the less frequented thoroughfares, he hurried on towards Eastcheap, disgusted with the fickleness of human nature. He could not have ridden through Cheapside had he wished, for there in the market-place a fountain running wine had been erected by the city merchants, and the street was blocked.

"You do well to rejoice so madly over an untried boy," he said to his brother, the usual salutations over.

"We do not all rejoice," returned Ralph.

"I was told it was the city merchants who erected that vinous fountain in the market-place, and I suppose you consider yourself one of the leading merchants," said Hubert, smiling scornfully. He was not naturally scornful, but a heavy heart is not always meek and resigned, even when it has been made lonely by clinging to that faith whose Divine source is all meekness and gentleness.

"There are many of us who outwardly rejoice hoping

thereby to ward off an impending blow, such as you yourself would much deplore."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the younger brother, with supreme unconcern.

"Come, Hubert, there's something wrong; what is it?"

"Oh, nothing very momentous. But what is it that you hope to ward off?" he asked, in a gentler tone.

"A blow that is likely to fall very heavily on the man you so much admire and love."

"Not Wycliffe!" exclaimed Hubert, with a sudden return of animation.

"Yes, Wycliffe," answered his brother, leisurely, and playing with the dagger in his belt.

"Do not trifle with that name," said Hubert, his eyes kindling; "tell me quickly whence the blow is expected?"

"From Rome," replied Ralph, ceasing to play with his dagger, and a reflection of his brother's earnest eyes lighting up his own.

"Has he been summoned there?"

"Not yet." Taking a small parchment from his wallet, Ralph read—

"'It has become known to us, that John de Wycliffe, Professor of Divinity, more properly a master in error, has proceeded to a degree of madness so detestable as not to fear to assert, dogmatize, and publicly to teach, propositions the most false and erroneous, contrary to the faith, and tending to weaken and subvert the whole Church. It is enjoined, accordingly, that, if he has indeed taught as we are told, he be committed to prison, and retained in sure custody, until such answer as he may make to the charge of such teaching shall have been obtained, and judgment given thereon to the Holy See. Should the Bishops fail in their attempt to apprehend the said John de Wycliffe, or to retain him as a prisoner, they are to affix a citation in such public places as may bring it to his

knowledge, requiring him to appear in person before the Pope within three months.'*

"There! It was with considerable difficulty that I got this copy of a bull received from the Pope by Archbishop Sudbury. What do you think of it?"

"Greatly to be deplored, though I am not surprised. But I did not know, Ralph, that you took such interest in our Reformer."

"It is only lately that I have."

"I am delighted to hear you say so. He anticipated this summons, and, wishing the people not to be misled as to his real opinions, he hoped to disseminate them by means of a tractate he has written; his pupils are all over the country with it at the present moment. Here is a copy. But perhaps you will take all I have left, for you know better than I in whose hands they will be useful."

"I could dispose of twenty times as many as these," said Ralph, taking the small bundle of scrolls, "and place them in good hands, too."

"Are the Londoners, then, really so well inclined to our Gospel-doctor?"

"Half the city is with him." †

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hubert, agreeably surprised.

"I suppose he has a good following in the University?" said the citizen.

"Yes, amongst whom are many of its leading men. By the way, how do you hope to aid Wycliffe by rejoicing at the boy Richard's accension to the throne?

* Vaughan, vol. i., p. 201.

† Walsingham, the monk, says that at this time nearly the whole of London was tainted with the "heresy."

The old king favoured him, but what do we know of the new one?"

"We show that we fear nothing from the royal boy; and as it is well known that half of us are Lollards,* the bishops will have fresh cause to be dismayed. I hear on high authority that they dare not send for Wycliffe."

"What is it my sons find so interesting to talk about that they come not to supper?" asked Dame Ellerdale, entering the room where the young men were conversing.

"Wycliffe," replied Hubert, taking his mother's hand and kissing it. In case he should be thought an undutiful son, it should be said that he had already seen his mother.

"The blessed Virgin pity us!" exclaimed the dame, rather testily; "you are all going mad about this Wycliffe. What is the good of spreading the board with hot joints and my choicest delicacies, when you think more of this man's theological nonsense than a rare haunch of venison and a tankard of Malmsey, whose grapes were pressed when you were both lisping babes?"

Hubert smiled, and, taking his mother's arm in his, professed to be still capable of appreciating a good supper; which, considering that he was still smarting

* The term "Lollards," earlier in the century, had been applied to a number of laymen who formed themselves into a society at Antwerp for the purpose of visiting the sick and burying the dead during a time of pestilence, when the priests deserted their duties. Spreading to other parts, they became as much beloved by the common people as they were hated by the clergy, who accused them of holding heretical opinions. The term gradually sank into one of reproach, and as such it was applied to the followers of Wycliffe.

from the effects of the morning's interview, may well be doubted.

The conversation at supper turned on the young king. Religion was avoided—by Wilfred Ellerdale, because he cared little for the "new religion," as he termed the reformed faith, nor the "old;" by his portly but good-looking dame, because just now all her thoughts were concentrated on her joints and pasties; by the sons, because they knew it would be uncongenial.

"What ails you, Hubert?" said his mother next morning, surprising him as he sat at a casement window overlooking the Thames, where a ship was unloading a cargo for conveyance to his father's warehouses.

"Head-ache, mother."

"It is not head-ache," said the dame, bending affectionately over his broad shoulders. "Tell me, is it the new religion, or is it heart-ache?"

"Heart-ache."

She had a warm, motherly nature, and he told her all that lay upon his mind. She was a Romanist, but not being of a very religious temperament, and unconsciously influenced by the Lollardism that had made such headway in the city, forbore to chide him for embracing doctrines that, in London, even among Papists, were looked upon rather as venial opinions than denounced as deadly heresy.

"I know more than one city maid, as fair as your Edith, who would be charmed were you to woo her," said his mother, cheerily; "but I should advise you to wear a gayer doublet and have longer toe-points to your shoes."

"My heart is not so easily swayed as to woo a

second time, and perhaps it is better after all that I should not marry."

"Nay, my son, speak not so bitterly."

"I intend to be a priest."

"Holy Mary! a priest, and talking of marriage!"

"You mistake me, mother. It is because I intend never to marry that I mean to don the cassock."

"And how can you reconcile that with your new-fangled notions?"

"There are very many pastors in the Church who will not acknowledge the Pope. Dr. Wycliffe, himself, you must remember, is a so-called priest."

"I trust you will neither become a priest, nor take the vow of celibacy, but follow the honourable calling that has made your father one of the chief men in the city. Ah! here he comes—no, it is Ralph," she added, as the tapestry in the doorway was moved aside, and her eldest son entered. He had promised to go with Hubert to some of the citizens and a priest or two who had renounced the old superstitions.

Hubert was surprised to find in the busy town many ardent and faithful spirits whose every energy and faculty were bent on furthering those truths which Wycliffe's untiring zeal had diffused. His own soul was refreshed by contact with so many of a kindred spirit, like the thirsty land that has been remoistened by long-needed rain. And, from converse with these men, whose enthusiasm rekindled his own, was born a shame at having allowed a selfish sorrow to retard his spiritual energies. He resolved, God helping him, to devote his life, more closely than he had hitherto done, to the service of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER IX.

"I'll have a priest shall preach her from her faith,
And make it sin not to renounce that vow,
That I'd have broken."

THE following day Ellerdale went to Walden Manor to demand of Sir Cedric the fulfilment of his promise. Entering the hall, he found it occupied by the knight, who had been expecting him, and was resolutely pacing it from end to end. He had told Edith that Hubert was coming that morning to bid her farewell, and touched by her entreaties for forbearance, thus sought to overcome his scruples. He knew she was in the chamber overhead, but bidding an attendant fetch Dame Adeline, he commissioned that lady to tell Edith of Hubert's arrival.

As they stood there in the centre of the hall, a few feet apart, with their eyes fixed on the staircase down which Edith would come, the two men looked not unlike prisoners awaiting their judge's verdict. Their bearing, however, was widely different. The knight felt some compunction for what he had done, and the restless movement of his eyes gave him an appearance of guilt, that contrasted unfavourably with the more dignified, calmer attitude of Ellerdale, the ashy paleness of his face alone testifying to the struggle going

on within. But the poignancy of his grief was alleviated by the tempering influences of the peace which passeth understanding.

No rustling of silk or satin announced the coming of the maiden they awaited. The staircase was inside the hall, and they saw her glide noiselessly down its broad oaken steps.

Her father avoided her eyes at first, but as she approached him he looked up, and was confounded. An hour ago he had left her weeping piteously. Now scarcely a trace of tears was on her face, as taking Hubert's hand, she gave him a bright smile; but she did not speak. Nor could he, in the fulness of his heart, for a sudden drooping of her eyelids and a tremor on her lips had shown him that the smile was one of self-abnegation.

"Have you nothing to say?" asked the knight, looking first at one and then at the other. Perhaps he felt ashamed of the doubtful position in which he had placed himself, for he walked to the end of the hall, muttering to himself, "Truly a comely pair—all that a Walden could have desired for an only daughter, except —manly, handsome, brave, but—no, it must not be."

Regarding his removal from their immediate presence as permission for privacy, Hubert and Edith conversed in whispers. He implored her to be faithful to the the Gospel truths, but she could not now think of aught but human love. She had meant to repress her real feelings as much as possible, that he might not go away from her utterly miserable; and to a certain extent she succeeded, but repression is not easy in a nature in hers. Pretending to be interested in some

body-armour on the wall that was not in its proper place, her father glanced furtively at the lovers for several minutes, angry with them, and with himself. At length, returning to where they stood, Hubert addressing him, said—

"This interview is to me, and I think to your daughter, exceedingly painful. I would terminate it at once, but cannot go without asking you to reconsider what you have said."

"Renounce your belief in the new religion and you shall have my child," replied the knight, with a broken voice.

"No, I will never renounce the righteous faith God, in His mercy, has made known to me."

"Then you may as well part at once."

"Farewell, dear one, and may the good Lord bless thee," said Hubert, with a painful effort at self-constraint, and pressing to his lips the maiden's hand.

But the warm Saxon blood that flowed in Edith's veins would not be satisfied with this formal adieu. Drawing closer to him she raised her face and solicited the dearer token of affection, and then hurried away, unable any longer to restrain the rebellious tears.

"Farewell, Sir Cedric, and may God forgive you this act of injustice."

The summer months rolled slowly by, and autumn came, with its fading, many-coloured woods; but Edith, whose delight it once had been to wander through the groves and by the river's mossy banks, no longer sought those peaceful retreats. In vain the little feathered songsters wooed her presence with their choicest lay,

and "many a flower was born to blush unseen." Nature had lost her charm for her, for now the joyous chant of birds and purling river fell gratingly on her wounded heart. But although she studiously avoided the rapturous mirth that filled the woods while yet the sunbeams streamed through its upper branches, in the evening occasionally she would again resort there, hoping that

> "Philomel might deign a song
> In his sweetest, saddest plight."

At such times she would seek out old Raoul, the gardener—with whom she had always been on the closest terms of intimacy, and who, like herself, knew all the windings of the undergrowth—and get him to tell her where the sad bird of night had chosen his bower, that she might go there and woo his even-song, "so musical, so melancholy."

Dame Adeline had seldom to chide the motherless maiden for waywardness and indiscretion now, for Edith became painfully obedient and docile. Father Ambrose, too, no longer had cause to speak harshly to her, for she could not combat his subtle arguments, and soon became again the passive child of "Holy Church," and yielding herself its captive, confessed her sins and shortcomings to her father-confessor.

But, though his daughter had thus fulfilled his wishes by returning to the Church, though she never upbraided him for depriving her of her heart's joy, though she was as kind and obedient to him as ever, still Sir Cedric was not satisfied. He saw the bloom gradually fade from her cheeks, and her eyes lose their lustre; he beheld the light-hearted girl too quickly develop into the sad, thoughtful woman.

"I am afraid Edith is not well," he observed, one winter evening to Dame Adeline, when his daughter had retired early to rest.

"She is very pale," said the lady, uneasily, who, though austere and matter-of-fact, really loved her gentle charge. "I think I know something that will do her good," she continued, "but I shall have to go to the village for the necessary herbs."

"Will you go to-night?" asked the anxious father. "I will see that you have a safe escort."

"Gladly," and laying aside the hawking-glove she was embroidering, the dame was soon ready for her walk.

On arriving at the village, she bade her attendants wait for her at the village hostel, while she performed her errand. Walking on, she reached a turning that led into a narrow lane, where she waited for a moment to assure herself that she was unobserved; then, hurrying along the lane and through a small coppice, she stopped in front of a hovel that looked as much as possible unlike a human habitation. Yet that such it was, a thatched roof, a door, and a hole meant evidently for a window and stuffed with straw to keep out the cold, sufficiently indicated. She knocked several times at the door without any response. At length a harsh, shrill voice screeched—

"Go away."

"No, Madge, you must let me in."

"Who disturbs my sleep?" continued the voice.

"Mistress Adeline Tracy."

"Go away."

"I have come to speak to you about the noble damsel, Edith Walden."

Presently Adeline heard some one moving in the hovel, and a flickering light slowly found its way through the straw in the hole that served for a window; then a couple of wooden bolts having been withdrawn, a tall, bony beldame, dirty, unkempt, and but half clad, stood in the open doorway, with a torch in her hand.

"The noble damsel—"

"Talk about the wench when I bid thee, and come inside," said the witch, for witch she was by common repute.

The command to enter was somewhat necessary, for a cold blast of wind rushing into the hut, set the dry furze, that had just been lighted in the centre of the hovel, into a blaze that threatened to burn up more speedily than intended.

Adeline entered with considerable trepidation. She did not at all like the idea of being shut up with a witch, and as Ruggy Madge, as she was called, commenced rebolting the door, the dame observed that she only wished to say a few words.

Madge deigned no answer. Placing a small caldron upon the fire, now replenished with turf, and setting her tripod in order, she sat down and screeched out some incantations, as a blue flame ascended and mingled with the smoke that after seeking all the crevices of the hovel, found its way into the outer air through a small opening in the thatched roof and the window.

"I would not have vexed myself for any other wench but Edith Walden," said the sorceress, putting something mysterious into the caldron. "Thee needs not tell me what ha' happened to the poor thing," she added, ambiguously.

"Well, Madge, the young mistress of Walden, gives us much uneasiness. She is not sick, but is pale, and has no appetite, and is much thinner than she used to be."

"Dost think I know not all that happens without being telled? I did not ask thee to tell me."

"I know you see what others don't," said the dame, anxious to propitiate her.

"Let the girl see the lad her loves, and see that thee gives her this," placing a phial in Adeline's hand, "an' it'll not be long afore I see in the woods again the only being as ever showed kindness to Ruggy Madge. Now get thee away."

The dame rose with much greater alacrity than she had seated herself. Giving the old hag a few groats, she hurried back to the village hostel, and thence with her escort to the manor.*

Whether it was because one of Madge's injunctions was not followed out, or because Edith's disease was beyond the witch's art, the maiden did not get better. For a few days after the nocturnal visit, a faint colour returned to her cheeks, and her eyes recovered some of their former lustre, but she soon languished again, and Sir Cedric grew alarmed. Change of scenery and surroundings was proposed, and Edith, who was passive and resigned to anything, allowed them to take her to her aunt's convent; but her father made it distinctly understood that she was not to take the veil, unless Edith expressly desired it.

* Until Gaddesden, the physician to the late king, raised his art into better repute, the friars and witches had been the only doctors; but already the laity had begun entering the profession as a distinct branch.

She had never quite understood the reformed tenets; therefore, when she was debarred the society of the only one who wished her to know them, it is not to be wondered at that she should first waver and then fall a victim to the reasonings of her wily father-confessor. Hubert had implored her to approach God without intermediate prayers, and for a short time she had done so; her own doubts, however, fed as they were by priestcraft, crushed the flickering spark of light. But Rome gave her nothing in return, for though she confessed her doubts and sins to Father Ambrose, her soul remained unrefreshed, notwithstanding that the priest had inflicted his penance and declared her absolved; she remained benighted, because she knew not in its fulness that sweet source of comfort whence the Christian turns his eyes when grief and misfortune oppress and well-nigh crush the heart. So long as she had looked forward to wedding Hubert, it had seemed easy to accept the new doctrines, for his strong, faithful heart would, she thought, keep her from doubting; and, so nearly did she catch his spirit that, as we have seen, she for a moment rested her faith on Christ as the only source of consolation. But now, her bright hopes dashed to the ground, and with every influence around her tending Romewards, she could not, or would not, trust Him who alone could give her peace. What was she that she should tell her petty troubles to the Sovereign Father? Ah! she knew not the ineffable love of that Father who, if sought with childlike trust in His well-beloved Son, is so gracious and tender to the weakest of His children.

CHAPTER X.

"It is the little rift within the lute
That by-and-by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all."

TENNYSON.

THERE are perhaps few antique edifices in modern London more cherished than Lambeth Palace. The irregularity of its architecture, exhibiting as it does the styles of various ages, enhances our reverence for it, and carries us back to times when it was the place of judgment and confinement for many of the earliest martyrs of Protestantism. Visions, too, of splendour arise as we recall the visits so often made to it by our kings and queens. Even the grand old trees in which it is embosomed are relics of the past, and add a charm to our modern gaze—glimpses of green being so rare nowadays in this brick-and-mortar city of ours!

On a fair April morning in the year 1378, Lambeth Palace presented a scene of excitement not often witnessed even within its historic old walls. The bull, mentioned in a former chapter as having been issued by the Pope, had been, after considerable delay, transmitted to the Chancellor of Oxford University. Other

bulls were fulminated against the Reformer, addressed to the young king and the bishops, in which the Pope demanded the suppression of the rapidly spreading heresy. The Oxford Chancellor for some time shrank from the responsibility of committing Wycliffe to the mercy of his enemies, his teachings having taken such hold on many of its leading men as to raise a storm of opposition to such a course. Still, it was at length decided by the functionaries of the university that the rescript should be received, and in the month of April a synod was convened in Lambeth, before which Wycliffe was summoned to appear.

He had now been deserted by the Duke of Lancaster, but he relied on a more potent Protector, and God in His good providence shielded his faithful servant in this hour of danger. He had no sooner arrived in London than he was received by a crowd of citizens anxious to do him honour, and who, alarmed for his safety, were determined to escort him to the palace. On arriving at the Great Gate, which, owing to the sympathetic crowd, he reached with difficulty, he attempted to appease them by assuring them that God would not forsake him. But the people, infuriated that their beloved teacher should be in the hands of his enemies, and expecting the bishops would commit him to prison, followed up his disappearance by overpowering the custodians of the gate, and forcing their way tumultuously through the palace grounds into the inner court. Some of the citizens burst into the chapel itself, where the synod sat, loudly proclaiming their attachment to the person and opinions of the Reformer. The bishops, nevertheless, were attempting to proceed with the trial,

when to their dismay Sir Lewis Clifford, a leading courtier, entered the chapel, and in the name of the Queen-Mother forbade their proceeding to any definite sentence in regard to the doctrines of Wycliffe. Whereupon, says the monkish historian, Walsingham, the delegates, "shaken as a reed by the wind, became soft as oil in their speech, to the open forfeiture of their own dignity, and the injury of the whole Church." Wycliffe left the court, with a simple admonition to abstain for the future from the publication of his doctrines.

But besides the support he received from the Black Prince's widow and the Londoners, Wycliffe was indirectly favoured by the feeling in Parliament, by Chaucer's satires upon both the secular and religious clergy, and most of all by the "Western Schism." About this very time St. Peter's chair was rendered vacant by the death of Gregory XI., and for the next forty years the Church presented the unedifying spectacle of being ruled by rival Popes, one residing in Rome, the other in Avignon. The "infallible" Popes were so much engaged in anathematising each other, and even in raising armies to enforce their respective claims, that Wycliffe was permitted to preach, teach, and write for a few years longer with little molestation. So slightly did the Lambeth trial daunt him that, almost immediately after, he attacked another of the Romish dogmas—transubstantiation, which a council in the preceding century had established as a dogma of the Church.

The prodigious strain, however, to which he had subjected both his mental and physical powers, began

at last to manifest itself. He had not long returned to Oxford before he was seized with so dangerous an illness as to leave little prospect of recovery.

Our thoughts are again drawn to that old house in Oxford where on a former occasion we saw him in kindly conversation with two of his favourite pupils. They are again by his side—not this time in the room where his busy brain sought *rest* among his books and manuscripts, but in his bedchamber. The room is a small one overlooking the noisy High Street; its floor is strewed with fresh rushes, and the sufferer lies on a bed of reed-down, but, though beds are the chief domestic glory of his age, it is simple and unadorned; a chest serves the purpose of a table, a plain square-backed chair being the only remaining article of furniture worth noticing. Purney is seated in this chair, reading to his master a portion of the Bible he has been translating. Ellerdale is standing by the latticed window, his face shaded by one of his hands and listening to the inspired words.

The sick man is deeply interested in the translation. His face, though unable sometimes to conceal the pain he patiently endures, is lighted up with a calm and holy peace, a peace so radiant and beautiful that an angel might be hovering over him, about to place on his brow the well-earned trophy of his life's battle, and convey the faithful servant to the mansions of his Lord. His hair and flowing beard, white almost as snow, form a fitting halo for his peaceful face. His eyes are not fiery now, as they were wont to be in the heat of discussion and controversy, but, mild and gentle, are fixed on his pupil.

"Read that again, Purney," he said, a sweet smile playing on his finely cut lips. And his pupil repeated that passage where Peter, bursting forth in praise to God for the incorruptible inheritance reserved for those who love Him, reminds them of transient seasons of heaviness and temptation, "that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth," might redound to their own permanent good, and the glory of Him "whom, having not seen, they love."

"Oh, yes," murmured the sick man, closing his eyes, "we do indeed love Thee, most gracious Lord;" then opening them suddenly, he added, in deep earnestness,—

"Purney, and you, Ellerdale, see that you suffer not the trials and persecutions that I am convinced are not far distant to weaken your faith. Cling, oh! cling, my sons, to the blessed Bible."

It cost him an effort to speak, so much had his illness reduced him; but he felt that these young men, one of them already a pastor, and the other about to become one, were destined to follow in his steps when he should be dead, and he yearned over them as lovingly as though they had been his own sons. Closing his tired eyes, he prepared himself to hear Purney read some more of his translation, when the door was suddenly thrown open by an attendant, who announced visitors.

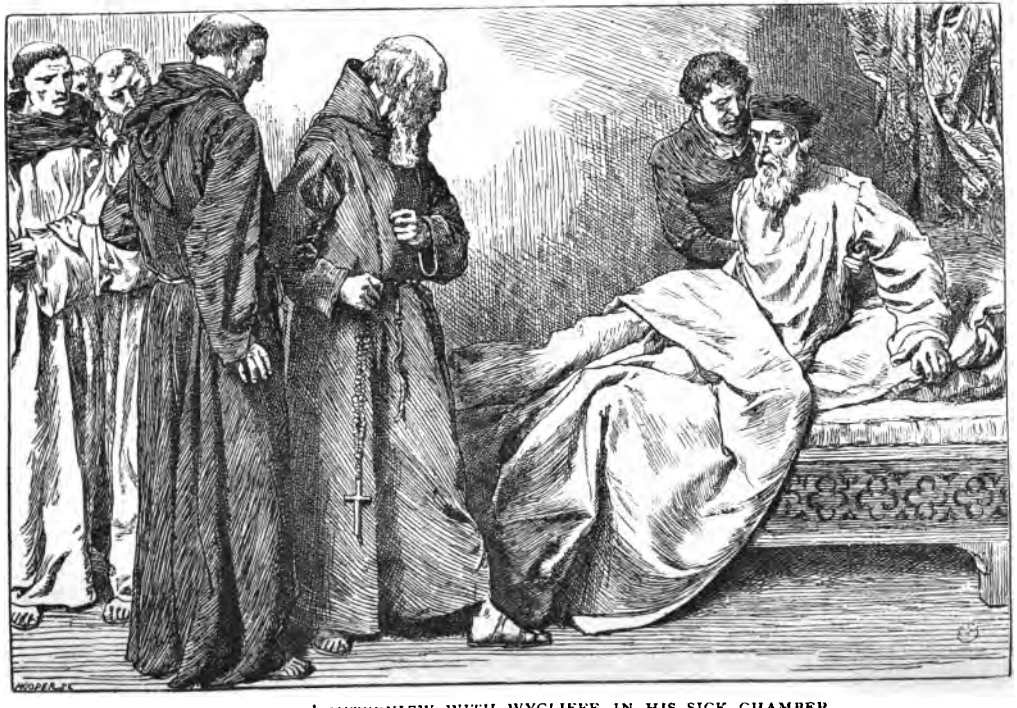
Four friars—doctors representing the four mendicant orders—accompanied by a like number of the civil authorities of Oxford, entered the small apartment, to make room for whom Purney and Ellerdale, having hastily gathered together the manuscripts, went to the head of the bed, furthest from the door.

"We are sorry to hear you are so ill, Master Wycliffe," said a portly alderman, by way of preface.

The sick man thanked the citizen for his courtesy, but looked wonderingly at the friars.

They formed an interesting group, the dark, gloomy-looking cassocks of the religious beggars forming a striking contrast to the gay hose and rich velvet doublets of the civic brotherhood. There, near the sick man's head, scowling across the bed at the suspicious-looking manuscripts the pupils held in their hands, stood a Franciscan, or Grey Friar, in his coarse habit of grey cloth reaching to his ankles, a common cord girding it at the waist; by his side, a brother of the Dominican order, an order more popularly known as the Black Friars, from the colour of their habits; near the foot of the bed the Augustine representative, and the Carmelite, or White Friar. Apart from these stood the alderman.

Another of the citizens was about to speak, but the Dominican interrupted him. "You are surprised to see *us* here, John Wycliffe?" he asked, sternly, but receiving no reply, continued, "Aye, and well you may be, for I see death is marked on your face, and you become ghastlier as your memory dwells upon the grievous wrongs you have done us for well-nigh twenty years. But I shall not needlessly prolong the agony of your last hours, for well I know that, despite your seeming defiance, your wicked heart quakes as you review your most apostate life, and contemplate the future that is in store for you when your body lies rotting in the grave—aye, John Wycliffe, think of it, and think of the mischief you have done to holy Church,



THE FRIARS' INTERVIEW WITH WYCLIFFE IN HIS SICK CHAMBER.

Reduced from "The History of Protestantism," by Rev. J. A. Wylie, by permission of Messrs. Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co.

but most of all our sacred orders. We hope, however, that you have feelings of compunction, and that you will confess to us your wicked life, and show yourself penitent for your sins against us and our master the Pope. But before we receive your confession—assoil we dare not yet—we wish to ask you whether you will recall all you have said against us."

"We *demand* it," said the Franciscan, pushing the Black Friar aside. Throwing back his grey cowl, and leaning over Wycliffe's bed, that the sick man should hear all he had to say, he continued, "You have never ceased to accuse us of hypocrisy, ignorance, and all that is base and vile; now, on your deathbed we demand you to revoke all your lying invectives and utterances against our sacred orders."

"The perjured heretic speaks," interrupted the Black Friar, drawing closer to the bed.

The crowded room had rendered Wycliffe somewhat faint, and he found it difficult to say what he had on his mind. He tried to raise himself, but was too feeble. Purney and Ellerdale, seeing what he wanted, bent forward and gently raised him to a sitting posture. The sufferer had remained motionless and silent as he listened to the fierce utterances of the friars. Now, raising his right arm and pointing his finger at the mendicants, he summoned all his remaining strength to cry, with passionate face and flashing eye—

"*I shall not die, but live, and again declare the evil deeds of you friars!*"

The mendicants drew back appalled. Two minutes of profound silence ensued, except for the rumbling of some waggon wheels in the street below. The Francis-

can slowly replaced his cowl over his tonsured head, so as to shade his angry features, and glanced furtively at the unflinching eyes of the Reformer, that seemed to search his secret thoughts. The Black Friar sullenly handled the cross that hung from his girdled cassock, but avoided Wycliffe's face. The Augustine bent his dark eyes on the rushes, as if waiting to hear more. The Carmelite alone dared to return the look of righteous wrath, but he quailed before it.

Nor did the burgesses, who had retired to the doorway, break the silence. Though less interested than the friars, they were yet impressed by the picture of four vehement and haughty men quailing before the gaze of their apparently dying enemy, who, reanimated, as with fresh life, pointed at them a finger that neither trembled nor faltered. Overawed, the citizens stole quietly from the apartment.

The Black Friar motioned to the others, and cowed and sullen, the mendicants followed the citizens, not one of them venturing to say another word to the man who, though reduced and enfeebled by illness, seemed to speak with the conviction of a prophet.

"Do not say anything just now, you are too exhausted," entreated Purney, as he smoothed the pillow, and gently helped his master to lie down.

Wycliffe's lips moved, but following his pupil's advice, he said nothing, and closing his eyes, in a few minutes was asleep.

Contrary to general expectation Wycliffe recovered for a time from the malady that had assailed him, and resumed his labours both in the pulpit and the class-room. But his constitution was undermined, and he

spent less of his time in Oxford and more at his quiet parsonage at Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, a living to which he had been presented by Edward III., the local patron being at the time a minor.

Yet, in spite of his shattered health, he gave himself little rest even at Lutterworth. Besides his duties as a parish priest, the faithful and loving performance of which Chaucer so graphically acquaints us with in his quaint English, he spent much of his time in translating the Bible—it being the dearest wish of his heart to give England an English Bible before he died. And he lived to accomplish the arduous work. But so much did the translation of the Scriptures occupy his time, that he was obliged to call in the help of a curate; he chose John Purney.

Not long after Purney had entered upon his duties at Lutterworth, his friend Ellerdale was presented with the small living of Cranwood, in the county of Kent. The patronage was vested in a friend and disciple of Wycliffe, and upon the living falling vacant the Reformer had recommended Ellerdale.

Leicester Abbey.

CHAPTER XI.

"In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires gleam warm and bright;
Above, the spectral glaciers shone,
And from his lips escaped a groan,
Excelsior!"

LONGFELLOW.

TWO years have passed passed since Ellerdale bade farewell to her whom he had loved as his betrothed—two years, with its hopes and fears, its longings and strivings; its hopes of reflecting the light he had received from his master, Wycliffe, and fears that he was not worthy; its longings to converse with the maiden whom he could not forget, and strivings to prevent the love he could not smother from interfering with his soul's welfare and the purpose of his life. He had learnt much in these two years, not the least of which was, that though the heart may be aching the soul may be refreshed as from streams of living water.

He had now become one of the many parish priests who upheld the reformation, and soon became respected and beloved by his flock, both on account of the purer worship he inculcated, and for the gentle manliness of his disposition. He endeavoured to imitate the simpli-

city that characterised Wycliffe's services in his little parish of Lutterworth. He had no priestly indulgences to bestow upon his flock, but offered instead the precious promises of the Bible—he had one of his own now; nor did he quiet their consciences by granting them absolution for their sins, but bade them confess these to God only, who alone could absolve them. Neither did he violate the simplicity of that feast which his Lord had commanded to be perpetuated in remembrance of His sufferings and undying love, by "performing" an idolatrous Sacrifice of the Mass, the pompous ritual of which that touching ordinance is linked. The adoration of images he claimed to be subversive of scriptural doctrine, the use of extreme unction to be a wicked imposture, and mariolatry and saint-worship a system of polytheism worse than the hero-worship of pagan Rome; he would not dishonour his Lord by allowing other atonement for sin than by the blood of Jesus. But while in public worship he eliminated nearly all that came between Christ and the worshipper, in other respects, like the Reformer himself, he followed the established ritual of the Church.

In his vocation as parish priest he acquitted himself faithfully and diligently. Cranwood, pleasantly situated on the little river Ravensburn, in Kent, was something more than a village, though scarcely attaining the proportions of a town; so that its homes were not so numerous but that its new pastor could visit them. Of these rough-thatched dwellings of the serfs, with their slender walls and mud floors, had an especial attraction for him; for though their sufferings had been alleviated during the late reign, the peasants were

still in a state semi-slavery, and lived in huts apart from the townsmen.

"How is little Ina?" he asked of a poor woman one morning, as he stopped at the doorway of one of a row of miserable hovels.

"She be very weak, your reverence," said the woman, her eyes filling.

"May I see her?"

"An' welcome, sir."

On a straw pallet in the corner of the hut furthest from the door, lay a child of about ten, very pale and thin, with a coarse sheepskin thrown over her.

"I have brought you something that I think will do good, Ina," and Ellerdale took from the wallet that hung at his girdle a small capon, which he handed to the mother. "There," he said, "I got old Dorothy to do it up for you."

And then, bending over the child, he asked her whether she remembered what he had been telling her of a day or two previous.

"Oh, yes! I remember it all; about Christ bidding little children to come unto Him."

"And do you ask this dear, kind Lord, who loves you so much, to make you happy?"

"Yes," she answered with a patient smile.

A tear glistened in his eye as he turned away from the little sufferer's bed; for she was the first, with the exception of Edith, he hoped, who through his instrumentality had taken the Gospel message to herself in its fulness. He inquired after the breadwinner, and slipping a couple of groats into the mother's hand, left the hut.

"Poor woman!" was his first mental ejaculation—

his next, "And yet she is far happier in her home life than I."

Several fortuitous circumstances had tended towards making Cranwood a stronghold of Lollardism, among which were its comparative nearness to London and the estrangement of its chief men from Rome; but its former pastor had been a zealous Romanist, who thought more of Church ceremonies and festivals than visiting his flock. This habit of going from door to door with words of cheer, and giving from their substance to the poor, was one of the characteristics of "Wycliffe's poor priests" that endeared them to the people, even before they understood what it was these priests taught.

"I like you, Master Ellerdale," said John Dennis, the tapestry maker of the town, "because you don't come and dun my Jenny with questions as to how wicked she be, nor ferret out of her all she knows bad of me, like Master Lydgate used to; he well-nigh drove her mad asking her to confess things she never did. I try and live an honest life, and bless her, she helps me. It was she who brought me over to the new ways of thinking. I don't see how a man can be good, unless he have a wife to keep him right. Come in and see her, your reverence."

The door was open, and he saw into a room pleasantly lit by the warm reflection of a log fire, near which was seated at her spinning-wheel fair Mistress Dennis.

"Another time," said the young pastor, with a sigh.

"Good-morrow, Master Ellerdale," said Ulric, the smith, stopping in his work, and looking up at him with a good-natured smile.

"Good-morrow, Ulric. That's a noble creature you are shoeing," commented the pastor, with a change of colour.

"Aye, there be blood in the mare, and there be blood in him as left her here."

"Erna," said Ellerdale, patting the creature's snowy back; "ah! she looks round; I thought I knew her. Who left her here?"

"I don't know his name, but he's at the hostel over the way."

Ellerdale hastened across the road with feelings quite unorthodox for a priest, at least according to the prevailing ideas of orthodoxy. "What if Edith should be with her father?" he asked himself. He was quite sure it was Sir Cedric's mare he had seen, and as she was one of the knight's favourite steeds, he felt equally sure that Erna's master was in Cranwood. On the spur of the moment he was about to enter the inn, when he bethought himself that it would be madness again to confront Edith's father. He was about to turn aside, when the knight presented himself in the hostel entrance.

"Hubert!" he exclaimed, stepping back with a gesture of astonishment.

"You are surprised to see me in this dress?"

"I was not told that you had entered the Church. But your hand, man. How are you, sir priest?"

"Well enough. I hope you are the same."

"Come upstairs, and we'll have a talk together."

Hubert followed with a tumult of feelings: surprise at Sir Cedric's courtesy, wonder as to what the ensuing conversation might portend, a secret hope that Edith

might be in the chamber, and bitter stiflings of the eager, useless throbbings of his heart.

But the room he was led into was empty. A look of disappointment overshadowed his face. Sir Cedric noticed it, and looking at him keenly, said,—

"You expected to see Edith? Well, it is of her I wish to speak to you."

"Edith—tell me, is she well?" asked Hubert, eagerly.

"No, nor has been since that unfortunate day I spurned you from me. Everything has been done for her that the most eminent leeches can advise, but to no purpose. I have had my suspicions as to the true cause of her ailment, but, fool that I was, I remained inflexible. At length, only a few days since, I asked her whether she still loved you, and in an agony of tears she told me she did, and that you are the sole cause of her despondency, as she terms her illness."

"I the cause!"

"Yes, you. I could stand it no longer, despatched one of my men to Eastcheap to procure from your father your whereabouts, and have come here as fast as my best horses could bring me to say—but what avails it now?" exclaimed the knight, vehemently. "You are a priest, and therefore of course cannot marry."

"Of course I cannot marry," repeated Hubert, confounded.

"What possessed you to think of entering the Church?" asked the knight, rising and pacing the small apartment angrily, like a caged lion. But receiving no answer, he continued, "Did you not once

ask me for my child, the darling of my old age? Could you have really wanted to wed her, and yet so belie the wish as to turn priest? Man, are you sane?"

"I shall not be so long, unless you speak to me more plainly," replied Hubert, pressing his temples.

"Have I not been plain enough? Have I not told you I came here to tell you that you may have her?"

"Have her?" repeated Hubert, a cold perspiration settling on his brow.

"Aye, marry her."

"Marry her, and I a priest!"

He sank into a seat and buried his face in his hands, the agitation of his breast and his heavy, irregular breathing showing that his emotions were stirred to their depths.

Sir Cedric, who was naturally a kind-hearted man, though unbending enough under certain circumstances, went up to him, and resting a hand on his shoulder, said,—

Come, Hubert, I cannot stand this."

But there was no response.

"Forgive me for the past."

He looked up with a hard expression on his pale face, but with no sign of forgiveness.

"I always liked you, Hubert, even when I banished you from my child's presence, which I have since bitterly repented; for I am now a Wycliffite."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the priest, starting up, and looking his tormentor in the face, to satisfy himself that he had heard aright.

"Edith has done it?"

"Dear Edith! has she then clung to the true faith?"

he asked, in a relenting tone, though his mind was still in a whirl.

"She clings to it now, but it is after being sadly tossed about, for I and that rascally priest, Ambrose, did our best to darken her understanding, poor child. But the Almighty willed that she should be a witness for the truth."

"Thank God!" said Hubert, solemnly, and a mist coming over his eyes, he turned aside to conceal his emotion.

Sir Cedric stepped up to him. "*She* has forgiven me," he said; "will not *you?*"

Hubert turned, and offered his hand.

"Will you come and see her?" continued the knight.

"Yes."

"To-day?"

"No, it is too sudden," said Hubert, trying to concentrate his thoughts. "I will try and go early next week."

Half-an-hour later they left the inn and crossed over to the smith's, where Sir Cedric found his squire and a couple of attendants awaiting him; and in a few minutes a stretch of dusty road lay between the knight and the young pastor of Cranwood. He remained there gazing after them until the horseman reached a bend in the road, and even then he stood as in a dream, listening to their distant clatter. He felt dazed, as be a sudden flash of lightning on a dark night. A sounding ring on the anvil brought him to himself. Drawing a deep sigh, he turned round and tried to interest himself in the smith's work.

"Is your reverence ill?" asked Ulric, arresting a

blow that was about to fall from his brawny arms, struck by the paleness of the pastor's face.

"I am well enough, but want something to rouse me. Here, let me see how I can handle that sledge," and taking it from the astonished smith, he dealt some well-delivered blows, until his face had resumed its natural colour.

"There," he said, throwing down the heavy hammer, "that does not look as if I were ill, does it? And I hope you will not call me *your reverence* again," he added, with an apology for a smile.

"Well, I know you hold your own views about the clergy, but I think none the less of you, sir."

"Do you then not agree with my views?" he asked, listlessly.

"Aye, that do I," replied Ulric, heartily, "and so does my wife. Mayhap thee'll do me the honour to step in and see her? She's a buxom, good-hearted lass, and likes thee right well."

He dreaded being left alone to his unhappy thoughts, and willingly acceded to the smith's request, though it was only to defer his sense of loneliness; for the glimpse into another happy home but added to the bitterness of his thoughts when he left it.

Home, home, home, the sledge-hammer seemed to say, as it descended on the anvil "with measured beat and slow;" but, as he walked on and distance gave an echo to the ringing blows, they all too sadly changed to *No home, no home, no home.*

He had once thought of telling people of the glad tidings he had received as a lay preacher, like numbers of his countrymen were doing, and he had hoped to

have a wife's gentle companionship. But his interview with Sir Cedric the day he had confessed his religious views had dispelled the bright picture, and after waiting some time in the vain hope of seeing the knight change his mind, he determined to enter the Church, and thus by one resolute step sever all thoughts of marriage. Now, only a short time having elapsed since his installation as a parish priest, he found the barrier that had shut him from Edith removed; but it was like the mirage in the desert.

"Oh, Edith! your sweet innocence purified my early manhood, but, alas! your tender sympathy may not ennoble and strengthen my riper years. A priest, forsooth, must have no gentle companion to remove some of the thorns from the pathway of life's long journey. But why should I obey the church in this, when I disobey her in so many other matters?" he asked himself. And then the vow that bound him to celibacy rushed like an icy spectre before his eyes. True, according to Wycliffe's teaching, priests should marry, but how few had availed themselves of that teaching! And Wycliffe himself, too, remained unmarried. Could he be hardy enough to set an example? No, he could not cast a shadow on Edith's fair name by dragging it into the arena of controversy. Look where he would for shelter, the cold, icy law of *holy* Church, like a mountain glacier, frowned down upon him, and chilled the warm impulses of his heart, telling him in freezing accents that her priests must not defile themselves with the companionship of woman, even though the hand that made her is Divine, and though he in infinite wisdom has expressly created her as a help*meet* for man.

CHAPTER XII.

"The soul, reposing on assured relief,
Feels herself happy amidst all her grief."

COWPER.

ELLERDALE passed a sleepless night, and the first streak of dawn saw him issue from his dwelling, dressed in his sober, priestly habit. He hoped the fresh morning air would cool his brow, and assuage the tumult of his thoughts. He walked hurriedly, to still if possible his angry heart, but the throbs only increased the more; he walked slowly, but the quiet reminders of his misery would not be subdued. He turned, in thought, to the Bible, but only those passages which he had diligently studied at a time when he had weighed the possibility of becoming a married priest, now filled his mind. He even took a stern pleasure in torturing himself with that, to him, meaningless one, where honour is claimed for the wife as the weaker vessel, "being heirs together of the grace of life." He was repeating the comfortless averment over and over again, when his attention was arrested by the rosy hues of the feathery clouds above him, and he hastened to the summit of a little grassy eminence to see the sunrise. As he stood there facing

the east, waiting and watching, the turmoil of his heart subsided into a peaceful rest begotten of the scene before him. Up rose the orb of day bathed in a mass of golden-yellow clouds; and then, when the sun had cleared the trees and clouds that fringed the horizon, and shone out at last in ruddy, solitary grandeur, his rebellious thoughts shaming him, he knelt down on the velvety turf and breathed his morning prayer. And in the succeeding hours he was upheld by the "day-spring from on high." He visited the serfs, and by little acts of mercy, blessing him who gave assuredly not less than they who took, passed a day not wholly devoid of quiet happiness.

Nor did the following day, Sunday, pass by without its refreshing and softening influences, and very heartily did he thank God for sustaining and strengthening him in his hour of trial. True, he knew that the coming meeting with Edith must be fraught with many painful associations; but the same grace that had upheld him during these two trying days would, he felt, continue to sustain him when he should have again returned to his lonely parsonage. His heart would not have been human had it not been swayed by pleasurable thrills at the thought of seeing Edith once more, and at the same time by sad forebodings of the trial in store for both of them. Yet, when on Monday morning he rode forth on his way to Walden Manor, the effects of the services of the preceding day still lingered refreshingly "as the gentle rain from heaven," and gave him hopes for the future.

When a sudden shock causes the heart-strings to vibrate with remorse and sadness, it takes often some

time to feel that there is a bright side to the picture; but when the mind has accustomed itself by persistent brooding to the sad side, it is glad sometimes to turn with relief to the brighter. So it was with Hubert Ellerdale. The fresh morning air too, and the smell of the hawthorn that wafted its sweetness in his face as he passed through the Surrey lanes, helped to brighten the picture he had painted.

He rode without any attendant, for though many of the highways were infested with robbers and outlaws, yet, as a rule, the clergy, whether of the religious or secular orders, were respected, probably, however, more from motives of superstition than veneration.

London Bridge was the only one that spanned the Thames, the other important points of the river being crossed by ferries; so when he had reached the picturesque old town of Richmond, he availed himself of that primitive mode of crossing to the Middlesex side. A few minutes ride brought him in front of Walden Manor. He could hardly believe that two full years had passed since he was there before, though the gate was opened by the same ancient porter whom he had known in his boyhood, and he saw no new faces amongst the retainers in the courtyard. But when, upon entering the hall, he found Edith and her father waiting to receive him, he became painfully aware that quite two years had elapsed. Her face had altered much; it was now pallid and worn.

Utterly oblivious of the different relationship in which he now stood to her, regardless of his priestly costume, and impelled only by the dictates of nature he put his arms round her as he used to in the old days,

and for a moment pressed her to his breast. Then he stepped back with a sudden consciousness of the terrible gulf that for ever lay between them.

"I could not help it, Sir Cedric."

Sir Cedric smiled. "Welcome to my poor manor, Hubert," he said, "and a hearty welcome from me and my darling. I would give half my estate, though, if instead of that religious garb, you wore the doublet I last saw you in."

Hubert's smile relaxed, but quickly returned on perceiving the contagious effect the expression of his face produced on Edith's.

It was Sir Cedric's custom to entertain a number of guests at his table; but this day he took care there should be as few as possible, seven persons only sitting down to dinner—himself, his seneschal and his esquire, his daughter, Dame Adeline, Hubert, and the pastor of Brentford. The knight retained many of the Saxon customs, amongst others that of the wassail-bowl. Drinking to Hubert, and glancing significantly towards his daughter, he said—

"You have done more than all the leeches already."

And if warm cheeks and bright eyes count for anything, he spoke truly; but then Edith was excited. After dinner she proposed what she had not done for many a day—a walk in the woods. Sir Cedric pleaded that it was too warm for such a portly old man as himself, but gladly consented to her taking a stroll with Hubert, while he remained in the manor and held a discussion with the pastor of Brentford concerning Wycliffe's last great doctrine, namely, the refutation of the dogma of transubstantiation.

Side by side the young priest and the maiden sauntered through the pleasant fields, on into the wood, and at last to the fallen tree, which still lay on the spot where two years before she had sat in the fond hope of seeing her betrothed ride down the road that skirted the side of the wood. They seated themselves on the mossy trunk, and talked over the prospects of the Reformation, the pretty wild flowers, the pleasant summer weather—everything, in fact, but their blighted hopes.

"And so, in spite of opposing circumstances, you have cleaved to the faith Wycliffe has taught us," remarked Hubert, with a smile that implied tender respect for her constancy.

"Oh! do not think I have been faithful, for indeed I have not."

"But your father says you have."

"No, no; I have been most unfaithful."

"But you have renounced the old superstitions?"

"I have *now*."

"You have had your doubts, in common with the rest of us. The change from the old belief to the new is so complete that one may well pause before he renounces all he once cherished."

"But I have been very wicked, Hubert—I may still call you that?" she asked, with something between a smile and a tremor on her lips.

"Please do not call me anything else, my—— Edith."

"Well, Hubert," she continued, without betraying the pang the slip of his tongue had caused, "I will tell you briefly my religious experiences since I last saw

you. Father Ambrose too easily induced me to renounce what little good I had learnt, and in the spring of last year I went to my aunt's convent."

"Not as a novice?"

"Not at first, but I became one."

"But, Edith——"

"I made no vow, though I had serious thoughts of becoming a nun, so entirely had I forgotten my former convictions. As it was, I commenced a novitiate."

"What induced you?"

"My—my unbelief," she answered, colouring.

He felt at once how it was—that it was something besides her unbelief; he was deeply affected to find she had loved him so much, and he turned aside to hide the flood of emotion that sprang to his face.

"I commenced my novitiate," she continued, "but my dear father heard of it, and removed me from the convent before I had taken the vows. I was surprised to find that he had become much more lenient towards the Lollards. He, thinking I still retained their faith in my heart, determined to see how their church services were conducted, and judge for himself whether their style of worship was as bad as represented. He went to the church at Brentford, whose pastor is a Lollard—it was he who dined with us this morning—and was so impressed with the earnestness of the worshippers, and the brotherly love that existed among them, that he thought the principles by which such a community were governed could not be very bad. It was at the beginning of last winter that he first went there. Since then he has been very often. You may imagine my surprise at his being actually dis-

appointed when he found I had returned to the old way of thinking. But in spite of my apathy towards the new tenets, I had indeed lost all real faith in the old. My heart was cold and bitter, and, truth to tell, I hardly believed in any religion at all. However, I went with my father to Brentford to hear Master Exton preach, and then all my old yearning to know more about the Gospel of Christ returned. And now—now——"

She buried her face in her hands, overcome by her feelings.

He dared not trust himself to speak, but waited until she looked up and said,—

"Thoughts of my wicked persistency to refuse listening to the dear message of Christ my Lord makes me cry sometimes for shame."

The face that looked up into his was a very sweet one, notwithstanding the change that the last two years had effected. Her lashes retained a teardrop, but the glistening eyes were as pleasant to look upon as the flower wet from a recent summer shower, smiling and weeping simultaneously as the sunlight burst upon it from a rift in the rain-cloud; for thoughts of her present peace quickly dispelled recollections of her former deadness to any religion. The smile that shone through her tears still played unconsciously on her lips as she looked up into his face, saying,—

"But you, I know, have not swerved from what good Master Exton calls the narrow road that leads to heaven."

"Alas! yes; but He, to be whose faithful servant is the dearest wish of my heart, has always brought me

back; and indeed I should be most unworthy were I now to forsake that narrow path, for in hearing the truth from the lips of England's great Reformer, I have been blessed beyond numbers who are far more faithful than I."

"How far away is Cranwood?" she asked, as they retraced their steps through the tangled wood.

"About twenty miles."

"May my father take me to hear you preach sometimes?"

"Would you like to?" he replied, his eyes bent on the ground.

"Very much, but—but perhaps you would rather I did not."

"Why do you think so?"

She was wondering what to say, when a tear fell on her wasted cheek, and made a reply unnecessary. When the body is weak from protracted grief, and the heart is suddenly refreshed with what it has been languishing for, the nerves invariably betray the signs of an undue tension. So it was with Edith, and the tears that came and went like April showers were beyond her control. Hubert had studied human nature sufficiently to know this, and taking her hand tenderly in his, observed,—

"You are very weak, and must not excite yourself by talking too much."

He took her hand in sympathetic consideration for her weakness, but it was not wise, for his tender touch recalled in vivid and rapid succession the memories of the past; his eyes also were too full of the love he could not conceal. And unable to sustain any longer

the strain produced by leaving unsaid what was nearest to her heart, she wept.

Setting prudence at defiance, he rested her poor, thin face upon his breast, and tried to soothe her, as he would have soothed her were she still his betrothed bride.

"Presently the tears ceased, and sobbing gently, she cried plaintively,—

"Oh, Hubert, Hubert! I have tried not to show you how much I love you, but it is no use. It is very wicked for me to love you *now?*"

"No, sweet one, for it is not God but presumptuous man who says it is wicked for us to love each other."

"Then I may love you," was her artless rejoinder.

"Yes, Edith; nor am I, priest though I be, forbidden by any Divine law from loving thee."

"And do you still love me?"

"Too well."

She remained silent for a few minutes, but she thought a great deal. Her woman's instinct told her that it was an inhuman and unrighteous law that forbade them their rightful relationships.

But she was much happier now that he had owned he loved her as much as ever, and told her that it was not wicked for them to love each other. What though they could not marry? She might love him, and would often see him. When they returned to the Manor every trace of tears had left her face, which looked brighter that in had for a long time.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Wide o'er the brim, with many a torrent swell'd,
And the mix'd ruin of its banks o'erspread,
At last the rous'd-up river pours along."

THOMSON.

CONTRARY to his expectations, his visit to Walden Manor acted beneficially on Ellerdale's spirits, for though it rekindled into a brighter flame his love for Edith, yet the knowledge that she and her father had joined the ranks of Wycliffe's rapidly increasing followers was a source of sincere satisfaction to him. On his return to Cranwood he devoted his time more diligently than before to the happiness, spiritual and bodily, of his flock, determined not to allow his private feelings to interfere with his religious duties.

A lull in the ecclesiastical atmosphere, owing to the schism of the Popes, and an internal sore in the English Church itself, offered a golden opportunity for the reformed priests in England to exert all their energy in diffusing the knowledge they had reaped from the Scriptures—an opportunity these faithful pastors did not lose. In nearly every county the Reformation spread like conflagration. It is a significant token of

the purity and righteousness of our Protestant faith—the Reformers of that day were Protestants in all but the name—that, whenever political or ecclesiastical exigencies arise to favour it, the mass of the people welcome it with generous enthusiasm. Not only the Protestant countries, but those subjected to every form of superstition, remind us of the fact.

A season soon came which called upon our young pastor to indulge to the utmost his love of cherishing the poorer portion of his flock. The summer of this year turned out a very stormy and disastrous one, and the swollen rivers that were a consequence brought with them devastation and misery in many parts of the country. But before the havoc occasioned by these storms occurred, we must allude to a little episode that broke the somewhat monotonous routine of his daily work.

Oswald Walden returned this year from the desultory war that had for some time been smouldering on the Continent. The soldier was disappointed to find his sister still a maiden, especially when he learnt the reason. However, he and Ellerdale had been bosom friends at Oxford, and he lost little time in finding his way to Cranwood parsonage. Ellerdale was standing in the porch of his modest wood-and-plaster dwelling one quiet August afternoon, his hood thrown aside and his dark brown wavy hair playing in the fitful breeze—for, let it be here observed, the secular clergy in those days shaved neither head nor beard—when he was surprised and delighted to see his old friend approach him.

"I thought you would be glad to see me," said Walden, "but the best part of my pleasure in seeing

you is spoilt by your having turned priest. I cannot say I admire you in that long dismal-looking gown.

"Come inside," interrupted Ellerdale, "and we'll talk about priestly garments and coats of mail where we shall be undisturbed."

He tried to speak cheerfully, but the slightest covert allusion to the unattainable longing of his heart made him sad.

"And about errant damsels?"

"If you like," returned Ellerdale, good-naturedly, conceding to what he considered a soldier's whim.

After narrating to each other the events that had transpired during the three last years of their lives, Walden reminded his friend about the errant damsels.

"Shall it be about a Spanish, French, or English maid?"

"I should be sorry to think you interested in so many, but English if I may choose."

"Very well. The one I am specially concerned about was with me an hour ago. In fact, she is in the town now. She is my sister Edith."

"Edith!"

"Yes," said her brother, gravely. "I told you how concerned I am to find her so much changed since I left England. My father believes fresh scenery and fresh associations the best stimulants for her, and as Adeline, who has a married sister in this town, wished to avail herself of my escort, he readily consented to Edith coming with her. He also tells me that were you to don the doublet instead of the cassock, she would soon be quite her old self again.

"Spare me, Oswald. It is too late now."

"They tell me some of the Lollard priests have acted upon Wycliffe's advice, and taken to themselves wives. I am less than ever a friend to your learned doctor, but candidly, I think this commotion he is making in favour of the priests marrying is a very sensible idea—the only sensible thing he has ever done."

"I know some have married, but most of them have relinquished the priesthood in consequence."

"And why don't you?" rejoined Walden, impatiently.

"The people here like me, to whom I believe God has entrusted me with a humble mission. Were I to forsake my little flock, your sister would scorn me not less than I would myself."

Now that Ellerdale had become thoroughly imbued with all of Wycliffe's opinions, Walden was not very eager about his marriage with Edith, and he was not sorry when their conversation led into other channels. Ellerdale was no longer the sort of companion he delighted in, and during the time he remained at Cranwood he spent little of it with his old friend.

Edith, like all damsels of good birth, had been accompanied by a suitable number of her father's retainers, who were sent back again on her arriving at the house of Dame Adeline's sister, with the exception of her brother's special attendant. Mistress Dennis, Adeline's sister, was the wife of a well-to-do townsman, a tapestry-maker. Edith and Ellerdale saw nothing of each other until next matins. As he stood in his place in the church, he glanced hurriedly over the little assembly until his eyes rested on the face of his beloved, and then he saw no other.

Notwithstanding a heightened colour, he went through

with the service of the church sincerely and earnestly, and preached* an animated sermon. Never did he appear more noble to Edith than that morning as he stood in his beautifully chiselled stone pulpit, declaiming against the increasing arrogance of the Church, though he was placed in the anomalous position of being one of her sons.

Some days elapsed ere he could muster courage to visit the household of which she had become a temporary member, and even then he spent most of the time conversing with Mistress Dennis. But the fair bourgeoise was not to be deceived. With the quick perception of her sex in such matters, she soon understood how affairs were between the young priest and Edith Walden. She noticed Edith's eyelashes droop, and a faint blush find its way to her cheek; she noticed too that his conversation was vague and monosyllabic. And, admirable woman though she was, the dame could not keep the secret to herself. Before many days had passed Cranwood, speaking broadly, knew, or guessed, that their pastor was not less prone than themselves to allow a woman's love to find its way to his heart. Nor did Cranwood blame their pastor for the weakness.

"They tell me Master Ellerdale means casting to the winds another of the Romish doctrines," said a burgess to John Dennis.

"Indeed! I thought he had left nothing to remove!"

"Celibacy of the clergy."

Dennis had heard from his wife her surmises, but pretended ignorance.

* Preaching sermons was an innovation of Wycliffe's, which his followers naturally made an essential point in their church services.

"They say he means to marry."

"And if he does, I for one shan't blame him.

"Nor I. Out on those, I say, who violate human nature by their unnatural laws."

"Aye, out on their priestcraft and their war on human hearts," commented Dennis.

It soon came to Ellerdale's ears that his marriage was discussed pretty freely amongst the townsfolk. Of course he felt indignant, and having told Walden about it, they agreed that it would be best for Edith to curtail her visit. Accordingly, a day was fixed for the return to Walden Manor. But it was not to be so soon as they had arranged.

For some time past the weather had been very unsettled. The dismal shrieks of the cormorant and the hern, that had betaken themselves to land, had suggested the possibility of coming storms; other indications had not been lacking, and these had determined Walden to leave at once. But the storm came sooner than was expected.

Ellerdale was not altogether exempt from indulging at times in self-praise. He felt he had done a meritorious act by recommending Edith's early departure, yet so inconsistent is poor humanity under certain contingencies, that on the evening preceding the day fixed upon, he actually contemplated with complacency the sun set amidst an angry mass of coppery-yellow clouds, and was not much distressed to see the lurid streaks in the west rapidly displaced by ominous black ones, which gradually growing denser and blacker, and spreading beneath the leaden sky, brought on night before its time. And when some large drops fell

suspiciously through the murky air, he did not feel so grieved as might have been expected, nor did his spirits sink to zero when shortly after vivid flashes of lightning and the heavy roar of heaven's artillery were followed by hours of incessant rain, the dismal, nay welcome, patter of which was only broken by thunder-peals that shook the houses of Cranwood to their foundations, each peal bringing with it a denser sheet of rain.

The raging of the storm precluded sleep. He turned on his bed again and again, and tried to believe he was sorry that the roads would be totally unfit for ladies to travel on for some days; yet when a late daybreak dimly lighted his chamber, and he rose from his unpretentious bed, he candidly admitted to himself that he was not greatly distressed. But on going to his window the scene that presented itself modified his feelings.

> "Th' unsightly plain
> Lay a brown deluge, as the low bent clouds
> Pour'd flood on flood."

Immediately his thoughts flew to the poor serfs, whose huts lay lower than the rest of the town, and who were unpleasantly near the Ravensburn. How could he pass the night and forget the hamlet? He must be more in love than he had imagined. He felt ashamed for having harboured thoughts of self-congratulation, when perhaps the hamlet might be in the greatest distress and misery. Poor little Ina's wan face floated before his imagination, borne along by the ruthless river, her gentle spirit for ever at rest on the bosom of the Saviour she had trusted. He scarcely tasted his breakfast, and anxiously paced the hall watching for signs of some abatement in the tempest.

"Does the river often overflow its banks?" he asked old Dorothy, as she removed the morning repast.

"Aye, in times like these," she replied, with a solemn shake of the head, "and then woe to the poor creatures in the hamlet!"

He did not wait for the storm to cease, and issuing forth into the torrent, hastened towards the serfs' quarters. The Ravensburn, muddy and rapid, was swollen to the edge of its banks. As yet it had not overflown; but though the hamlet had escaped the river, the rain had come in under the doorways, and in the lower huts everything stood in water.

The little girl he had pictured as floating in the river's cold embrace, he found sleeping peacefully enough, though the mudfloor was some inches deep in water, and her straw pallet already wet. He prevailed on the mother to let him have her in his own house, and promising to send provisions to the more needy of the peasants, took the child in his arms and carried her still sleeping into the outer air, accompanied by the blessings of father and mother. It was not raining so heavily now, and drawing the sheepskin well around his frail burden, he hurried up the ascent to his dwelling. And never in his life did he feel happier than when soon after he saw her ensconced in a pile of woollen things in front of a cheerful fire, and taking some broth Dorothy had made her.

He kept his word with the peasants, and sent them provisions. And then, his mind easy with respect to the poor people, he set himself to his day's duties, of which looking in at the Dennis' household he considered one.

"I am afraid the storm is not over yet," observed Walden, as he and Ellerdale sat over their supper in the parsonage. It had commenced to rain again.

"Then the hamlet will be flooded."

"What a fuss you make about those wretched serfs. How is that little thing you brought here?" asked Walden, derisively.

"The peasant and the prince are brothers in the sight of the Creator," returned Ellerdale, rising impatiently, and going up to the window. "Ha! the rain comes down as cruelly as before;" and as he spoke, the hissing, relentless rain descended with fresh impetus. It came down incessantly, all through the night in torrents.

Directly there was sufficient light to find his way he was out in the teeth of a blinding downpour. Very painful was the scene that met his gaze. The Ravensburn had burst from its bed, and a portion of the town was inundated. Lower down in the plain where the huts had stood, their thatched roofs, rent and tempest torn, alone were visible, limbs of trees and the *débris* of the hamlet marking the course of the impetuous river. And the peasants, where were they? He looked anxiously around, but could see them nowhere.

"Ha! Master Ellerdale. I thought I should find you here." It was Ulric, the smith, who thus accosted him.

"Where are the serfs?"

"Poor things, they be on a knoll yonder. You cannot see them for the rain, but they be there—men, women, and children, all huddled together like a flock of sheep."

"How can we rescue them?"

"Rafts," suggested the smith.

A sudden flash of lightning revealed the poor creatures crowded together on a little eminence, surrounded by the rushing waters. Rattle, rattle,—boom, boom, boom, went the thunder-peals rolling over the flood, like a warning voice from God.

"We must not lose a moment," said Ellerdale, grasping the smith's arm; "every moment makes their peril greater."

A couple of hours elapsed before a number of logs were lashed together of sufficient strength to serve the purpose of a raft. Many of the townsfolk were too much engaged in their own minor disasters to trouble themselves about the unhappy peasants, added to which the freemen held serfs in the greatest contempt; still there were not wanting those who willingly aided their pastor in his errand of mercy. Ulric took charge of the roughly-constructed raft, and Ellerdale and Walden accompanied him, each using long poles, that had been hastily hewn from some ash trees, to propel it towards the gradually diminishing bit of vantage-ground.

When the river first overflowed its banks, the waters had immediately shut off the hamlet from the town; but near the hamlet stood a knoll approached by a narrow neck of ground higher than the contiguous parts, to which the rustics had rushed directly they found their huts flooded. The men might, at first, have forded to the higher parts of the town, but, with a keen susceptibility to the antipathy always evinced towards them by the freemen, they preferred staying by their wives and little ones. The knoll and the town

were on the same side of the river, otherwise it would have been impossible to have got across the bed of the ungovernable stream.

The raftsmen found the serfs in a miserable plight, drenched, shivering, hungry, some almost insensible. A dozen of the weakest were taken over first. They were so exhausted as to be quite unable to walk, and had to be carried to Ellerdale's dwelling, which he had placed at their disposal. Several volunteered to convey the poor creatures as soon as he had set the example by taking a child in his arms, his place in the raft being filled by one of the townsmen. The remaining rustics were brought over safely, and several of the townsfolk, following the initiative already set them, sheltered in their own houses the homeless people.

CHAPTER XIV.

"The heart, they say, is wiser than the schools."

ROGERS.

ELLERDALE soon found that he had undertaken a very delicate task. He had received into his house those of the peasants who had been most prostrated by their long exposure to the storm, and who were now suffering from ague—a disease very common when drainage was ignored, and large tracts of wood and rotting timber covered the country. The women and children he had taken under his roof wanted gentle and considerate nurses, but a wide gulf separated serfs and townsmen, in spite of Ellerdale's teaching about Christian charity. Compassion for the poor was not one of the virtues of the age. Whom could he get?

The clouds showed signs of being spent, and patches of blue sky gleamed through them, as he sat in a small chamber overlooking a waste of waters, pondering over his dilemma. He was looking up at the bits of blue, wondering what should be done, when Walden suddenly entered.

"Dennis has suffered some inconvenience from the flood," he said, "and Edith, feeling herself and Adeline

to be in the way under the circumstances, says they will come here and nurse these people you are so interested in, if you like. I have tried to show her that the idea is preposterous, but she persists."

Edith come under his roof at *her* own suggestion! It made his heart bound to think of it. Of course he was willing. Who would make a gentler nurse than she? Who would be so considerate to the sick women and children?

"Well, Hubert, what do you say?"

"I should be only too glad to have them. It is just like Edith to propose such a thing, and yet—do you think it wise?"

"Wise to soil her dainty fingers with those of serfs? No; but, as you say, it is her nature to take absurd notions into her head."

"You do not object to her coming?"

"Oh no, I suppose not. There's no accounting for tastes."

"Then let her come, and may He who spent His sacred life in comforting and healing the poor and the distressed bless her, and never let her love of charity grow cold."

Not until late in the afternoon did the rain altogether cease, and not till then did Walden consent to his sister and Adeline leaving the Dennises. He had rather enjoyed crossing and recrossing the belt of water that had separated the serfs from the more favoured townsmen; but tending the wants of the poor people afterwards was a very different thing, and he had no wish that Edith should get her head wet, as well as her feet, on their account. He was not hard-hearted, but he

belonged to the vaunted age of chivalry, and to that order of knighthood which guarded and respected "the fair" with exceeding courtesy, but treated with profound contempt "the common herd."

However, Edith did not belong to any of the orders of chivalry, and took sincere pleasure in ministering to the bodily wants of those now rendered so helpless.

But before she undertook the office of nurse, she had to go through the not unpleasant ordeal of supping in Hubert's humble hall, of conversing with him in the presence of those who knew the relationship in which they once had stood to each other, and of seeing him in his home, empty though that term was. She had not been told of the rumour that had got abroad concerning herself and her lover—for lovers they were, notwithstanding the Church's prohibition. Of an artless and unsuspecting nature, she would not have thought it improper to be under his roof even had she not come on her present mission.

As for Ellerdale, he felt his position rather embarrassing. He would not have been at all disquieted, but for the report that had been circulated by means of Mistress Dennis's garrulity. However, the consciousness that he had acted rightly in the sight of God, and that the sick ones would benefit by Edith's tender care, soon banished other thoughts from his mind; and when Edith seated herself next morning at the breakfast board, anxiety written on her brow and pity in her eyes, her sympathetic face told him more eloquently than his own judgment that he had done right.

"I fear you have not had much rest last night?" he said, after the morning salutation.

"I wish some of the poor creatures upstairs had rested as well. The children are not very much the worse for their drenching, but the women and two of the little ones have ague badly."

"And how is Ina?"

"Dear little snowdrop! she has slept nicely. I do not wonder at your loving the child as you do, she is so patient and good."

Breakfast over, she rose to relieve Adeline, who was in the sick rooms, when, turning upon Hubert a smiling face, she said—

"Will you come and see my children?"

"If it is not against the rules."

"Will you come, Oswald?" she asked, turning to her brother.

"I might waken the little wretches," he answered, considerately.

"Come, Hubert, then we must go alone."

It was quite a new sensation being conducted by Edith through his own house, and it was a very agreeable one, not to say charming. The chamber she brought him to had been strewn with fresh rushes, and eight beds of straw were ranged around it, the occupants of which, worn out with exposure to the storm and their long wakefulness, lay fast asleep, with the exception of two children who were suffering from ague.

"Here is your little Ina, sleeping as peacefully as a dove in her downy nest," said Edith, stooping over the child, and kissing her softly. "Dear lamb! she was awake not long ago, and asking to see the pastor."

"The "pastor" smiled, and would fain have kissed both child and nurse, but Ina showing signs of having

felt even the light touch of Edith's lips, he forbore to kiss the child, and honour forbade his kissing the nurse. And she whose lips had looked so tempting did not wait at Ina's bedside long enough for him to change his mind; she had gone to the other end of the room to soothe the two children stricken with ague. One was shivering with cold, though wrapped in an extra supply of coverlets; the other was tossing about deliriously in the hot stage of the fever. Edith could do nothing for the one whose whole body shook with that uncontrollable tremor which characterises the first stage of ague, but bathed the other child's head with cold water, and then laid a damp kerchief over the sufferer's temples.

"Poor little thing! the fever is at its worst now; she will be better in another hour," commented the gentle nurse. "And now I must go and relieve Adeline;" saying which, Edith returned the pastor's smile, and entered the adjoining chamber, where were three women and two young girls on whom the fever had taken a firmer hold.

By the end of a week Dame Adeline's experience, old Dorothy's cooking, and Edith's tenderness had effected wonders for the sick ones; but the huts were not yet habitable, and another week ensued before they were in a fit state to receive their former inmates. They were made more comfortable than before through Ellerdale's generosity. In such outlets did an allowance supplied him by his wealthy father find its way.

Ellerdale was really beloved by his people, freeman as well as serf; and seeing him take so lively an interest in the welfare of the peasants, the townsfolk

made constant inquiries of him respecting them. But to his annoyance, they did not confine their inquiries to the rustics. Edith's sweet face had captivated the people, and when she showed them that her heart was as sweet as her face, their regard for her was not lessened.

A marked change came over her white face during her ministry to the sufferers. The whiteness became relieved by a slight colour on her cheeks that bade fair to become permanent, and her eyes became bright as on the day when her father had consented to her betrothal to Hubert Ellerdale. Was that faint returning blush the hectic glow of fever, and the lustre that lit her beautiful eyes the precursor of death? Had she become infected with disease while ministering to the sufferings of others? The sweet smile that now so often played on her lips might indicate her willingness to let her gentle spirit leave its earthly tenement, but the soft outbursts of melody that parted them seemed hardly consistent with thoughts of death. No, the change that had come over her was not caused by disease; it was the response of nature to the partial fulfilment of her laws. After two years of weary sorrow, she was now in daily companionship with him who for many years had been her heart's choice and love: she chose to forget she could not always be near him, and determined to be happy while she could.

"Dear little Ina is getting so much better," she remarked one morning to Hubert, after their usual greeting. "Living in this pleasant place seems to influence her health as well as mine."

"It is the nurse, not the dwelling-place, that is making

Ina well," said Hubert, his thoughtful brown eyes resting more lovingly than usual on her face.

"Oh yes! *you* think so, of course; but I have no nurse. It must be the dwelling-place, else why is it *I* am so much better since I came here? Answer me, sweet your reverence."

"It is the bracing air that is bringing back the colour to your cheeks."

"Could the air be purer or more bracing than at my native Walden? Nay, it is not the air. It is your dear self who has restored my happiness, and with it my health."

He took her hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"And you, dear Edith, have made the last three weeks of my life holier and happier than ever before."

"Oh, Hubert! is it possible I have made your life better in the sight of God?"

"Yes, for I know now what it means to possess one's soul in patience. You have taught me."

"Nay, it is you who have taught me. I would still harbour wicked, rebellious thoughts, but that, knowing how you love poor Edith, she honours you for the counsel you have given her, and honouring, she has caught a spark from your noble, patient soul."

"We are not always what we seem," he said, smiling sadly. "But we will not despond," he added, quickly, as her eyes rested wistfully on his; "the Reformation is spreading rapidly, and the time may yet come when we may make this a real home."

"Are there not already priests who have homes?" she asked, timidly.

"There are a few," he answered, the throbbing of his heart belying the calmness of his reply.

She was about to say something, but the words died on her lips, and colouring, she turned to the window, and looked out on some sycamores whose shrunken leaves were being tossed about by a pitiless wind.

He stepped to her side, but she had suddenly become meditative.

"You were saying that there are priests who have homes," he continued, laying emphasis on the last word.

"Nay, it was you told me," she replied, gazing intently on the falling leaves.

"Perhaps I did once, but you referred to the fact just now."

"Did I?" she rejoined, with provoking serenity.

"Of course you did, Edith? Are those trees so very interesting?"

"Yes: I was wondering why it is that sycamores and limes begin dropping off before the summer is quite over."

"Why do you not tell me what you meant?"

"About the trees?"

"No, about the married priests."

"I hardly know what I meant. I know what I thought," she said, looking out again at the window from which she had just turned away.

"What did Edith think?" he asked, bending over her, and joining in the interesting contemplation of the withered trees.

She had her face from him, but none the less did he notice the blush that embarrassed her as she replied—

"I thought they were true, brave men."

What was he to do? He longed to take her in his arms, and press her to his bosom, and tell her God did not mean that their lives should be lived apart. As it was, he just touched the warm cheek so near his lips, and, still bending over her, said, very softly—

"Am I to suppose that Edith would counsel me to follow their example?"

She looked up into his face, her eyes moistened, and her lips curving in a smile. It was her answer.

"You would risk all and be my wife?"

"Yes," she said faintly, and then hid her face on his breast, her own strangely peaceful, though it had been sadly agitated but a minute ago. It was over now. She had said and pronounced what he had not dared to.

"Has my Edith considered the consequences?"

"She does not think they will be very terrible."

"Not if her name should become one of contumely?"

"That it would not be, except by those whose judgment we despise."

Next morning her brother left for Walden Manor, and on the following day her father arrived in Cranwood, and drew reins at the parsonage. He greeted Ellerdale warmly, and immediately set his mind at rest.

"So you and Edith have compounded?"

"Provided we have your consent, and I the approval of my flock."

"You have mine."

And then Edith appeared, radiant in smiles and returning comeliness; for she had heard the interchange

of more than friendly greeting, and she knew her father would not a second time oppose her marriage.

"Cranwood suits you, my child, better than Walden," he remarked, looking delightedly in her happy, healthful face.

"Does my father think so?" she asked, demurely, but the corners of her mouth betrayed a wish to laugh or weep.

"And has my child no question to ask me?" he said, when they had gone inside the house, and been seated some minutes talking commonplaces.

"It is needless."

"You have judged rightly, daughter mine. I shall not again stand between you and your happiness."

The next day was Sunday, and being one of the Church festivals, only a few of the townsfolk were absent from the matin service. Amongst the worshippers were Edith and her father. Ellerdale conducted the service with his habitual earnestness, and when he told the people that his discourse that morning would have a personal bearing, his clear, dark skin scarcely betrayed any heightened colour, his lips were resolute, and his eyes steadfast and unflinching; for he knew that the step he was taking, though righteous, was a bold one. He was about to speak to them, he said, of a Romish doctrine which from personal feelings he had as yet left untouched, but which, as perhaps they were aware, had been strenuously opposed by Wycliffe and many of his disciples. He reminded his hearers that at the council of Nice a motion had been made in favour of celibacy of the clergy, but that, from the storm of opposition it created, it had been speedily

laid aside, and that not until the papacy of Gregory VII., at the close of the eleventh century, had celibacy been established in the Church, and that even then it had been loudly proclaimed against. English records, he went on to say, showed that in England at least the clergy had been very slow in accepting the new law. In Bohemia, and for aught he knew elsewhere, even in their own times, the people would not listen to this intolerable teaching.

"But," he continued, "I take a higher standpoint than the mere fact of celibacy being an innovation of modern times. God's inspired Word tells the Bishop as well as the prince, the pastor as well as his flock, that marriage is the most honourable of all human relationships. And if marriage be a Divine ordinance, that takes precedence over all other human ties, then why, in the name of all that is pure and holy, debar those whose office it is, or ought to be, to instil love and purity into the hearts of those around them—why debar them from the only earthly type of love in heaven? Can their hearts be pure and tender and loving, who are shut out from this nearest earthly symbol of the union of the Lord Christ with his Church? Is it to be wondered at that the institutions of that Church become arrogant, unnatural, deformed, polluted, which terms as sinful that which engenders tenderness and forbearance?"

Only once during his discourse did he venture to look at Edith, and then a momentary flush mantled his face, but it was only for a moment, and might have been attributed to his enthusiasm. He was perhaps paler than usual when, having said all that was on his mind, he suddenly paused, and then told his hearers

that he himself meditated breaking this latest outcome of papal intolerance, but that he would not if any amongst them disapproved. Requesting any who did so to leave the church, he stood for more than a minute silent and motionless.

And none left.

It was a touching sight to see how his people loved him when, on leaving the sanctuary, he was surrounded by them, and cheered. All were anxious to shake his hand, and congratulate him on his fearless determination.

And Edith, where was she? Had she hurried away from the church ashamed, or afraid to look in the people's faces? Oh no! there she stood by her father's side, outside the little throng that had encircled their pastor, waiting until she too could speak with him. Nor had the colour on her cheeks come there either for shame or fear, but unconsciously in the joy of her heart, for, like Ellerdale, she knew her union with him would be righteous in God's most holy eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

"Can tyrants but by tyrants conquered be,
And Freedom find no champion and no child?"
BYRON.

ON the following morning Sir Cedric and his daughter left for Walden Manor, with the understanding that the wedding would take place in the course of a month or so, when Ellerdale would repair to the Manor to claim his bride.

He accompanied his late guests after breakfast to the hostel where Sir Cedric's attendants had been boarding, and whence he obtained a view of the first mile they had to travel. Very bitter had been his thoughts once before as he stood there watching the knight ride off. How different now? They were soon out of sight, and he turned to enter the smithy. But neither Ulric nor any of his men were there, and the forge had burnt itself out. It seemed strange, so he entered the adjoining dwelling.

"'Deed I wish I knew where he be," said the smith's wife, in reply to Ellerdale's interrogation. "All he told me was that he was going to Blackheath, near London, to see about the people's rights, as he called

it, and he's ta'en the men with him, and a number o' the serfs."

Repairing to the hamlet, Ellerdale found the women in the utmost excitement. Their husbands and their sons had left with Ulric, armed in true rustic style with what implements or tools they could lay hands on. They had thrown out hints that they would not return to Cranwood as serfs. Ellerdale was not long in guessing what had happened. The poorer classes had at last risen in rebellion, as they had long threatened, goaded to fury by their harsh treatment and the unpopular poll-tax.

Noblemen and wealthy burgesses could afford to glory in the French wars, as they sat before tables which groaned

> "Beneath the smoking sirloin, stretched immense
> From side to side; in which with desperate knife
> They deep incision made, and talked the while
> Of England's glory, ne'er to be defaced
> While hence they borrowed vigour."

But the miserable serfs, or villeins, who rarely tasted the "smoking sirloin," were tired of the wars which brought them nothing but misery and increased taxation. Already writhing under incessant exactions for these expensive campaigns, the culminating point of their endurance had been reached when the fatal capitation tax was levied, every one over fifteen years of age, male or female, being obliged to pay three groats—a sum sufficient to purchase many years' exemption from purgatory! Nor was it even a war-tax, but one to pay for the recent extravagances at court. The serfs, and the freemen just above them in the social

scale, had murmured ominiously; but no heed was taken, until the tax-gatherers, adding grossest insult to injury, drew upon themselves and the government the wrath of the incensed people, who rose simultaneously in Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and the eastern counties.

On mixing with the townsfolk, Ellerdale found rumours rife of a gathering of insurgents on Blackheath. Visions arose of London being sacked and his father's house destroyed, and he resolved to set out immediately for the metropolis, to help his father in case of untoward contingencies. Several of the Cranwood men accompanied him. On approaching the city, the houses on the road to London Bridge showed unmistakable signs of pillage. Passing through the village of Lambeth, they beheld a portion of the archiepiscopal palace in flames, the insurgents having thus vented their anger on being balked of the primate, whose name was on their list of "traitors to the Commons and the King." Ellerdale and his companions rode out of their way to see the extent of the mischief. Returning to the main road, their progress became suddenly impeded by groups of armed men. Discordant shouts were now heard close at hand, and emerging into the London road, the litttle body of horsemen found itself thrown into the midst of a rabble army, some sixty thousand strong, that had come into the main road from the direction of Blackheath. Here and there, dotted over a sea of wild, sullen faces, were men on horseback. These were the captains. There, encased in body armour that had been made for more knightly persons, were Wat the Tyler, Jack the Miller, and others, and there, also mounted, his person pro-

tected by plate armour, was Ulric the smith. Nor were the captains all men of such social importance as the above. Some there were whose coats, made of the tanned skins of wild animals, and legs protected with leather that left bare the knees, proclaimed them serfs; but only those villeins whose persons were large and imposing had been elevated to the rank of leaders. At the head of this motley army, one-tenth of whom were perhaps sufficiently armed, but the rest carrying nothing more deadly or defensive than farm tools—at the head of this rustic host, alongside of Wat Tyler, and seated on a mule, rode John Ball, a friar whom the Archbishop of Canterbury had imprisoned for seditious preaching, and whom the insurgents had liberated. He occasionally re-animated those behind him by crying out, in stentorian accents,—

> "When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Where was then the gentleman?"

This was his favourite text, and the crowd never wearied of its repetition; and the masses retained the old rhyme as household words long after the insurrection had been quelled.

Ellerdale's party had no sooner become mixed up in the rebel rout, than their bridle-reins were seized, and themselves dismounted to make room for fresh captains. Resistance was out of the question, and the rustics hustling them apart, Ellerdale soon found himself in the midst of the wave that was rolling London-Bridge-wards, and compelled to go thither whether he liked or not. The bridge was closed against them. Sir William Walworth, the mayor, anticipating the arrival of Wat

Tyler and his Commons of Kent and Surrey, had fortified it and raised the drawbridge, which formed one of the arches.* "Then the commons cried to the wardens of the bridge to let it down and give them entry, whereby they might pass, or else they would destroy them all: whereby the wardens were constrained by fear to let it down and give them entry, at which time the religious of the chapel were earnest in procession and prayer."

The insurgents then swept on towards the Savoy Palace, which their captains made it their first business to destroy. In Eastcheap, Ellerdale, after considerable difficulty, detached himself from the mob. He found his father's residence fortified, and the gates closed, which, however, were opened to him when the crowd had passed by.

"Who would have thought of seeing you here, sir priest?" exclaimed Wilfred Ellerdale, laughing heartily at his son's expense, whose garments were torn and dirty.

"I have been led here for several reasons," said Hubert, joining in the laugh. "First, I wished to satisfy myself that you had not suffered by the insurrection, and secondly to tell you that I am about to take to myself a wife."

"The saints preserve us!" ejaculated his mother,

* "I well remember," says Pennant, the antiquarian, "the street on London Bridge (removed gradually during the last century), noisome, darksome, and dangerous to passengers; frequent arches of strong timber crossed the street from the tops of the houses, to keep them together, and from falling into the river." A chapel, dedicated to St. Thomas à Becket, adorned the tenth or centre arch in Wycliffe's days.

who had just entered the hall. "You Lollards are turning the world upside down."

"It is time," he said, smiling, and stooping to salute her.

"And who is the lady," asked the dame, "who ventures so close on holy Church's ground?"

"Edith."

"She is a brave girl," said the merchant, interrupting his wife, "and I am proud to know that I have a son bold enough to set the Church at defiance in this as in other matters."

"You have then altered your religious opinions?" asked Hubert, eagerly.

"I never pretended to have any at all until quite recently, nor are they very clear even yet. But enough of this. What do you think of the insurrection?"

"I have not had time to think; indeed I scarcely knew there was one, until I found myself in the midst of the insurgents, relieved of my horse by a dozen peasants, who afterwards had a fight among themselves for its ownership, and borne into Eastcheap more like a cork on a rushing stream than as a man holding the dignified position of a parish priest. And now what can you tell me?" he asked, flinging himself on a settle by the side of his mother, who had forgotten all about his marriage under the combined influences of pleasure at seeing her son and dread of impending events.

"Very little. Yesterday Wat Tyler's rabble demanded an interview between their leader and the young king, in the hope that he would listen to what

they call their grievances. Richard, whose court is now at the Tower, was willing to trust himself in their company, but was dissuaded; and the rustic army, well aware that the king has scarcely any armed force at hand, and indignant at the slight shown their chief, are now, I suppose, doing just as they like."

"They have set fire to the Savoy," broke in the merchant's eldest son, who had come down from a point of observation at the top of a turret inside the court.

But the flames were soon visible from a lower standpoint, and as night closed in, all London was illuminated by the burning of the Duke of Lancaster's stately palace, an edifice thrice the size of the archbishop's, which was also burning on the other side of the Thames. The flames, that shot high into the night air, struck terror, not only into the breasts of the nobles who were with the king in the Tower, but of the wealthy merchants; for, on account of the part taken by some of their number in raising the obnoxious poll-tax, they expected indiscriminate revenge at the hands of the infuriated mob, and they fortified their houses accordingly.

Despite, however, this act of spoliation, the insurgent host for the first few days behaved with wonderful forbearance. All they wanted, they said, was that the commissioner of the poll-tax, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and some others, should be secured and punished. The young king, who in this crisis showed all the promptitude and bravery of his heroic father, met them on several occasions, and promised to abolish villeinage. Unfortunately, there were some who, having tasted the

sweets of power, would not relinquish it; these, overpowering the knights of the Tower, entered that stronghold, and beheaded the archbishop and the tax commisioner. From that hour nothing but violence and the wildest disorder ensued. The intoxication of power extended itself, and the moderate leaders were forced into a line of action they deplored. The prisons were forced, and a dangerous class of men thus added to the insurgent ranks. The rich Italian merchants who had farmed the taxes were all beheaded, and their hoarded treasure appropriated, in which bloody drama the outlaw, Jack Straw, was the chief actor.

For nearly a week the citizens were in the greatest consternation, and London witnessed scenes of rapine and bloodshed. The wealthier amongst them fortified their houses, which they defended with stubborn bravery, thereby, however, rendering the gallant Lord Mayor powerless to raise a citizen army, for the regular troops, at this critical juncture, were sequestered in Scotland and on the continent. Wilfrid Ellerdale's residence was attacked in due course. The gates were strong, but were forced in. The merchant and his sons and servants, who had defended them as long as they withstood the pressure from without, fell back before the assailants, when a half-armed horseman ordered them to seek booty elsewhere. On his head he wore a conical leather skull-cap, his chest and back were protected by plate armour, his legs were encased in leather, and his arms were bare; he brandished a short sword, and a knife was stuck in his belt.

"Ulric!"

"Aye, it be me," said the smith, rather sheepishly.

"What could have induced you to join in this insane movement?"

"Justice; but there'll be none now, for most all our men be drunk as owls, and know not what they be doing. I'm thankful I saw thee in time."

"Stay," cried Hubert; "you confess justice cannot now be obtained; remain here."

"No; there be some there as I persuaded to leave their homes, and I'll stand by 'em, come what may;" and, wheeling his horse, he rode after the men he had ordered to leave the courtyard.

Later in the day the insurgents gathered together at Smithfield, where they were met accidentally by the king, who was accompanied by sixty horsemen. And then followed the well-known incident that brought the insurrection to a speedy termination.

It was a sight sufficient to make the boy-king quail as he looked on that scowling host drawn up in front of the old Abbey of St. Bartholomew. But he seems not to have been daunted, and, for once at least in his unhappy life, showed himself kingly and self-reliant. Everyone knows how, ordering his knights and gentlemen to stop where they were, he rode forth alone, and called upon the insurgent leader to come forward and speak with him. "Tall of stature, of a handsome person, of a fair and amiable countenance," seated on a richly caparisoned charger, he presented a striking contrast to the man who sullenly obeyed his summons —a largely built, heavily bearded, bold, rough-looking man, mounted on a horse of ponderous weight. Like most of his captains, he wore plate armour, which contrasted forcibly with the king's unprotected doublet,

as did also his iron casque with Richard's crown of gold.

"Sir king, seest thou all yonder people?" said Wat Tyler, playing with a dagger he held in his hand.

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because they be all at my commandment, and have sworn to me faith and truth to do all that I will have them. And think'st thou that they, and as many more in London, will depart without a charter?"

Richard courteously assured him they should have it. His knights and gentlemen had now drawn around him, amongst whom was an esquire who was a personal enemy of Tyler. Some high words ensued, and then followed Walworth's sword-thrust at Tyler's throat, the putting themselves in battle-array of the insurgents, the bending of their bows at the royal party, and the charming presence of mind of Richard, who, having first ordered his attendants to keep back, rode up alone to the incensed multitude, and cried out—

"I will be your leader and your captain. Follow me. Am I not your king?"

Tyler had reeled and fallen from his horse, a corpse. Yet not an arrow left the bow-strings, not one of that surging crowd, who a moment ago had scowled in anger and hatred on Richard and his handful of attendants, laid hands on the royal boy. Charmed by his dauntless bearing, and the frank courtesy of his words, they became as subdued and harmless as the miserable serfs they had been but a week before, and at his bidding followed him to some fields near Islington. There they became panic-stricken at the sight of the renowned Free Companies' captain, Sir Robert Knowles, and

throwing down their bows and less warlike weapons, the dispirited peasants fled in all directions.

Of this insurrection Wycliffe has been accused of being the cause, and perhaps not altogether unjustly. Ground down in abject slavery, barely treated as human beings, what wonder that the poor villeins should demand from their tyrannical masters their freedom, when they learnt from the religious reformers the doctrines of the Bible? Gradually they had awakened to the fact that in the eyes of God they were not mere beasts of burden —that they and their lordly masters were in His sight brothers,

> "Of kindred form, and kindred faculties,
> Of kindred feelings, passions, thoughts, desires:
> Born free, and heirs of an immortal hope."

Roused by such thoughts as these, what wonder that they should make a convulsive effort to throw off the chains of their slavery? Not allowed to leave the soil to which they were "attached," unless bought by some new master, and subjected to ill-treatment and contempt, it is not surprising that they should rise in insurrection when an opportunity presented itself, especially now that there burned in their rustic breasts the sentiment of our epic poet—

> "Man over men
> He made not Lord, such title to Himself
> Reserving, human left from human free."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Mercy is above this sceptred sway,—
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice."

Merchant of Venice.

"FAREWELL, dear home of my girlhood, and you, ye sweet fields and groves!" cried Edith, looking back on the scenes of her young life's uneventful history; then turning her face from the Manor, with less reluctance than her words would seem to imply, and bending over the name of her snow-white steed, she added, with a sigh faint in comparison with her smile, "Come, Erna, we must not tarry longer."

"You do not seem so very sorry to leave old Walden," broke in her father, with a sonorous laugh, as he spurred his horse to keep abreast of Edith's.

"I am more sorry to leave Walden's lord than Walden," she returned, a tender regret eclipsing for the moment the joy in her heart.

The arrangements for the wedding had been altered in accordance with the wishes of the good people of Cranwood, who desired that their pastor should be

married in their own town. Edith and her father were now on their way thither. Half-an-hour's ride brought them to the banks of the Thames, where a barge was awaiting them. Dismounting, their horses were taken on board along with those of their attendants, eight of whom exchanged the bridle for the oar—Edith, her father, and Dame Adeline in the meantime seating themselves under an awning in the centre of the barge. They had scarcely landed on the other side of the river, and had just broken into a trot, when the knight's party found its further progress impeded by a unmannerly band of peasants. They were now at the gates of the palace of Shene, and Sir Cedric, who was well known by the king's halberdiers stationed there, at once gained admittance for his daughter and Adeline into the palace grounds, while he himself stayed outside to parley with the half-armed rustics.

Some weeks had elapsed since the scenes at Smithfield and Islington, but the country was still disaffected, and bands of serfs, afraid to return to their masters, lingered in some places.

Rumour had assigned to the Princess Anne of Bohemia, who had not been many days in England, the most kindly and sympathetic qualities. She was known to be at Shene, and these malcontents whom Sir Cedric was treating with were clamouring for her protection. Nor did they clamour in vain. Hearing the uproar, and learning the cause, the princess immediately betook herself, with only a slender body of attendants, to the palace gates, when a great shout greeted her.

A fair, gentle maiden of fifteen, whose flowing satin gown, fitting tightly at the waist, displayed a slight and

graceful figure, and whose upper tunic of cloth of gold, and girdle studded with richest gems, bespoke her high rank. And yet "Cæsar's sister"—she was sister to the German Emperor—scarcely looked a princess, so gentle and retiring was her deportment.

Edith and her duenna stepped back amongst some shrubs as the royal maiden approached, while Sir Cedric, who had been vainly endeavouring to pacify the peasants, stepped up to the gate, and, bowing low, said,—

"Your highness's fame—for I know by the sweet charm of your person that you are the Princess Anne of Bohemia—has preceded your arrival here. These fellows have heard that mercy is a ruling trait in your gentle breast, and, threatened by their masters for their late sedition, have flocked here to ask your intercession with the king on their behalf."

Smiling very graciously, and inclining her slight form to the rustics, she addressed Sir Cedric—

"Tell them, sir knight, that I have already resolved to beseech His Majesty to pardon all who have been concerned in the insurrection."

Her words were received with a loud cheer, and the men crowded to the gate to kiss their fair advocate's hand, which she put through the iron bars, smiling the while upon the rough but for the most part honest faces.

While Sir Cedric again tried to induce them to return peaceably to their several homes, the princess advanced to the shrubs where Edith had retired.

"You have come here for refuge from those poor fellows?"

"Yes, your highness."

"Is that knight your father?"

"Yes, he is Sir Cedric Walden."

"I know no knightly name in England but Richard," said Anne, blushing, though Edith was the only one who heard what she said, for the princess's attendants and Adeline stood a little apart.

"Your highness has not been long in England?"

"I only landed at Dover last week. But you must not think I am totally ignorant of your English names. At least there is one beside Richard that I have heard much of, some of whose writings have spread into my native Bohemia; and that name is John Wycliffe—one I have learnt to love and reverence."

"Dear princess!" exclaimed Edith, enthusiastically.

"You are pleased that I love that name? Are you then one of his disciples?"

"Oh, yes! and they say half England has accepted his doctrines."

"Indeed! I did not know they had spread to such an extent. I am truly glad to hear it. Ah! here comes Richard. Nay, do not leave me," she added, turning to Edith, who was about to retire as a gay cavalcade approached them through the now open gates.

At the head of the party rode the king on one side of him his half-brother, the cruel Sir John Holland, on his other his tutor and faithful friend and adviser, Sir Simon Burley. The young king immediately descried the Bohemian maiden, and vaulting from his richly trapped charger, he ordered his train of followers to ride on. Saluting her tenderly, he asked her what had brought her there.

"The cries of your oppressed peasantry."

"Ah! have the rude churls dared to approach our

palace? We saw a number of them just now as we came in from the road." At the approach of the king's retinue, the peasants, overawed, had fallen back in a contrary direction.

"Oh, Richard! have pity upon these poor, miserable people."

"Pity, my sweet princess? They deserve none."

"None indeed!" muttered Sir John Holland, scornfully, and twirling his black moustache as he fixed his dark eyes on Edith's mantling face.

Anne looked very unhappy. Had she not heard that this England had become imbued with Wycliffe's noble sentiments, that the court itself was tinged with his teachings, and that Richard, though wayward and self-willed, had a generous, noble heart?

"Are these poor people so very bad, then, that you can find no pity for them?" she asked, reproachfully.

"Rustics they have been and are, and in bondage shall they remain. Make not sad that sweet face of thine on their account."

"I shall never be happy unless you grant my request."

"We have said the churls must remain in bondage."

"It is not the abolition of slavery that I beseech of you, dearly though I would welcome such a state of things. My dear liege," she said, with much earnestness, "will you grant me one favour before our marriage?"

"A hundred, my gentle Anne," said the thoughtless king, taking her hand and pressing it to his lips, little thinking whose had kissed it but a short time since.

"I ask but one. I am told that thousands of the unhappy men who took part in the insurrection are under sentence of death. Pardon them all."

"Pardon them all!" repeated Richard, smiling in spite of a hot, angry glow that rushed to his cheeks.

"Them all!" echoed Sir John Holland, playing insolently with the jewelled hilt of his poniard.

Sinking on the greensward, her fair young face bathed in a sunbeam that came down through the branches of an ancient oak, she clasped her hands, and looking up into the face of her betrothed, cried, with passionate earnestness—

"Oh, Richard! if you love me, as you say you do, spare these poor misguided men, and dye not your hands in blood on the eve of our nuptials."

We are told that "in the whole bearing and deportment of Anne there was an unaffected yet dignified benignity, a winning grace and suavity, the power of which none could resist." Richard felt he could not, as he looked down upon her face of earnest entreaty, though when in his indecision he glanced away from hers to the haughty features of his half-brother, his feelings again momentarily hardened, but, looking from his younger to his older and more faithful counsellor, he saw Burley gazing kindly and approvingly on England's future queen. And she, in that interval of indecision glancing furtively around her, caught that look of sympathy on Burley's face, and was about to implore him to add his entreaties to her own, when the king, divining what she would say, and not caring that the prayer should come from other lips than hers, held up his hand, and smiling tenderly upon her, said—

"It shall be as you wish. We will have our prisons emptied for thy sweet sake, and to celebrate your coming to our realm."

"God will surely bless you, my dear liege, for this act of mercy, aye, and the land that is ruled by such a prince."

And who knows but those words, so full of earnestness and pathetic conviction, might have come true, had he always listened to the counsels of his gentle queen; but unfortunately he was actuated by passionate impulses, and easily led by flatterers.

Stooping to raise the slight form that had continued kneeling at his feet, he again kissed her small white hand, and no doubt believed himself at that moment the most merciful and tender-hearted of kings.

There were several witnesses of this promise of mercy. With his arms folded across a breast that dazzled in cloth of silver, his blue velvet mantle flung back over his shoulders, stood the king's brother, the embodiment of pride and arrogance. He believed the peasantry could only be kept down by oppression. Frowning darkly on Richard, who was several years his junior, he sought to ease himself of some of his suppressed wrath by grinding the soil with the golden spurs that were attached to his red leather boots, which had the fashionable enormously long-peaked points. Beside him, showing a very different visage, stood the man whom Sir John had been unable as yet to alienate from his brother's confidence—the wise, faithful Sir Simon Burley. A few yards apart from these were Edith and her father, who having succeeded in dispersing the peasants, had come back for his daughter. There were also Adeline and the princess's attendants.

"You will pardon *all* the insurgents?" asked Anne, with momentary hesitation, as she caught sight of Sir John's handsome, angry face.

"For your sweet sake, every man of them. Who is this?" added Richard, turning to Edith, and acknowing the obeisance she made with his habitual grace.

"One who believes in the same faith as myself, and who I should much like to have in my train."

"Is the fair damsel desirous of becoming a maid of honour?" asked the king, looking kindly on a face few saw without interest. "Ah!" he added, bending slightly to her father, "I did not at first recognise our good knight, Sir Cedric Walden."

"No, my liege, my daughter has a prior engagement to fulfil," said the knight, freeing Edith of her embarrassment.

"She could hardly enter a nobler service than that of the Queen of England," returned Richard, haughtily.

"She is about to become a bride," explained the knight.

"Ah that makes all the difference," said the king, smiling; and, bending to the father and daughter, he led the princess towards the palace.

"A noble youth, were he not influenced by minions and flatterers," commented Sir Cedric, as they stood for a moment at the gate, and looked back on the royal party.

"A sweet princess," murmured Edith, musingly.

"A proud and insolent set," observed Dame Adeline, alluding to Anne's attendants—an opinion, however, which she considerably modified when five minutes later, seated on a pillion behind a groom, she related to him what she designated their interview with the king and his *fiancée*.

CHAPTER XVII.

"There is a day of sunny rest
For every dark and troubled night."

W. C. BRYANT.

THE day on which the pastor of Cranwood and Edith Walden became man and wife was not marked by the boisterous revelry that usually attended a wedding. Esteeming marriage as the most sacred and exalted relationship on earth, Ellerdale had an inherent aversion to the unbridled licence that in his day attached to the festivities prevailing on such occasions, and regarded the mummeries then indulged in as worse than puerile. His father-in-law's ideas of a wedding were widely different, and it was with great reluctance that he deferred to Ellerdale's wishes, and consented to a descendant of the Thanes of Walden becoming a bride without the gay festivities and revelry that his Saxon heart delighted in, his Lollardism notwithstanding.

The morning was a mild and pleasant one, and the slanting rays of the wintry sun lit up with cheering warmth the porch of the church, as the bridegroom stood there awaiting Edith's arrival; the marriage ceremonial in those days being almost invariably conducted in the entrance porch. His father, who had come

down the day before from London, stood near him, and by his side the grey-haired pastor of Brentford, who had been the means of converting Sir Cedric to the reformed faith, and had been indirectly the cause of the marriage: it was therefore very *apropos* that good Master Exton should officiate at the wedding.

The meadow in which stood the Norman church was filled by the people of Cranwood, rich and poor, who were anxious to show their beloved young pastor how cordially they approved the step he was taking. A lane was made for them as the bride appeared, leaning on the arm of her mother-in-law, for Mistress Ellerdale had overcome her religious scruples. Behind, in gowns and kirtles of snowy white, came the bridemaids, resident maidens who had insisted on performing this ancient service.

Very sweet and charming looked the bride as blushingly she took her appointed place in the porch, the roses on her cheeks deepening when a loud and ringing cheer burst from the people outside. Ellerdale had overcome Sir Cedric's wish to have a Saxon wedding, but he could not restrain the enthusiasm of his flock, who were overjoyed at this latest exhibition of contempt for the hated laws of Rome. He well knew what that hearty cheer signified, and catching the fire of enthusiasm from his people, his eyes shone with a zeal that for the moment eclipsed the thoughts of his approaching happiness; but, as they settled on Edith's drooping eyelashes, the fire of Reformation zeal softened into a look full of tenderest love, and taking her hand in his, he whispered—

"It is a testimony to the righteousness of our union."

She raised her eyes, and they told him of perfect faith and love.

"It *is* a testimony," came in clear, impressive accents from the lips of the aged priest, who was about to blend their young lives in one. As he spoke, he smiled benignantly on Ellerdale and his bride; then, lifting his hands in the attitude of prayer, he implored the Divine blessing, and the short service commenced. Immediately every voice was hushed, for the people outside on the church-green were much impressed, and men doffed their bonnets as though an intensely solemn ordinance were being celebrated, so novel was the sight of a priest in the guise of a bridegroom.

The ceremony over, Master Exton delivered a short address to the people, warmly defending marriage amongst the clergy by the sure word of God. Ellerdale had himself meant to say a few words to his flock, but his heart was too full; simply thanking them for their manifestations of affection, he took Edith's hand and left the porch. Many were the hearty blessings invoked on behalf of the pair as they passed through the little throng on the green.

As soon as they were out of hearing, Sir Cedric gave vent to his suppressed feelings by informing the people that a dinner had been provided in the grounds of a hostel hard by for as many as chose to dine there, and that the sports in which young men delighted would take place afterwards; then throwing a purse heavy with golden florins and nobles to a man whose leathern jacket looked as though it had seen long service, he bade him distribute its contents among his followers.

"What have you been saying to them?" asked Ellerdale, with a dubious smile, as the knight rejoined him.

"Bidding the poorer ones amongst them repair to a dinner I have provided at the hostel. Your reverence has no objection, I hope?"

"Not if it does not lead to coarse buffooneries."

"You have disciplined them too well for that," returned the knight, good-humouredly.

Old Dorothy had provided for the bridal party what she considered a most sumptuous repast. And although the wealthy city merchant had often sat down to costlier dishes, and Sir Cedric would much have preferred a larger number of guests in his own hall at Walden, in the style of his ancestors, yet every one was happy: the knight because his child was supremely so, and Dame Adeline for the same reason; the merchant because he hated unnatural superstitions, and was proud of having a son with courage to defy them; his dame because in spite of her prejudices she was charmed with Edith's winning manners and simple grace; and the aged priest who had performed the nuptial ceremony because he saw what he hoped to be the dawning of brighter days for England. The four townsmen, too, who represented Cranwood were happy because they were good men and true, and knew that their pastor reserved his generosity for nobler purposes than costly banquets; and the bridemaids because they were young, and liked being decked out in wedding finery. As for the bride and bridegroom, they would have been not less happy had the board been spread in the meanest cottage, and the repast the coarsest of cotters' fare.

Soon after the dinner, Master Exton returned to Brentford, with an escort Sir Cedric had provided for him, and the merchant and his wife to London. The knight remained at Cranwood for the day, deeming it incumbent on his honour to visit the hostelry and stay to countenance the sports. Ellerdale and his bride accompanied him, but did not remain there long, for each had an inbred dislike to associate the day with sounds of revelry, which were but too discernible as they approached the festive boards. Most of the men were unaccustomed to anything stronger than ale and mead, and to-day Sir Cedric had made Meadcups, the hostel-keeper, broach a cask of his choicest malvoisie, and the inevitable consequences had ensued.

A bacchanalian shout was raised by those who had drunk more freely than was wise, as the knight and the newly wedded pair entered on the scene. Edith, whose cheeks were of course sensitive on such a day, was disconcerted; her husband's turned pale, as they always did when he was much displeased.

"Tell Meadcups to serve them no more wine," he said, authoritatively, to one of the hostel men. "I am grieved that this should have happened on my account," he added, turning to Sir Cedric.

"Tut, man, the wine will do the lads no harm."

Accustomed to such scenes, which have always been but too common in "merrie England," Sir Cedric did not see anything very dreadful in a carousal; but as Ellerdale was evidently sorely vexed, he proposed that the sports should at once commence.

It would not be fair on Cranwood to suppose that all who had availed themselves of the knight's mis-

placed generosity had indulged in too much of the ensnaring malvoisie, but enough had done so to make the wind-up of the dinner noisy and roistering. Therefore Ellerdale readily acceded to the proposal for change of scene and occupation, and so far encourage the sports as himself to lead the archery exercise by sending a shaft well into the longbow butt, amidst the applause of the competitors. He waited to see the shooting with the longbow and the arc, and the running at the quintain. This last was the game the young men most delighted in. A high wooden post was placed in the ground, with a cross-bar at the top, which revolved on either of the arms being struck; at the end of one arm was a shield, on which was painted a Saracen's head, and from the other end was suspended a bag of sand. The game consisted in a horseman, grasping in his right hand a stout pole, galloping at the quintain, and endeavouring to strike the head, and at the same time elude a blow from the bag of sand, the cross-bar revolving immediately it is struck. When the winner had been declared, Ellerdale and Edith left, leaving Sir Cedric to superintend the remaining sports.

Home! what thrilling meaning there was in that word now: what peace, what rest!

"At last, my Edith!" he said, as he led her through its threshold on into their bridal chamber, where, kneeling side by side, they took this first opportunity of privacy in thanking Him whose compassion for His children they believed had approved and promoted their union, and in beseeching Him to make their wedded life not only pleasant to themselves, but a means of blessing to others.

Then going to the single window the room afforded, and pushing back the lattice, they gazed for a few minutes on a pretty, peaceful view, that had the church they had so recently left for its central object. Before them lay some meadows, in the midst of which reposed the sacred edifice, its Norman tower and lancet windows overgrown with ivy and clematis. The fields continued to rise in gentle slopes to the Kentish Downs beyond. To the right of the church, on less elevated ground, lay Cranwood, only a few of its gabled roofs visible from the window.

As she looked on the rural landscape, Edith recalled a time when she had contemplated with a shade of remorse the thought of leaving her much-loved haunts at Walden ; but she had then expected noisy, fashionable London to be the scene of her wedded life. She was musing thus, when, an arm stealing softly round her waist, she turned with a smile of quiet contentment, and instantly trees, meadows, church, and hills became less beautiful to her than her husband's face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Oh, how unlike the complex works of man
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!"

COWPER.

THE good people of Cranwood never repented having urged their pastor to marry. They did not find that the fair stranger who had settled in their midst monopolized the society of him so well loved by others, nor claimed as an exclusive right the love and sympathies of his gentle, manly heart. They did not find him less diligent in seeking out the sick and afflicted, nor did he take a less tender interest in their petty sorrows now that he had a partner to accompany him on life's journey. On the contrary, his sphere of usefulness was greater now than when he had been celibate, for she who was his second self shared to the full his delight in visiting the fatherless children and widows, and all who were desolate and oppressed.

But did not he fail somewhere at least in his sacred office? Is not woman so weak, unstable, sinful, that she must of necessity drag to a lower level any of that holy, priestly, albeit human, section of mankind who dare to imperil their holy lives by taking the same

path as she in the long, tedious road that leads to immortality? Else why that inhuman law that insists upon celibacy?

No, it is a myth designed by the subtle brains of Rome—a libel on the purest half of our race, this perfidious aphorism of hers, that woman enervates and cramps the soul of man; an infamous falsehood forged by a crafty and presumptuous priesthood who, forsooth, would be esteemed a separate race, distinct in its sacredness from the rest of the world—one of the many devices, indeed, to arrogate to themselves the office pertaining to the meek Saviour, our one and only Priest.

Surely to none should "wife" be a dearer, more blessed word than to the faithful Christian pastor. From the nature of his calling, cognizant of much that is sad and miserable in the world, who so dependent on a wife as he? Depressed, cast down, and sad, because of the rampant evil he sees around him, and fearful perhaps lest his ministry be in vain, who so comforted and reanimated by a wife's patient, faithful heart?

Some time had passed since Ellerdale's marriage, when one chilly December afternoon he stood in the porch of his parsonage, an air of impatience on his face, and a scroll of parchment in his hand. But when the figure of a woman emerged from a bend in the road, the expression of his face altered to one of gratified expectancy.

"I thought you were never coming," he said, pressing his lips to Edith's cool brow, that had been fanned by the wintry breeze.

"I found so much to say, and the poor people had so much to tell me," she replied, as they entered the house.

"And what do you think of them all—any changes since August?"

"I have only been into a few of the huts."

"And I thought you must at least have been over half the town."

"Oh, but you know women have more to say than you men, there are so many little things that you nobler beings cannot enter into. I did not think, though, that I had been long away," she added, smiling.

"No, only I want to read over this scroll with you. An Oxford student rode by a short time ago and gave it me as a token that my old friend Purney has not forgotten me. He has transcribed it himself. It is Dr. Wycliffe's last tractate."

"I shall be so pleased to hear you read it to me; but," she added, with a mischievous sparkle in her eye, "was it absolutely necessary that you should let me know about it at once?"

"Well, you see, I shall want to let others read it."

He had done so himself, and was desirous of making her a sharer in the interest it had created; but that constant longing for each other's company that naturally clings to the early married days had, perhaps, something to do with his restlessness, for though where true love reigns in the heart, the affection of husband and wife remains ever green and fresh, there is yet an indefinable charm about those first days that acts like the loadstone.

Seating herself on a low stool beside him, in a room whose walls and ceiling of oak-panelling were now light as in daytime, and now lurid, according to the fluctuating glow from a large log that lay burning on the hearth, she folded her hands on his knee, and looking up in his face, waited for him to begin reading.

"What is it about?" she asked.

"It is against transubstantiation. Wycliffe entitles it 'The Wicket; or, a Definition of the Words *Hoc est corpus meum.*'"

"I am afraid it is a very learned production. Do, please, explain it a little before you read it."

"But of course you know what those words mean?"

"Not exactly."

"And yet you have often been to mass and repeatedly heard them used."

"Yes, but before I went to Master Exton's church I understood very little of what was said in the different services. I once told the priest Ambrose so, but he said it was not necessary for me to know."

"Ah! it is the same everywhere, except, thank God, in our reformed churches."

"What does Dr. Wycliffe mean by 'Wicket'?"

"The Gate approached by that straight and narrow way, found, and followed, by so few. The tractate is full of Scriptural quotations, for he places infinitely greater weight on the words of the Bible than his own arguments, and above all, treasures the recorded utterances of his 'sweet Jesus.'* He commences by saying

* We see something of the deep, and yet childlike, love Wycliffe had for our Saviour by the following extract from his "Caitiff on the love of Jesus": "O, Thou everlasting Love! inflame my mind

that he is convinced an hour of sore temptation and trial is approaching for the faithful followers of Christ."

Edith crept closer to her husband, and his lip quivered for a moment as he looked down upon her fair young face.

"Christ tells us," he said, softly, "that those who endure unto the end shall be saved."

"Oh, Hubert! let us pray that we may be spared persecution for the faith."

"The persecution Wycliffe anticipates may never come. We must pray that it may be so."

"What does Dr. Wycliffe say about the Eucharist?"

"His great point is to show that the Sacrifice of the Mass is an idolatrous worship. Referring to the mass-creed, he reminds the Papists how they pretend to believe only in one God, whereas their daily sacrifices would imply many gods, for each time they consecrate the bread they pretend, you know, that the bread is God. In the psalm *Quicunque vult*, it is said, 'The Father is unmade, the Son is unmade, the Holy Ghost is unmade.' 'And thou, who art an earthly man,' says our Reformer, addressing the Romish priest, 'by what reason darest thou say that thou makest thy Maker?

to love God, that it burn not but to His callings. O good Jesus, who shall give to me that I feel in Thee? Enter into the inmost recesses of my soul, come into mine heart, and fill it with Thy most clear sweetness; make my mind to drink deeply of the fervent wine of Thy sweet love, that I, forgetting all evils and all vain visions and scornful imaginations, Thee only embracing, joying I may rejoice in my Lord Jesus. Thou most sweet Lord, from henceforward pass not from me! Dwell with me in Thy sweetness!—for only Thy presence is to me solace or comfort, and only Thy absence leaves me sorrowful."

COPYING THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.

Knowest thou that if thou mayest make the body of the Lord in those words thou sayest at the consecration of the host, This is *My* body, thou thyself must be the person of Christ, or else there is a false god? And even if the Almighty Lord did at the passover supper make of the material bread His own blessed body, what earthly man hath power like Him?'"

"Does not Christ say of Himself, somewhere in the Gospel, that He is the True Vine?" asked Edith.

"Yes."

"That of course is a metaphor."

"Of course, and when He says, This is My body, He is speaking figuratively, as He does in many parts of the Gospel."

And so her husband continued, until long after curfew in less favoured sections of the country had signalled the hour of repose, explaining and afterwards reading to her Wycliffe's famous "Wicket."

"To sum up his tractate in a few words," said Hubert, "our Reformer points out to the priests and the deluded people that they worship the sacraments of Christ instead of Christ Himself."*

* It has repeatedly been said of Wycliffe that he was undecided upon the doctrine of transubstantiation, but surely the following extracts from his "Wicket" prove the contrary: "Ye say that in every host each piece is the whole manhood of Christ, or full substance of Him. . . . Is both the flesh and blood in the host of the bread? or is the flesh made at one time, and the blood at other time, that is to say, the wine in the chalice? If thou wilt say it is full and wholly the manhood of Christ in the host of bread, both flesh and blood. . . . then makest thou us to worship a false god in the chalice, which is unconjured when ye worship the bread; and if ye say the flesh is in the bread, and the blood in the wine,

"*Instead* of Himself! Oh, Hubert, let us talk about something else, for now that our dear Lord has shed upon us the light of His own blessed truth, and shown us how wicked are the Romish dogmas, I do not like even to talk of these self-appointed priests, with their masses, their indulgences and absolutions, and what not."

"About what then shall we talk, my Edith?"

"About the poor people down in the hamlet. There is one woman whose husband is in prison for taking part in the insurrection, and another poor creature whose son is with him. They are in sad trouble about it. I told them about the king's promise of pardon, and you may imagine how they received the good news."

"I hope he will keep his promise," said Hubert, dubiously.

"Do you doubt it?"

"I have never seen him, and so perhaps should not judge his character, but I have heard that his word is unreliable. I am afraid he is not like his noble father;

then thou must grant, if thy craft be true—as indeed it is not—that the manhood of Christ is parted, and that He is made at two times. For first thou takest the host of bread, or a piece of bread, and makest it as ye say, and the innocent people worship it: and then thou takest to thee the chalice, and likewise marrest, makest, I would have said, the blood in it, and then they worship it also. . . . Ye give us after the bread, wine and water, and sometimes clean water unblessed, or rather conjured by the virtue of your craft; and yet ye say, under the host of bread is the full manhood of Christ. Then by your confession must it needs be that we worship a false god in the chalice, which is unconjured when we worship the bread, and worship the one as the other; but where find ye that ever Christ, or any of His disciples, taught any man to worship this bread or wine?"

and for this reason I have abstained from saying anything about his promise. Ulric, a smith of the town, is also in prison."

"For the sake of the princess so soon to become his bride, King Richard will keep his word," said Edith, decisively. "I wish you had seen her, she is so sweet and good."

"I should imagine so if she wished to have my Edith for an attendant. Did you see Ina?"

"Yes, the dear child seems very ill. I should so like her to come here again, and let us see what we can do for her."

"I do not think the father and mother could part with her, but you can ask them and see what they say. The child has taken a strange hold on my affections."

And so next morning, before the lazy winter sun had as yet cast his oblique rays towards the cold North, Edith set off for the hamlet. It was snowing, but severe must have been the storm that would have hindered her from visiting the poor home where sweet, fragile Ina rested her weary little body.

Ina's father, Wolnoth (he had but one name, like all the serfs, who for many subsequent generations considered themselves, and were considered, too mean and servile to bear surnames), was of course at his daily toil. His wife, who in the spring and summer months worked for the lord of the manor along with the male portion of the peasantry, was now getting ready a frugal meal before a fire that burned in the middle of the one room the hut contained, only some of the smoke finding its way through an aperture in the centre of the conical roof.

Edith told the woman the object of her mission, but found, as Hubert had expected, that the mother could not now part with her little girl. Reared in the lap of luxury and wealth, she had yet to learn that peasants love as warmly and passionately as their more favoured brethren. The peasant mother blessed her for her kindly heart, and spoke with emotion of the goodness of "his reverence," but her child was dying, and she could not bear that any but her own or her husband's hands should close the eyelids of their darling, when her gentle spirit should have departed to its long rest.

Ina was asleep. Her straw pallet was in the warmest corner of the room, and Ellerdale had taken care the sick child should not suffer from the cold; but not the downiest bed nor the softest and warmest coverlets could have prolonged the flickering light that feebly burned in that poor, frail body. The thin, white face was smiling in its sleep—that happy smile of perfect rest and peace that so often plays on the childish faces of our dying darlings, and makes us think the good Lord vouchsafes to His little ones a view of heaven before their guileless spirits have really flown there, where "their angels do always behold the face of My Father."

Edith's eyes filled as she turned from the bed, and went out again into the wind and snow. She could not find it in her heart to disturb the child by even one soft kiss. Happy for that child, she thought, that no Romish priest was near to waken her, and, breathing upon her his pestilential mummeries, trouble the departing spirit whose assoilment was already recorded in heaven.

CHAPTER XIX.

"A boding silence reigns,
Dread through the dun expanse; save the dull sound
That from the mountain, previous to the storm,
Rolls o'er the muttering earth, disturbs the flood,
And shakes the forest-leaf without a breath."

THOMSON.

INA did not die so soon as her mother had expected. She lingered through the snows and frosts of winter, and not until some time after the "heralds of the infant year" had raised their bell-shaped flowers above the chilly soil did the gentle Shepherd receive His lamb into His tender, caressing arms, and take her to fairer fields than those of earth.

None, excepting the poor parents, missed Ina's patient face more than Edith. Evincing a faith in the Saviour beyond her years, the child had diffused around her the sweet atmosphere of love and gentleness that pervades His teachings. But the days were coming when another little face was to take Ina's place in Edith's heart, a baby face that would call forth deeper love than Ina's could, a love at once pure and purifying.

Events, too, were about to transpire that prevented her dwelling on Ina's death, and made her cling more

than ever to her husband. Early in the summer she was left an orphan. But again she had not time to grieve as she would otherwise have done, for it began to be whispered among the Lollards that the dead were better off than the living.

A storm-cloud, black and lowering, was gathering over the land. Dark rumours, hinting at a persecution of the reformers, were floating about the country; for Courtney, the most bigoted romanist in the land, was now primate. The publishing of the "Wicket," which, by the help of zealous transcribers, was being circulated far and wide, occurred at almost the same time as Courtney's elevation to the primacy, and acted as a powerful incentive to operations against the Lollards. But a more potent agency than the "Wicket" was at work to rouse the archbishop to action. Wycliffe had at last completed the dearest wish of his heart, a translation of the Bible from the Latin vulgate into the vernacular.

Had he lived one hundred years later, when Caxton was issuing volumes in rapid succession from his printing presses, Wycliffe's English Bible would at once have found its way to the masses. But the times in which he lived were against him, the price of a Bible being about five pounds, a sum at that time considered sufficient for the annual maintenance of a tradesman, yeoman, or curate. Nevertheless, his version of the sacred writings spread considerably, even in manuscript, in distinct portions, throughout England.

"Have you heard of the proceedings against the reformers?" asked Ralph Ellerdale, one summer morning of his brother.

"I have heard many rumours, but nothing definite."

"I thought not, and it is to tell you about a synod that was held the other day in London that I am here. There are all sorts of rumours current I know, but I have my information from a reliable source."

And then Ralph told his brother how Archbishop Courteney had convened a synod of prelates, doctors of the civil and canon law, friars, and monks, and that they had met at the monastery of the Grey Friars in London to consider the best method of putting down the new teachings; how an earthquake had unsettled the minds of the assembly, and raised doubts as to whether God were pleased with their proceedings, and how Courtney had laughed them to scorn, and finally got them to censure the reformers in twenty-four "conclusions," denouncing "the heresies that were being generally, commonly, and publicly preached throughout the province of Canterbury, and the realm of England;" how letters had been issued to all the bishops, commanding them to use every means for preventing the so-called heresies and errors from being preached or defended in their dioceses.

"I am much afraid," said Ralph, "that the times of peace are over, and that you reformed priests must look out for yourselves."

"No one has hitherto greatly interfered with me in my work. Wycliffe, too, still teaches in the Oxford schools when his health allows, nor has his diocesan stopped his pulpit utterances and his church services."

"The bishops have hitherto connived at the doings of Wycliffe and the rest of you. But the controlling influences are altering. The Duke of Lancaster has

deserted our Reformer, as have others of high political standing; Courtney, too, is a very different man from our former primate. My advice is, not to so openly adhere to Wycliffe's opinions as you have done. Appear, outwardly at least, in unison with Rome."

"That will I never do."

"Then you will assuredly pay for your foolhardiness."

"So long as I remain free to uphold the truth, I consider it my duty and privilege to do so."

"Well, if you prefer a prison cell to outwardly conforming to the Papacy, then I shall say no more. Ah! here comes your wife. I see, Mistress Edith, you know a man does not lose his appetite by travelling."

"Perhaps your appetite will vanish when you become better acquainted with my culinary productions," returned Edith.

"There is little chance of that, if I may judge by the very savoury smell that comes from that trencher."

Dorothy followed her mistress, to complete the arrangements of the board. The repast over, Ralph immediately left, for he held a high position among the civil authorities in London, and his absence could not long be spared.

"What advice has he given you?" asked Edith, anxiously, of her husband, as soon as the citizen had departed.

"Advice that I cannot listen to. He counsels our renouncing our faith, because the new primate, he says, will be less forbearing with us than our last. My Edith would not have me desert the standard of Christ?"

"No," she replied slowly, yet decisively.

The summer sped on, pregnant with an ominous

calm, that seemed to presage the coming storm. But the reformed priests remained unmolested by their diocesans, and, for the most part, treated with contempt sundry warnings from friends who augured no good from the mysterious silence that had succeeded the "earthquake council," as the ecclesiastical meeting at the Grey Friars' monastery was designated.

One day, when her husband was away from home, and Edith was seated, distaff in hand, in the porch, a man came up to her, very fashionably dressed, but of a countenance marred by too much wine-drinking.

"Is Master Ellerdale inside?" he asked, doffing his bonnet.

"No."

"Perhaps he will be back soon?"

"I expect so."

"And no one else is in the house?"

"An old woman," said Edith, rising to go inside, piqued at the man's familiarity.

"Stay, fair mistress! 'Tis a warm day, and sith your company is so agreeable, I pray thee do not go away."

She felt too indignant to reply, and he continued—

"At least let me speak with thee until thy master comes this way."

"My master!" she repeated, with a movement towards the hall.

"Stay, I have letters here for Master Hubert Ellerdale. But no, I shall wait to give them him myself. And now, thou saucy wench, hast thou nought to give me but scornful looks?"

When she had sufficiently recovered herself from the

indignation the man's words had produced, she exclaimed—

"Master Ellerdale is my husband. Begone, sir."

The man gave a low prolonged whistle.

"In that case, madam, I shall leave the letters with you," he replied, offering her a packet.

"No, you shall deliver them into my husband's hands yourself," said Edith, turning her back upon the gallant, and entering the house.

"I wonder whether the bishop knows of this. A priest, and married!" and with another low whistle he left, poising in his mind as to how he could best turn this information to his own advantage.

The archdeacon's summoner, for that was the man's avocation, had not proceeded far before he met Ellerdale, to whom he handed the letters, which were to acquaint the pastor of Cranwood that his heretical practices had reached the ears of his diocesan, and commanding him forthwith to renounce them on pain of excommunication.

The summoner, or sumpnour, was so called from delivering the summonses of the archdeacons to persons discovered to have deviated from the canons and customs of the Church. The class had gained notoriety for deceiving unsuspecting laymen, by employing spies to inform them what offenders it "availed" to punish, or draw into mischief. On the other hand, Chaucer tells us, in his "Canterbury Tales," the sumpnour was always willing to sell his silence for a consideration, such, for instance, as a quart of wine; for well he loved

"To drink strong wine as red as blood;
Then would he speak, and cry as he were wood, [mad]

> And when that he well drunken had the wine,
> Then would he speak no word but Latíne,
> A fewé termés could he, two or three,
> That he had learnèd out of some decree."

And where he met with liberal treatment, arguing that money would settle the worst "deviations," he would join the offender in laughing at the archdeacon's or bishop's curse.

"What will you do?" asked Edith, when her husband, having read over the summons, had placed it in her hands. Her face was white, but she tried to speak deliberately.

"I shall wait the course of events."

"And continue in every way as you have been doing?"

"Yes; it is now, my Edith, that we must prove our sincerity."

"It will not be hard for your true soul to remain faithful, but it will for me."

"Nay, dear one, God will give us both strength to remain loyal to Him in the evil days that may be coming."

"They *are* coming. They are close at hand."

"Perhaps not. In the meantime we must commend ourselves, and all who have embraced the true faith, into the safe keeping of our faithful God."

"However, the evil days Edith dreaded seemed still distant. Summer lapsed into autumn, but the Lollard pastors, though served with various letters, admonitions, and threats of a *significavit*, remained practically unmolested. This appears strange when we consider the persecuting propensities of the Papacy, but we must

bear in mind that our statute-book had not as yet provided any laws whereby the religious aberrations of the community might be corrected.

Her father's death had been a sad blow to Edith, but her husband's love more than compensated for the loss; and now a fresh love offered itself for her to cherish, one she had been eagerly looking forward to and hoping for.

When the leaves lay sere and brown in wood and field, and symptoms of winter were showing themselves, Edith became a mother. A mother! how she had been dreaming of that blessed name during the past months, and of the little heir of immortality that was to be confided to her keeping, hers only, and not another's!

They named their little girl Ina, for both Edith and her husband retained a lingering affection for the peasant child who had died early in the year. And sometimes, when her babe looked up into her face with the wistful gaze of infancy, Edith thought the large serious eyes painfully like those of the Ina in heaven; in her motherly anxiety ignoring the probability that all baby eyes are big with wonderment, because of their short acquaintance with the world, and even with the mother they so trustingly confide in. But when the tiny mouth of her little one shaped itself into a smile, the wistful look departed, and then she would fold her darling to her bosom and thank the Giver.

CHAPTER XX.

"At first, heard solemn o'er the verge of heaven,
The tempest growls; but as it nearer comes,
And rolls its awful burden on the wind,
The lightnings flash a larger curve."

THOMSON.

IT had been mercifully ordained that Edith's baby should come when it did, for the utter dependence of the helpless little innocent called forth the mother's energies, which might otherwise have drooped under the trial in store for her.

Not long after her child was born, Ralph Ellerdale again paid his brother a visit, with the same object in view as before.

"There is no doubt about it now," he said; "all the Wycliffite priests will be not only ejected from their livings, but imprisoned, perhaps worse. Why not renounce your opinions, outwardly, you know, before it is too late?"

"I thank you, Ralph, for the trouble you have taken on my behalf, but I cannot look back now."

"You are like the rest of them," said Ralph, impatiently; "you will not believe there is real danger.

But I can assure you strong measures are being taken against all of you. Wycliffe himself has been summoned before a convocation at Oxford, and been prohibited from teaching any longer in the schools. He has, indeed, been allowed to return to his parsonage at Lutterworth, for his Grace of Canterbury is afraid to take extreme measures with him on account of the influence he still has at the Court; but the rest of you will not get off so easily."

Hubert, however, had quite determined to remain firm in the performance of what he conceived to be his duty, and his brother soon found that it was useless urging him to recant, or even to resign his priesthood and benefice.

A week had scarcely elapsed, when some armed men appeared at the parsonage, and their leader peremptorily demanded Hubert Ellerdale, clerk, to surrender himself their prisoner.

"He has committed no crime," faltered his wife, who answered the call from outside.

"I will not pretend myself to accuse him of any," said the officer, respectfully, and bowing low, "but there are those unfortunately who hold the teaching of the new religion to be criminal. I am only a servant, and as such am bound to obey orders."

Hubert, presenting himself in the porch, instantly divined the significance of the armed men, but to give Edith time to recover somewhat from the distress he found her in, stepping up to the officer and taking her hand in his, he asked—

"What is my offence, and what authority have you for detaining me?"

"You must find out from your bishop what your offence is. As for my authority, you may read this," returned the officer, handing him a scroll of parchment.

It was a summons from the sheriff instantly to surrender himself prisoner, briefly intimating that he acted by command of the Bishop of London.

"You dare not touch him," said Edith, placing herself between her husband and the soldiers, her bosom swelling, but otherwise putting a restraint on herself.

The leader of the band bowed, and doffed his plumed bonnet.

"It is not with you, fair lady, that I have to deal."

After the impulse of the moment, she saw how futile could be any attempt of hers to shield her husband, and stepping back to his side, suffered her face to fall upon his breast. Tenderly supporting her with his arm, he held out the document to the officer.

"Am I to attend you at once?"

"Such are my orders, but, believe me, Master Ellerdale, it is with no willing heart that I enforce them; for, rough soldier though you may take me to be, I have a leaning towards you Lollards."

Edith raised her head. "Oh, do not then enforce them. Ah!" she cried, pressing her heart.

The officer, who was really a humane man, was touched by a piteous little wail that came from an inner chamber, and by the responsive exclamation of pain from the mother.

"I shall trust to your honour," he said, addressing Ellerdale, "to find you here when the convent bells strike noon," and then departed with his men.

"My Edith must not grieve like this," said her

husband, kissing her, and kissing her tiny reproduction, who was now nestling, warm and contented, in its mother's bosom.

"No, Hubert dearest, I know I should not. It is selfish of me to weep when I ought to comfort you," she sobbed.

"It is only what we have been expecting."

"Oh, my husband, when will they set you free again?"

"They will not detain me long. Cheer up, dear wife."

And she did as he bade her, not that she felt less unhappy, but because she wished to comfort him.

Just as the convent bells were striking, the sheriff's men returned; but they were this time attended by a number of the townsfolk who, having learnt the object of their visit to Cranwood, were clamorously threatening the officer if he dared to touch their pastor.

In vain Ellerdale tried to pacify the people, and at length, drawing the officer aside, volunteered to repair alone to a place agreed upon. The man took him at his word and retired, followed by derisive and threatening shouts.

It may be well here to explain that Archbishop Courtney had obtained the sanction of "the kings and certain lords" to a statute, the first of its kind in our parliamentary history, providing for the punishment of heresy. That the suspected heretics might without delay be placed under "arrest, and in strong prison," the forces at the command of the sheriffs were to be under the control of the bishops. Knowing that the statute had been illegally obtained, the primate lost no time in availing himself of the aid to be derived from

the coercive machinery of the State. When Parliament re-assembled, the members of the Commons represented in petition to the king that the statute had not received their sanction, that they disapproved of it, and desired that it should be disannulled; and Richard, prompted by the entreaties of his queen, complied with their request. But Courtney paid no attention to this veto passed upon his scheme, and continued to use the secular power once placed in his grasp. His first measure was to prosecute the heretical leaders—Wycliffe, Hereford, Repingdon, Ashton, Redman, Purney, and others. Some of the leaders, if we are to credit the Romish historians, shrunk from the contest, but not so the Reformer himself, who at this critical juncture shone out indeed as the morning star; the dark clouds of persecution could not dim its lustre, for though they sometimes passed over it, at every windy gale they would separate and leave it shining in faithful constancy; and long after the man had died, its fair light still shone down on the troubled land through his deathless monument, his English Bible. But we are digressing. Though the threats of persecution struck dismay into the breasts of some of his colleagues, the less influential portion of his followers, in immense numbers, remained as faithful as himself to their religious convictions; and in a short time every prison in the country became filled with these faithful witnesses for the truth. Amongst the number immured was Hubert Ellerdale. He had considerable difficulty in eluding the affectionate zeal of his people, who would have retained him in their midst to the point of resistance. However, he got away unnoticed, having first made

arrangements with Ulric—who, by the way, had been released from imprisonment—and Dennis, that they should conduct his wife and child to Walden Manor.

"This way, madam. If we take the main road you may be recognized."

"The lane looks dark and gloomy, but it is in keeping with my heart," said Edith, pressing her babe tightly to her bosom. "Lead on, good Dennis, anywhere you like; it makes little difference to me where."

They had proceeded a hundred yards or so, when a low whistle caused them to stop and listen.

"All right; it is Ulric with the horses," explained Dennis.

A few minutes later and Edith was in the saddle proceeding along the narrow lane at a quicker pace, Ulric in front, Dennis behind. For the first three or four miles they did not exchange a word. Emerging into the main road, her escort took up a position on either side of her. It had been quite dark when they started, but now daybreak was peeping out along the eastern horizon in a thin, pale streak of light. Suddenly Edith broke their silence by a suppressed exclamation of terror, for she had become aware of the distant pattering of feet behind her and an ominous sound that was half bay, half howl.

"It be but a few wolves, lady," said Ulric, "and they'll soon be scared off; for see yonder, the sun will be up afore long," he added, pointing in the direction of the dawn.

"Are we near the farrier's?" she asked, not much reassured.

"Aye, lady; we'll be at Ulney village by the time the sun be above yon trees."

But before the winter sun had shown himself, and before they caught sight of the faintest indication of human habitation, the howling smote upon their ears with unpleasant proximity, for the wolves were fleeter than their steeds. Presently the pattering of feet was heard close behind them, and drawing in their reins and unstringing their bows, Dennis and Ulric turned and sent a couple of shafts into the pack, with the desired effect; then clapping spurs to their horses, they rejoined Edith, and all three pressed forward at a hard gallop.

"Will you not let me take the child?" asked Dennis, drawing close to Edith, and stretching out his arm for the little one. He had made the request twice already, but had not been able to induce the mother to part with her babe.

"No, no, I cannot trust her even with you, good Dennis."

The wolves had stopped for a few minutes to devour the two that had been slain, but the taste of blood had only whetted their appetite, and soon the snorting and whinnying of the horses announced the reapproach of the pack. But now some blue smoke was visible curling above a cluster of trees that intervened between them and the village that lay in a hollow beyond. However, the men had to repeat their former manœuvre before they were free from danger. Ten minutes later they were under the humble roof of a farrier, between whom and Ulric had subsisted a long friendship. Here they met with a hearty welcome, the farrier providing ample

refreshment for themselves and their horses, and his wife, by her kindly consideration, rendering her rest there very acceptable to Edith.

"It be the cold as have drove them down here," said the farrier; "but thee'll see no more of the cowardly creatures now it be broad daylight, madam. There be not many in the country now; those we see come from the far North."

When they resumed their journey, Edith's escort was increased by the farrier and his two sons, who would not listen to the poor lady going on without them; "for," the man explained confidentially to Ulric, "there ha' been robbers on the road of late."

But they reached the ferry at Richmond without an adventure, perhaps because the little company had not presented a tempting enough appearance to risk an encounter by any ambuscade that may have been on their road.

The russet tunics, the bare knees, and leather leg-encasings of Ulric and the three villagers looked not like the apparel of a lady's attendants. And as for the lady herself, she might have passed for a peasant's wife, her figure being disguised under a coarse kirtle and dark-coloured mantle, and her wimple folded so as to leave little of her face visible. Of her little one nothing could be seen; but the babe was there under the mother's mantle, as warm and comfortable as if she were in her cot at home. The saddle lately adopted by ladies rendered Edith's fragile burden a comparatively light one. Dennis was the only one of the party who gave any signs of substance, for he wore a green velvet doublet, and his bonnet was spruce

enough; but most freemen, no matter how poor, affected the fashions.

On reaching the ferry the villagers left them, and soon after Edith saw the well-known outlines of her old home standing out bare and frowningly against a cold and leaden sky. How different seemed the aspect of those walls now to the time when she had ridden from them with her father, and when she had looked back at them fondly and regretfully! Then she had been setting out for a new home to become a happy bride, and only looked back regretfully because of the endearing ties those grey walls had sheltered. Now she was homeless, her husband in prison, her father dead, and Walden Manor seemed but an immense sarcophagus, notwithstanding the firelight that came through its great mullioned windows and its graceful oriels.

"So muffled up was she in wraps that none of the courtyard retainers recognised her, except old Raoul, the gardener. He had been her guide and protector in many a ramble through her father's demesne, and it would have required considerable artifice to disguise from him the maiden who had cast a flood of sunshine on his declining years. With the easy assurance of a privileged servant, he doffed his bonnet and asked her whether anything were wrong, and if he could be of service to her.

"Help me down," premised Edith, "and be careful, for I have my baby here. Thank you, Raoul. And now take me somewhere where I can speak with you alone."

She had told Dennis that she wished to get to her

brother unrecognized by the servants, so Dennis parleyed with the seneschal, while Raoul, proud of the distinction, though with a misgiving that something serious had happened, took Edith into a small chamber leading out the hall.

"Is my brother at Walden?"

"No, Mistress Edith, Sir Oswald be away, an' we don't look for him till the morrow. But your aunt, the Lady Isabel, be here."

Suppressing a little groan of disappointment, she removed her mantle to one side, so as to show the old man her baby.

"My husband is in prison, and I have come here for shelter."

"Poor, dear lady! the saints ha' mercy on thee," said Raoul, tears finding their way down his furrowed cheeks. "Be it for his Lollard ways?"

"Yes."

"There now, don't thee fret, poor lady. They won't keep him there for long; and thee must bear a brave heart for the sake o' the little wench."

"I am trying to."

"Aye, marry, must ye, for the child be a sweet 'un; it be real beautiful."

What a wonderfully soothing influence admiration for her baby has on a mother's heart, let it be ever so sad; and how merciful He who imparts to her such surpassing love for her tender offspring!

"Yes, she *is* beautiful," murmured Edith, softly, as she placed her darling back again in her bosom. "Well, I suppose I must see my aunt. Get some one to tell her a lady in distress wishes at once to speak with her."

The prioress was in her room, and Edith was glad to find her alone. Without saying a word, she removed the heavy mantle and the wimple that had partially concealed her features, and then, in a simple kirtle, stood before her aunt, her little one in her arms, silently, yet beseechingly.

"Edith!" exclaimed the Lady Isabel in a tone of utter scorn.

"Have pity."

"Pity for one who has transgressed so flagrantly as thou hast! Pray where is he who has violated the sacred office of priesthood?"

She could find no words to answer her aunt's taunt, and only clasped her babe closer to her bosom.

"I am glad that you are at least sensible of the extent of your transgressions."

"I am not aware of any in the sense you use the word."

"What! not aware of any indeed!" exclaimed the Lady Isabel in a high voice. "Begone, thou daughter of the Evil One; yet stay, you have not told me the meaning of this strange farce you are playing."

"My husband is in prison."

"Ha! that is where he should have been long ago. I suppose you have come here to throw yourself and that child on your brother's charity," was the taunting remark of the Lady Isabel.

"My brother will not, I think, look upon it as a charity."

"You think, then, it is his duty to disgrace himself by bringing up a Lollard's child?"

Edith's eyes were filling, but she felt too proud and

indignant for her aunt to see how deeply she had wounded her, and so she left the chamber.

How much of meaning is there often in a word, how much even in the tone of the voice! Had the prioress exhibited the slightest sympathy or spoken more considerately, Edith might have continued to battle with her sorrow, as she had bravely done for the last twenty-four hours. Now her spirit sank under the harsh words and manner of her aunt. She left the room not knowing whither she was going, but meeting fortunately one of the women attendants who knew her, she inquired whether the chamber that had formerly been hers was occupied. Receiving a negative answer, she shut herself up in it, giving full vent to her grief, nor left the room until her brother arrived at the Manor next day.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Go, to shine before His throne,
Deck His mediatorial crown;
Go, His triumphs to adorn:
Born for God, to God return!"

TOPLADY.

UPON no one in the land did the title of persecution sweep so harmlessly as upon its youthful queen, and yet perhaps no one mourned more sorrowfully than she when the storm burst upon the devoted reformers. An ardent admirer of Wycliffe, she bitterly deplored the course events were taking, and to her untiring solicitations is due the honour of allowing the Reformer to die in peace, and of delaying to his disciples, for some years to come, the terrors of martyrdom; for, though in the early years of his reign Richard's authority was much circumscribed by his ambitious uncles, the time came when, shaking himself free from the trammels of guardianship, he reigned an absolute monarch; and then his queen became the gentle monitress, who prevented him from staining his hands in blood: hers was the still, small voice that induced him to turn a deaf ear to the dark counsels of Courtney.

Daughter of the learned Charles IV. of Germany, she had inherited from him a taste for literature, and being of a deeply religious temperament, this taste expended itself mainly in studying the Scriptures—not only in her native Bohemian, for she had in her possession the four Gospels in three languages, Bohemian, English, and Latin.

Of a retiring disposition, she loved the comparative quiet of Shene Palace, a name said to have been given because of the beauty of its surrounding scenery. And Richard, who was a most devoted consort, indulged her by constituting Shene a chief resort for his Court.

Walden Manor was not far distant from the Palace, and Edith had only been there a few days when the Queen became apprised of her unhappy position, and at once renewed her offer to receive her into the royal household, which already embraced many ladies whose natural guardians and protectors had been imprisoned.

Now although her brother was kind and considerate enough to her in her misfortune, still there was a vacuity in Edith's life at the Manor that she found very distressing. Separated from him who was by far the dearest to her on earth, she was also daily reminded of her father's death. As Knight of Walden, her brother could not devote himself to her as when simply its heir. The spirit of the times called for his leadership, as lord of the manor, in all the tourneys and sports of chivalry; and the hospitalities and revelries that he had to sustain grated harshly on her wounded spirit. And, bitterest of her trials, Sir Oswald had as keen a hatred for the new creed as his aunt, the prioress.

Therefore, when she received an offer to enter the

household of a princess, the sweetness of whose nature was deeply impressed on her mind, and whose commiseration for the persecuted Lollards was known far and wide, Edith willingly exchanged a home of constant heartburnings for one into whose atmosphere was instilled the faith she had now firmly embraced.

"And you have not heard of, or from, him since?" asked the sympathetic Anne, one day of her, as Edith sat at the Queen's feet in one of her private apartments.

"Not a word."

"Poor child!" said the Queen, taking one of Edith's hands in hers. The lady Anne was two or three years younger than Edith, but queens worthy of the name have an intuitive feeling of motherhood. In the common acceptation of the word she was never to be a mother.

"Do you think, madam, my husband will be released?"

"I do, for I am told the prisons are already full."

"Oh, could not your highness supplicate the King on behalf of the reformers, as you did for the peasants?"

"I have done so, but he has not the power to interfere in this matter."

"Is he not a king?"

"His uncle of Gloucester is the real king at present, but it will not long be so. Richard cannot brook constraint."

Edith often reverted to the subject of her husband's release, and the Queen was always ready to sympathise with her, and encourage her to hope on. In addition to her intrinsic qualities, the lady Anne was much interested in Edith, as being the wife of a priest, for it reminded here of the stanch resistance her own country-

men had made to the demand for the clergy to remain celibate.

Very interesting must have been some of the scenes in the apartments of this girl-queen. Whenever an opportunity presented itself, she would gather the ladies of the household around her and read to them from the Bible—some at one time, some at another, for her establishment was a very large one, owing to damsels and ladies of high birth having come to Anne for shelter from the persecution. With trembling earnestness she would tell them of promises they never before had heard of, and linger lovingly over the tender and gracious words of Christ Himself. For though the sacred writings were now prohibited, Courtney dared not interfere with the lady Anne in her religion. These were her happiest moments. But there were times when she could not indulge her love for telling others of the sweetness of the promises contained in those dearly loved manuscripts of hers. There were occasions when the King, whose passion for gaiety was excessive, demanded all her time; and, shining through his many glaring faults, is this one pleasing trait in Richard's character, his faithful and devoted love for her whom our chronicles styled "the beauteous queen," and whom the people hallowed by the simple yet expressive appellation of the "Good Queen Anne."*

None of her ladies enjoyed these Bible readings more than Edith, who became much attached to her royal mistress. This Lollard atmosphere that pervaded the Queen's household, the compassion shown her by the

* Walsingham says that six thousand persons were daily entertained at the royal table, most of whom were "the indigent poor."

young Queen herself, and the wonderful love that the motherly instinct demanded for Hubert's child, took some of the bitterness away from Edith's sorrow. The beauty, too, of the palace grounds had an unconscious effect on her æsthetic mind. For, though she shunned the tilt-yard and the pleasaunce that were attached to Shene, she took a melancholy pleasure in wandering with her child through the royal demesnes, which comprehended several parks, each well stocked with the graceful fallow-deer, then exclusively royal property.

It was in the winter that she most mourned her separation from her husband, when the long evenings seemed intolerable. And she felt especially lonely at Christmas-tide, for then she saw little of the Queen.

The Court kept Christmas at the Tower of London, where was a noble banqueting-hall and a magnificent suite of state apartments. Born in the "luxurious South," Richard of Bordeaux had imbibed tastes linked with music, song, and revel, and kept Christmas in the same wanton, riotous style he had become enamoured of in Provence. Edith studiously avoided these Court gaieties, and during times of banqueting and revel, retired to her own chamber, and shut herself up with her child.

Only once did she grace a court-revel, and venture into the great dazzling banqueting-hall. Its elevated roof, richly panelled with wood, its carved screens and walls hung with beautifully embroidered tapestries, its minstrel galleries, its deep mullioned bay-windows, its long, splendidly-furnished tables, the presence of the youthful king and queen, the light thrown upon the whole by hundreds of candles—all these combined to pro-

duce a momentary fascination; but there were few of those assembled there with whom she cared to converse, and she was always thinking of him whom she pictured as lying cold and comfortless in a prison cell. The Court gallants annoyed her, the frivolous conduct of the King and his worthless favourites grieved her, and she determined never again to enter the banqueting-hall.

"I cannot go again, madam," she observed to the Queen next day, while performing some slight act of service.

"Nor would I wish you."

"Does not your Highness find these festivities irksome?"

"Yes."

"Then why attend them?" asked Edith, thoughtlessly. Immediately after, she was sorry for having put the question.

"The King attends them," returned the lady Anne, with as much hauteur as she was capable of commanding. And then she sat down and buried her face in her hands. Poor Queen! she was one of the gentlest and most chaste England had ever had, and yet was constantly forced into scenes she disliked.

"Forgive me, sweet lady."

"This is very foolish of me," said Anne, composing herself. "It is not so easy as you may imagine for kings to eschew such scenes as you saw last night," she added, apologetically.

At this moment the lady Joanna, the King's mother, entered, and Edith retired, leaving the noble ladies together. Both of them converts of Wycliffe, they were

LUTTERWORTH CHURCH.

the first in that band of princesses who were to be the nursing-mothers of the English Reformation.

Many years had elapsed since she had been called the "Fair Maid of Kent," yet Joanna, Princess of Wales, still retained some of that marvellous beauty that had captivated the heart of the Black Prince. Attired in a gown of black velvet, fitting tightly to her person, over which was a cyclas of cloth of gold, she looked every inch a princess. Her face just now was pale and sad.

"Wycliffe is dead," she began, half embracing the slight form of her daughter-in-law, and resting her cold brow on the Queen's shoulder.

"Oh no, not dead!" exclaimed Anne, disengaging herself, and looking with a pained expression into the face of the queen-mother. But that pale face told her as plainly as words that it was too true.

"How did you learn this sad news?"

"From Sir William Neville, who has just come from Lutterworth. Wycliffe, he says, was stricken with paralysis in his church during service, and died two days after."

"It was the right place for him to be in when called to his rest; but oh, how his loss will be felt throughout the country!"

"Yes, for he was her noblest son. Woe, woe to England now that he has left us!" exclaimed Joanna, in a passionate outburst of despair.

"Speak not so despondingly, my lady mother," said the Queen, seating herself on a stool at the feet of the Princess of Wales. "Surely there are those who are worthy to take the place of our great teacher."

"Not one. Eight years ago all England wept for one whom she called her noblest son, and no one mourned him so bitterly as I, his unhappy widow. And still I mourn his too early death, yet even I confess that he who died yestermorn was a nobler man than my gallant Edward."

"But I am sure there are some good men and true still left."

"Many indeed, I thank God, but not one fitted to be a leader in this crisis; none with the lion-heart of Wycliffe."

"Dear, brave heart! I can scarcely believe he is really dead. May it not turn out to be only a rumour?"

"Alas, no! the news comes from the lips of a knight who never says what he is not quite sure is true. We shall now relapse into Popery."

"Do not say that. You forget we have Hereford, and Repingdon, and Swinderby, and good Master Ashton still among us."

"Not one of them will take Wycliffe's place. Philip Repingdon, from whom we expected so much, has abjured the faith, whether terrified by the prospect of sufferings, or allured by promotion, I cannot tell; they say he is to be made Bishop of Lincoln, and a cardinal."

"I cannot believe it."

"I have it from Neville. As for Hereford, I fear he will never again set foot on English soil.* Ashton,

* Nicholas Hereford, having accepted a summons from Rome, defended his opinions in the presence of the Pope, by whom he was imprisoned. Liberated at length by a popular tumult, he returned to England, only to be again incarcerated.

and Swinderby, and Purney, are all true men, but they are only followers, not leaders. No, there will not be found one worthy to take up the mantle of Wycliffe. But who is this that intrudes on our privacy?" said the princess, rising.

"My dear liege," said the lady Anne, advancing to meet her husband, "have you heard that Wycliffe is dead?" she asked.

"Neville has just this moment told me. But, by our halidom, you must not look so grieved, sweet my Queen; and you, my lady mother, seem sadly distressed. Was this bold scholar, then, so much to both of you?"

"Would he had been so much to you, my son," replied the Princess of Wales, solemnly.

Little liking this sort of talk, the King left the princesses to themselves, having first reminded his wife that it was to be a banqueting night.

Dressed in a doublet of cloth of silver, his girdle studded with costliest jewels, an embroidered blue velvet mantle lined with ermine hanging loosely from his shoulders, his velvet cap ablaze with precious stones,* he looked what he was, more fitted for the company of the dissolute Robert de Vere, who was standing at the head of a staircase watching him, than for the sorrowing ladies he had left.

"Oh, Richard! wherefore with *him?*" But the King, after casting back one regretful look at the sorrowful face of his Queen, was gone. "And yet you are so tender and true to me," she said softly to herself as she re-entered the chamber.

* It is said Richard had one coat estimated at thirty thousand marks!

"And to me a most loving and dutiful son," said the queen-mother, pressing a white hand to a whiter brow.

Half an hour later, a number of her ladies grouped around her, the Princess of Wales seated beside her, the young Queen read aloud with pathetic earnestness from a copy of the Scriptures that had been given her by him whose death they were deploring. At first her voice trembled with emotion, but as her thoughts centred on the words more than the man who had written them, it became firmer. And when she finished with a portion of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, her voice was clear and almost passionate as she read—

"'When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'"

The apostle's triumphant appeal fell on the listeners' ears like sweetest music. The Queen, folding up her manuscripts, sank back in her chair, and allowed her thoughts to dwell on the sublime passages she had just read.

One of her ladies had listened perhaps more earnestly than the rest to her royal mistress's pleasant voice, touched though it was with the Bohemian accent, and overcome by her feelings, she withdrew herself from the Queen's apartment. Tears stood in her eyes as she pictured to herself a darksome prison-cell, and one lying there who might, for aught she knew, be uttering with vivid reality that very same exultant invocation of St. Paul's.

Quietly and unobserved she stole out into a spacious

corridor and down a staircase to her own chamber. Barring the door, she sank on a bed where lay smiling in its sleep her child, and placing her troubled face close to the sweet baby-one, sought comfort there.

The court-revels were more prolonged that night than on the previous one, for it was the evening of the first day of a new year. The year of grace, 1384, had rolled into the annals of time, and another had just commenced to run its course. What would be the political, or rather the religious events that were to mark this new cycle of time?

In spite of the swelling sounds of music that issued from the banqueting-hall, and the gay and thoughtless voices, Edith asked herself again and again this question, and mused on the life that had closed its mortal span with the expiring year.

And doubtless many besides in England, who had heard of the sad tidings, were putting the same question to themselves that night; for the reformers were as men in a vessel riding rudderless in a stormy sea. Never before had the Lollard-ship been so harassed and closely pressed by the angry waves of the ecclesiastical party; and now, just when their intrepid leader was most wanted at the helm of the tempest-tossed vessel, his strong faithful hands had fallen from the wheel.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Sailing upon life's dangerous sea,
Amidst surrounding rocks and shoals,
Lord, I would lift my heart to Thee,
To guide me as the tempest rolls."

EDMESTON.

HAVING promised to give himself up to the civil authorities, Ellerdale had considered it a point of honour immediately to fulfil that promise. Therefore, no sooner had he seen his dear ones into the safe keeping of Dennis and the smith, upon whose fidelity he thoroughly relied, than he at once repaired to the sheriff, who acting upon orders received from the Bishop of London, imprisoned him until that prelate should feel disposed to question the heretical priest on his religious belief.

So dilatory were the Church dignitaries in their proceedings with the reformers, that some months elapsed ere Hubert appeared before his diocesan. And then it was only a matter of form, for he had already confessed in a written declaration his adhesion to all the doctrines taught by his master, Wycliffe.

Amongst the charges brought against him was his marriage. "Did you not make a profession, sir priest," asked the bishop, "to live without a wife?"

"No, my lord, that I never did," replied Ellerdale,

warmly; "I made a profession to live chaste, but not without a wife."

The bishop told him he must renounce his marriage vow in the event of receiving his liberty, which demand Ellerdale indignantly repudiated. But his inquisitor did not lay great stress on this charge of marriage, for the morality of the clergy had become so notoriously bad as to make this dangerous ground; nor was the marriage of priests, in fact, nearly so bold a step then as in the days of Luther, for celibacy was as yet a comparatively recent institution. Of greater moment were such daring assertions as denying the Real Presence in the eucharist and the right of the Bishop of Rome to universal domination, and treating with contempt indulgences, the adoration of images, the use of extreme unction, etc.

After trying in vain to induce him to submit to the ordinances of the Church, the bishop sorely pressed him to renounce his opinions on the Sacrifice of the Mass, and the Supremacy of the Pope; for he was really anxious to release as many of the Lollard prisoners as possible, the prisons of London being now almost surfeited. But Ellerdale remained firm in his convictions, and was remanded to the Fleet prison.

Ellerdale's cell was barely ten feet square, and contained nothing but a bundle of straw. It had the advantage, however, of being above the level of the ground, and from a little lancet-shaped window he obtained a pleasant view of meadow slopes that swept beneath it down to the banks of the Thames. His slip of window faced the west, so he always had the evenings to look forward to. Of course he felt like a caged bird; still he was thankful for the glimpse he had of the green

earth, and in the evenings of the setting sun. And when he looked out each night on the same faithful stars, that seemed to him such beautiful emblems of constancy, he determined to be constant too.

But as the months rolled slowly by, and still no message came to set him free, his heart began to sink within him. Edith had always been in his thoughts, and her name was continually on his lips in prayer, yet he had tried to make himself believe that she was with those who would cherish her tenderly and lovingly, and the time must surely soon be coming when he would clasp her again to his breast. But now he suffered doubts and forebodings that hitherto he had resolutely combated to creep in upon him, and gradually hope gave place to despondency. For hours together he would muse on Edith and his child, but not now with the same resignation and trust in God he once had.

One morning, while he was in this unhappy frame of mind, the Bishop of London entered his cell.

"Good-morrow, my lord," said Hubert, springing up from the straw on which he had been reclining, the hope that had lately fled rushing back ecstatically into his soul.

"Good-morrow. I hope solitude has consumed your pride, and that you have been brought to a consciousness of the heinousness of your sins?"

"I have always been very conscious of my sins, my lord, and perhaps, as you suggest, am more so now than ever."

"Then kiss this emblem of your faith," demanded the bishop, raising to the prisoner's lips a small crucifix.

After a moment's hesitation, he complied.

"If you indeed repent of your sins and wish to be

received back into the arms of holy Church, I will now shrive thee, my son."

Drawing back as much as the narrow limits of his cell would permit, Ellerdale darted at the prelate a look of defiance.

The bishop frowned and bit his lips.

"Obdurate as ever! You refuse, then, to be assoiled of your abominable heresies?"

"You, my lord, have not the power to pardon me for my guilt. God only can assoil me, as I trust He will," said Ellerdale, quietly.

Three months went slowly by, at the end of which time he had become so depressed in spirits and weak in body that a low fever attacked him which threatened to be dangerous. Again the Bishop of London visited him.

"Are you still in the same evil frame of mind?" asked his inquisitor.

Receiving no response from him who lay flushed and feverish on his bundle of straw, he knelt by the prisoner's side and continued—

"Will you now submit to the ordinances of holy Church?"

"No."

"Nor renounce your heretical notions?"

An almost inaudible "No."

"Then, by St. Thomas, you shall die here in your apostasy," said the bishop, leaving the cell. But in a few minutes he returned.

"I give you one more chance. Will you renounce your opinions on the Sacrifice of the Mass?" No response.

"Will you to-morrow, after matins, receive the blessed eucharist, according to the rules of holy Church?"

"And if I do?"

"You shall be free. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Do you accept this chance of liberty?" No response.

"I am going. This is your last chance. Will you attend the sacrifice of the most holy mass to-morrow?"

"Yes."

Visions of wife and child and liberty were too strong for him, and he yielded to the tempter, yielded to what but too frequently proved the first downward step from the faith. But this downward step in Ellerdale's case was followed by keen and bitter feelings of remorse.

That night, as he lay tossing wearily on his wretched bed, some stars shone down upon him, and seemed to reproach him for inconstancy. The fair starlight that before had inspired him with aspirations pure and steadfast was now ungrateful and even displeasing to him, and he turned his eyes away from that chink in his prison wall through which he could see the twinkling diamonds of heaven. But it was in vain that he tried to shut out those bright reminders of his faithlessness, for they seemed in his fancy to shine the brighter, the closer he shut his eyes.

Soon after it was light a warden came to tell him he might attend matins. He did so, after being conveyed to St. Paul's Cathedral in a charette; for he was too weak and ill to walk. And then came the struggle—should he join in the service of the mass, and regain his liberty, or retract his promises to attend? Already he had tasted the sweets of freedom: could he be brave and faithful enough to return to that loathsome cell?

No, he could not forego the temptation; and he joined in the idolatrous service.

When the celebration was over, he was summoned to a consistory in one of the chapels.

"We are glad, my son," began the bishop, "to receive you again into the arms of holy Church. You will now sign this recantation of all your late heresies."

Ellerdale drew back appalled. Had he, then, not sufficiently degraded himself by partaking in the late celebration?

"You did not tell me yesterday that I should have to do this," he stammered.

"Nevertheless you must, and shall."

"I shall not,"

"Unless you do, you shall go back to the Fleet."

"May God, then, give me grace to bear my trial patiently, for I will not renounce one of what you, my lord, are pleased to call my heresies. And may He forgive me for my grievous sin this day."

"You speak boldly, sirrah. Perhaps at the end of another month or two you will think differently."

"He may not live through another month," put in a priest, casting a pitying eye on Ellerdale's wasted form.

"Away with him," said the bishop, angrily, and calling one of the prison wardens to him.

"My lord," continued the priest, "he is very ill."

"You shall follow him," rejoined the incensed prelate, "if you dare to sympathize with this obstinate heretic."

And so Ellerdale was taken back to the Fleet; but in consideration of his weak condition was allowed a larger place of confinement than the cell he had been occupying.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Hope, like the glimmering taper's light,
Adorns and cheers the way;
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray." GOLDSMITH.

"SWEET babe! she has her father's eyes. You must bring her over here often and let us see her."

"That will I gladly. The Tower and Eastcheap are not far apart," returned Edith, in response to her mother-in-law's request.

"I wish you would come and live with us always," said the city matron, pressing her grandchild to her bosom, as though loath to give back the little one to its mother.

"And that would I gladly do, but the Queen has been so good to me that I cannot bear to appear ungrateful."

It was the first time Edith had seen the home of her husband's boyhood, and the occasion was naturally fraught with a great deal that was at once agreeable and painful. She had had misgivings as to whether Hubert's mother really liked her, and had put off her visit longer than she would have done had she known what a warm welcome was awaiting her. And yet she

might have known that though Hubert's mother might once have looked coldly upon her, his child would be a sufficient peace-offering now. Nor were his father and brother less kind and considerate to the bereaved lady.

After this she often brought her little Ina to Eastcheap, for the place that had once been *his* home had an indescribable charm about it.

One wintry morning while the year was still young, after one of these visits, she was picking her way through the soft snow in the merchant's courtyard, her child by her side, when a cumbrous vehicle stopped at the entrance-gate. It was a kind of covered cart, open at the sides. Getting off his horse, the driver demanded admission. Edith took up her child in her arms to step aside, and in doing so noticed a man apparently either ill or hurt lying inside amongst some loose straw; and her woman's compassion prompted her to stay and see whether she could be of service.

The stoppage of the charette caused the man to turn uneasily, and Edith saw his face. With a scream of mingled joy and pain, she cast wondering little Ina from her, and rushed into the vehicle. Gently raising her husband's head, she placed it tenderly in her lap, bedewing it with tears so warm and grateful that he opened his eyes and looked at her.

"Oh, Hubert dearest! do you not know me, your wife?"

But the gaze was a vacant one, and she saw that he was unconscious.

"Oh, be very careful of him, he is delirious," she exclaimed, as she unwillingly relinquished the heavy head to stronger hands and arms.

After Ellerdale's recommittal to prison, the low fever

that had already attacked him before his attendance at mass, took stronger hold, and in a few weeks' time he became so ill as to be thought quite past recovery. Fifteen years later such an event as dying in prison for the faith would have been thought nothing of. But the times were not yet ripe for martyrdom, and the Bishop of London, knowing that his death in prison would be unfavourable just then to his schemes, made his attendance at high mass an excuse for his release.

During the rest of that day and all through the long winter night did Edith watch patiently by the sufferer's side for the faintest return of consciousness to his face. How different the nurse he now had to the rough warders of the Fleet! Her bosom always swelled in pity and compassion at the sight of suffering, and whenever such presented itself she felt she must nurse the afflicted one. How much more did her labour become one of love now that she was tending the sick-bed of her dearest one! Nothing could induce her to leave him even for a minute, unless to prepare something for his nourishment. There was always something she could do, or thought she could, to ease his suffering, nameless little acts of kindness beyond the mere smoothing of a pillow, the moistening of parched lips, and the cooling of a fevered brow.

"I will watch him now," her mother-in-law would say; "take you the rest you need, poor child."

"Not yet," she would reply, evasively.

"But you will wear yourself out."

"I would not be asleep for anything when he recovers consciousness."

But when the fourth night came and still he knew her

not, she gave way, and slept till daylight peeped in at the darkened window; and then she reproached herself for having slept so long.

"Has he recognised you?" she inquired, eagerly.

"No, dear one," said the mother, kissing the daughter she had learnt to really love.

"But he *will* recover," said Edith, passionately; then more meekly, "I know he will, for I have besought again and again the Lord he has loved so well to spare him."

And she knelt by the bed, and prayed for more faith.

Like his master, Wycliffe, her husband had found from the Bible that prayer can accomplish much, and had instilled into the minds of his flock the importance of it. And his teaching had not been lost on Edith. At her earnest request, his scruples overcome by her tearful entreaties, Ralph Ellerdale rode off one morning to Cranwood and begged those he knew there to pray for their late pastor; and the request was heartily responded to. Well does our latest poet tell us in his sweetest numbers—

> "More things are wrought by prayer
> Than this world dreams of; wherefore, let thy voice
> Rise like a fountain for me night and day;
> * * * * * *
> For so the whole round earth is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

When night again closed in, the city dame once more pressed Edith to take some rest, but she would not listen this time.

"I feel almost sure my Hubert will recognise me ere morning. I have thought at times to-day that there seemed a gleam of consciousness in his eyes," she said,

an excited flush painting her cheeks. Faith and hope were struggling in her bosom for the mastery: faith shone clearly, steadfastly, in her eyes; restless, panting hope was written on the sensitive lips.

"May all good saints bless thee, my child—nay, I know what you would have me say—well, may the Lord Christ Himself bless thee, dear one, for thy faith and goodness. Shall I fetch Ina to bid good-night?"

"Please, *mother*." It was the first time she had used this word since early childhood.

In another minute two plump little hands parted the tapestry in the doorway, and a bright wee face appeared. And then the minutes flew by unheeded in the warm maternal caresses.

"Kiss thy father, pretty one. Look well at the dear face, and forget it not, for to-morrow you must welcome it with your sunniest smiles. There now, let grandmother take you and put you to sleep, and may the good Lord bless thee," said the mother, relinquishing into the grandmother's arms her darling, who never before this last week had slept elsewhere than by that mother's side.

A week ago Edith would have rushed through fire and water to pacify an outburst of grief like that which came from her child as she was carried from the chamber. She still loved her with a mother's warm devotion, but now a nearer and dearer one demanded all her thoughts and care. Turning to the bed, she placed a cool, damp kerchief on her husband's still feverish brow, and gently stroked back his dark locks. At last he was sleeping, quietly, and peacefully. Oh, how patiently had she been waiting for that sleep to come!

Early next morning Hubert's mother stole quietly

into the sick chamber. Stepping lightly to the bed and stooping over it, she satisfied herself that her son was breathing. He was asleep. His hand was locked in Edith's, and she was kneeling at the bedside crying. Raising her, and disengaging the hands, she seated herself, and taking Edith on her lap, nursed her as if she had been a child.

"I see, dear, how it is. You need not tell me until you are more composed."

"He has smiled upon me and blessed me," said Edith, sobbing.

The lady remained with her until her excitement had become more subdued, and then slipped noiselessly from the room. "He shall see you alone," she whispered.

And Edith returned a look of grateful affection for her mother-in-law's self-abnegation.

When the lady looked in again, her son was awake, and Edith was leaning over the bed with an arm under his pillow, her sweet face happier and brighter than it had ever looked before—in spite of tears that again stood threateningly in her great blue eyes, and in spite of her weary watching.

"Come and speak to him, mother," she said, with a radiant smile, as she relinquished her place.

And then when his mother had kissed him and seated herself on the chair by his bed, a little maiden entered, not unobserved. They did not mean that he should see Ina so soon, fearing to over-excite him; but now that the child had found her way there, they could not send her away, especially as she had attracted her father's attention.

"Is that my little Ina?" he asked.

"Come, sweet, and kiss him too;" said the happy

mother, taking the child in her arms and laying her by the father's side.

And seating herself at the foot of the bed she watched these two—her darling ones; watched through tears of intensest joy the fat dimpled hands find their way at first suspiciously, but soon confidingly, in amongst the father's beard, and the round fresh face nestle by that other one which she hoped would soon be healthy like the child's. And when the wee red mouth pressed those dry, colourless lips, and, most of all, when the little maiden lisped, "Father," and that father looked pleased, oh, how the wife's poor heart throbbed with joy! It was almost too sweet, this cup of happiness. And the scene is almost too sacred a one for us to linger over. Happily it is but once or twice in our lives that we experience such bliss as was Edith's now.

It was a slow recovery; but, thanks to his wife's watchful, tender care, and to a good constitution, he got over his illness, and in a month's time had sufficiently recruited his health and strength to walk as far as the river's bank and see one of his father's ships unload her cargo. By the end of the second month of his stay at Eastcheap, he had almost recovered his energies.

And now the question arose, What should he do? He had been degraded from the priesthood, yet he would assuredly still be subjected to the hatred of the Church party. Of course Edith's place in the Queen's household was filled by another lady now, for wherever her husband went, she would go. At length he decided to go to Kyngeston-on-Hull, and take a part in his father's business that had lately been established in that thriving seat of commerce.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Sad I came
From weary commerce with the heartless world;
* * * * * *
When I beheld mild, slumb'ring innocence,
And on that fair maternal brow the smile
Of those affections which do purify
And renovate the soul,—I turned me back
In gladness, and with added strength, to run
My weary race."

SIGOURNEY.

WYKE-UPON-HULL sprang into prominence as a commercial town during the reign of the first Edward, who, seeing its great natural advantages, purchased it, and commenced the formation of the harbour, the enterprising king taking care to have the name of the place changed to Kyngeston. So rapidly did it grow in importance, that under his martial grandson the town furnished sixteen ships and five hundred men for the invasion of France, the complement of London itself being but twenty-five ships and seven hundred men; and at the time we write of, so flourishing had it become, that its exports amounted to one-seventh of the entire kingdom.

Amongst the burgesses of this busy, money-making town, none hold such a high reputation for integrity and righteous dealing as Hubert Ellerdale, who in the course

of some dozen years has become one of its leading merchants. Naturally averse to commerce, he has nevertheless been prosperous, as the world holds prosperity.

During the twelve years that have elapsed since our last chapter, most of the reformed leaders have either died, or are in prison, or are outwardly conforming to the Papacy; others, who have eluded the papal bloodhounds, are in hiding, or teaching the faith in places where they are safe from pursuit. And one who, though unable from her sex to be a leader amongst the reformers, had made it the aim of her short life to succour and relieve them—has exchanged her earthly diadem for a crown of glory. The "good Queen Anne" has died, bitterly lamented by the people, and to the inconsolable grief of the King, who in her has lost his only true friend; for none other took her place in restraining that thirst for absolute power which was to lead to the final catastrophe of his life.

And yet, notwithstanding the misfortunes besetting the Lollards, there are still many thousands in the land who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Courtney has failed to arrest the progress of the "heresies," in spite of having made it very hazardous for the Wycliffites publicly to teach their doctrines; and for the last year or two he has virtually desisted from his endeavour to suppress the Reformation.

A word about Ellerdale, and the last twelve years of his chequered life. On recovering from his illness he had repaired to Kyngeston, and taken to commerce. But his ardent temperament would not allow him to remain silent as to his religious convictions. By a kind of freemasonry that exists amongst those acquainted

with the Bible, he soon found that there were many who treasured its teachings in the place he had now settled in; and by the end of his first year there, he was more noted for his zeal in keeping alive the faith, than for an aptitude for buying and selling. It was not long before his doings had come to the knowledge of the Church sumpnours, and to avoid another imprisonment, he escaped one night to a town higher up the Humber, taking with him his wife and two little ones. Hunted from place to place, he had at length taken advantage of a lull in the persecuting policy of the Church to return to Kyngeston, where for the last few years he has been pursuing the avocation of a merchant. It is an uncongenial one, yet his commercial ventures have been successful. But he cares not for riches. The sweet incentives that make his life worth living, apart from his desire to spread the truth, are his wife and children.

"The ships are ready to sail; have you any orders for the Elbe?" asked a wizened little man of him one day, as he was leaving some warehouses that had just disgorged their stores of wool.

"Yes; bid the shipman learn how things are going in Bohemia, and whether Janovius be still alive."

"I meant to say, Have you any business orders?" explained the little man, contemptuously.

"No. But I am anxious to know what has been done to the Bohemian; ask the shipman to make inquiries."

"Aye, marry will I! But"—under his breath—"it shall be about the price of woolfells, and not the German heretic."

With an expression on his face of intense relief, Ellerdale turned his back on the storehouses, and after a short, brisk walk, stopped in front of a quaint, straggling old mansion, that had once been the manor-house of a Danish lord. The irregular sky-line presented by its grotesque, high-pitched gables, and the wreathed chimneys that had been lately added, the profusely fretted woodwork of its overhanging upper storeys, its basement of earth and mortar, with black wooden facings, suggested many additions at different times of its existence.

The merchant's face had looked sad and careworn a few minutes previously; but now every shadow of care vanished, as three sturdy little fellows rushed out from the house, attacking him so boisterously as to put to severe test the strength of the sober-coloured gown that hung over his sober-coloured doublet.

However, the father did not seem to fear any mischance, and in another minute, one of his boys on his shoulder, the other two impeding his progress to the best of their ability, he entered his home in triumph.

"My Hubert is late," said a comely dame, somewhere between the third and fourth decade of life, who was standing in the porch as he entered. She tried to greet him with her customary kiss, but found it quite impossible, owing to the young obstructionists that clung around her husband.

"I'll tell you what has detained me when we are alone," said her husband, seating himself by a blazing log in an ancient hall that had once been the banqueting chamber of Danish and Saxon chiefs. Removing his hood, his hair, once a rich brown, already showed streaks of grey.

"And has Ina nothing to say to father?" he asked, taking a sweet girlish face between his hands.

His daughter crept closer to him. "Why did you not come home yesterday?" she whispered.

"I was busy, Ina."

"I am unhappy when you are long away, father."

He took her on his knees and stroked her brown tresses, and for a moment or two a shadow crossed his face, and the lines in his forehead deepened. Glancing at his wife, he saw her brow too was clouded by some passing thought. Smiling tenderly at Edith, he pressed the child to his bosom, and whispered, "You must not think too much of father."

If that father and mother had any foreboding thoughts, they were soon dispelled by the reappearance of the three boys, who commencing a fresh onslaught on their father, made Ina's seat a less comfortable one than it had been. But warding off their attacks, he bade them remember Ina was not a boy. And then they commenced playing at "stool-ball," the childish game of the period, with the readiness to accept anything fresh, so characteristic of childhood.

Blessed, blessing children! Restless, noisy, disquieting though ye be, what a sad, dull world this would be without you! How monotonous becomes a long, sunlit road, when unrelieved by the green hedgerows and flowers that cheer us on our way; and, happy though husband and wife may be in each other's love, though they be each other's sunshine in the pathway of life, it is a weary one after all if not blessed with children's faces and children's voices. They are the sweet wild flowers in our path that keep us from growing utterly tired and weary.

Though Ralph sent the ball twice into the fire, and father was called to the rescue; though Bertie once upset the baby's cot—for there was a fifth arrow in their quiver; though little Ced at length tired and with a "hurted finger" came to father to be comforted; though in the hour allotted to them for frolic, the boys kept up a constant uproar—yet were they richest blessings.

"Why so thoughtful, my husband?" asked Edith, when, their children in dreamland, they sat alone before the expiring hearth-fire.

"I was thinking how insipid our lives might become without the merry prattle of our darlings."

"You are thinking of something else as well," she said, some minutes later, and sinking on the rushes between her husband and the fire, she looked up into his face inquiringly.

"I was also thinking how smooth the current of our lives has become of late."

"And that makes you look so very thoughtful?"

He smiled on the firelit face upturned to his. But the smile became a sad one as he said—

"It hardly seems right that when the times are so momentous our lives should glide on disturbed by scarce a ripple."

The upturned face grew serious.

"I have attended a secret meeting," he continued, "of those in the town who still cherish the condemned doctrines. We agreed that we would meet together for prayer and reading the Scriptures as often as possible. What would my Edith say were we to make our home—this very hall—the place of meeting?"

"Would you not risk imprisonment?"

"Yes."

"Do as you think right, dearest."

"Then you do not object to our having this hall for our conventicles?"

"Not if you wish it so. And God will be pleased," she said, quietly.

"Bless thee, dearest, for thy sweet faith in Him."

"Edith would not be a loyal wife if she had not some of that faith in God that is so dear to her husband;" and as the glowing log broke and cast out brighter flames, the face that looked up into his seemed to him lighted up with more than mere womanly beauty.

He did not forget how bravely she had encouraged him in the years gone by, by overcoming her fears when he made their home a rendezvous for Lollards; but that had been when the persecutions were more bitter than now, and when fresh perils were hardly heeded.

"I was afraid," he said, "that the tranquillity of the last few years might have made you unwilling again to incur the risks of imprisonment. I am so thankful and happy to find that it is not so."

"I want to try and be worthy of you, my husband."

"God grant I may be worthy of thee, sweet wife."

Did her baby look lovelier that night, and her other children seem dearer to her and more dependent on the father, as she stooped over them, and kissing them, breathed the short mother's prayer over each of her treasures? Perhaps so; but she did not let her husband guess either by lip or eye that she feared aught of evil.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Where'er we seek Thee, Thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground."

COWPER.

THE flat country around the Humber is covered with snow. The air is filled with flaky crystals that are falling in myriads all around, and are slowly piling fresh layers of purest white on roads whose outlines are almost effaced, and that are obscuring the twilight ere yet the short wintry day is over.

"Why does not father come?" said Ina, returning from the porch.

"He will soon be home."

"It is very cold, mother, and the snow is coming down thicker than ever."

"You are not afraid he will lose his way?" asked the mother, smiling.

"No, but he will be so cold. Shall I tell Ubba to fetch another log?"

"Yes, and bid him bring a large one."

Ina returned, followed by Ubba, whose broad shoulders bent under the weight of a piece of well-seasoned beech that once fairly ablaze might have roasted an ox.

"Now it burns cheerily," said the mother, smiling with

the complacency of one who feels that she has done the very best she can; for she was surveying a long table laden with joints, fish, and pasties, with bowls of mortreux and flagons of mead and ale.

From the centre of the heavy oak beams that formed the ceiling hung a rude chandelier that had once cast candle-light upon Danish carousers. But Edith had not lit its six candles, nor were they wanted any more than daylight through the windows, on which were gathering the clinging snowflakes; for the blazing stack of wood sent out a ruddy glow of warmth and comfort more cheery than the sickly twilight, or the cold, flickering rays from the candles.

It was not often that Edith got up so sumptuous a repast, and her eyes lingered on the board for some minutes with pardonable pride. She had prepared it less as a surprise for her husband than for his Lollard friends, who were coming to their home that evening.

"I think it will do, Marjory," she said, as her serving-woman entered the hall for the twentieth time. "I hope those capons will not get dried up," she added, glancing rather ruefully on some platters that stood on the hearth, the contents of which, in her eagerness to have everything ready in time, had been cooked far too soon. But thoughts of the capons were driven out of her head by the sudden appearance of her boys.

"Go back, you young rebels; it is time you were all a-bed."

"Here's father!" exclaimed Ina from the porch, and in another minute he and some dozen others entered the house, bringing with them a very chilling atmosphere and a great deal of snow.

Mistress Edith looked altogether charming as she stood holding back the tapestry in the entrance to the hall, inviting her guests to enter, her cheeks flushed, not only from her previous exertions, but from expostulating with her young hopefuls, who having scented the fragrant supper were loath to leave it.

"Why, Edith, you *have* been busy; but we came to pray, not to feast."

"You told me most of the Kyngeston Lollards were poor," she whispered, with a look of disappointment.

"And so most of them are, my thoughtful wife;" and whispering something to her, a bright, happy expression came into her face that lasted all the evening.

The plain russet tunics and jerseys in which the majority of her guests were attired, attested to the appropriateness of Edith's feast. Ulric, the Cranwood smith, and Master Dennis were at the board, and when Ellerdale saw how pleased was his wife that the fruit of her labour was duly appreciated, he reproached himself for having spoken of it disapprovingly. The repast over, everything was removed, including the "board" itself, or rather boards, the tressels being placed in a corner, and the seats brought closer to the wide hearth.

The gathering was meant as a preliminary one, and an hour or so was spent in relating their several experiences since Wycliffe's doctrines had been first prohibited, during which several fresh comers arrived.

Ellerdale was the first to recount his experiences of the late persecution. He told them how, having undergone nearly two years' imprisonment, he had been seduced into attending high mass in hopes of freedom, and how he had bitterly repented his weakness and gone

back to prison, but that he had been released on his life being considered hopeless; how, while he had conceived it to be his duty as a pastor in the Church to surrender himself prisoner, he had not thought it incumbent on him when deprived of his religious office.

"And then I came here with my wife and child, and entered my father's business, but had not been at Kyngeston long before I found there were several Wycliffites in the town, who often came here to hear me read from the Bible. We kept our meetings secret for more than a year, as some of you will remember; but one day a friend told me the sheriff's soldiers would be here next morning, and that, unless I wished to be again imprisoned, I must flee the town. Accordingly, in the dead of night, I escaped with this dear one," laying his hand on his wife's shoulder, "and our two children, higher up the Humber. I almost forget all we went through after that; but one day we found ourselves at Bridlington, whence a trading-ship was about to leave for London, and we went on board, for I hoped the London Churchmen might have forgotten me. For the next two years I remained in London, but having joined the Lollards there in their secret meeting—sometimes in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, sometimes at private houses—I was again warned of my danger, and retired to Hamburg, where my father had business connections. At length, hearing that the Church authorities had become less stringent in their measures owing to the crowded state of the prisons, I came back here."

"My story be a short one," began Ulric. "Cranwood were a happy town so long as good Master Ellerdale were our pastor, but when he were took from us we were

left in sore straits. Marry! but it came hard on us to have a Papist put in his place, and Master Dennis here and others of us determined to pay for transcribing o' Wycliffe's Gospels, and so keep the truth among us. We used to meet at Dennis's house, and he read to us, for he were the only one who could. But the sumpnour's ugly face looked in on us one night, and we knew 'twas all up with us if we stayed at Cranwood, specially myself, for I had took part in the rising of '81, and were a marked man. So Dennis and me, thinking Master Ellerdale was here, came to Kyngeston, but only to find the persecution had drove him away. However, God be thanked! we have him among us now, an' I pray the Almighty may keep him wi' us in safety, for I ha'n't heard a word of the blessed Bible read for nigh on ten years."

Each of them told his story of the recent persecution, some narrating what they knew of the king's prisons, others telling of their narrow escapes from the sheriff's soldiers.

At their conventicles the Lollards were careful not to attract attention by much light, so none of the candles in the chandelier above alluded to were lighted; but when each had told his experiences, Ellerdale took one, and placing it on a roughly-constructed reading-desk, lit it previously to reading the Divine Word.

"'Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.' What greater encouragement can we wish for inciting us to be faithful than these blessed words?" he asked.

And then, having selected from his pile of manuscripts the Gospel of St. John, he proceeded, with scarcely any comment or observation, to read some favourite passages

from that specially beloved of the Lord's apostles, who had written so pathetically of the sublime yet mournful life of his Master, and so tenderly and yearningly to His scattered flock.

Only one of his audience possessed any of the Sacred Writings, and most of them had not listened to the reading of the Word of Life for years. It was with the deepest interest then, and amidst intense silence, that these men again hearkened to the utterances from that Book on which they pinned their faith and hopes of heaven—that Book which in the night of time had lain closed for centuries, encased in dust and cobwebs.

And then they prayed to Him who alone could grant them their hearts' desires, not the faintest whisper arising to the Virgin Mother or the innumerable saints canonized by the Church. Nor did they pray in the set forms of prayer so eloquently condemned by Wycliffe, but in the simple, earnest diction that characterized the Lollards.

Before dispersing to their several homes they sang one of the beautiful, plaintive, Lollard hymns. It was the age of minstrelsy, and the Wycliffites while expunging the romaunt style from their sacred songs, sedulously cultivated the romancist love of harmony.

Lightly touching the strings of her harp, Edith struck a few initiatory chords, and then in strains subdued almost to a whisper, the little assembly raised its voice in song to God, all standing except the harpist. Edith's voice was rich and mellow, and her woman's treble was not lost amidst the deeper intonations of the men, singing as they did in softest accents. *

* We have already accounted for the term "Lollard," but some attribute its derivation to the old German "lollen" or "lullen," *to sing with a low voice.*

It had ceased snowing, and some stars peeped out here and there from among the sombre clouds. Those who had gowns or mantles wrapped them closely about their persons as they stepped out into the night, and all pulled their hoods well over their heads and about their ears and necks, for it was very cold. Their dark figures stood out in bold relief against the dazzling white that enshrouded everything, and to prevent attracting the attention of any benighted traveller who might be about, the men left in twos and threes, taking different directions to their homes.

But the snow did not betray that night's conventicle, nor did it on the evenings when that meeting was repeated. There were only a few, however, who dared attend those winter gatherings; but when the warm summer nights came, and still the little band remained unmolested by the Church spies, the numbers increased. Then came Bertha, Ulric's brave little wife, whose example was followed by others of her sex. Then ventured forth John of Bruges, the wealthy merchant, and his son Will; and Curthose, the dyer, plucking up courage, induced Timbershins, the carpenter, to accompany him. But we need not enumerate; suffice it to say that when another winter set in, Ellerdale's hall was well filled at each gathering. To lessen the danger of attracting the suspicion of their enemies, the conventicles were sometimes held at the houses of John of Bruges and Woofshod, a weaver. Ellerdale's home was, however, the recognised place of meeting. Being more secluded than most of the Kyngeston homes, it was better adapted than others for secret gatherings.

A pleasant trait in these conventicles, which were

obtaining throughout the land, was the bond of brotherhood that they caused to spring up between men of very different positions in life, which is the more interesting when we bear in mind the strong antipathies that still existed between those of Norman and of Saxon extraction. The Lollards rarely met until midnight, and while they were assembled together some of their number were stationed in the various approaches to the place of meeting to warn them of danger, watching by turns. So numerous had these conventicles become, that for a time the Church was completely paralysed in its endeavours to suppress the "heresies."

Knighton, a canon of Leicester, and a contemporary of Wycliffe, tells us that "the number of those who believed in Wycliffe's doctrine after his decease, multiplied like suckers growing from the root of a tree; they everywhere filled the kingdom, so that a man could scarcely meet two people on the road but one of them was a disciple of Wycliffe." He expresses regret that inadequate measures were taken to check the spreading of the Reformer's writings.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"And oft though wisdom wake, suspicion sleeps
At wisdom's gate, and to simplicity
Resigns her charge, while goodness thinks no ill
Where no ill seems." MILTON.

THREE more years have passed. Those who are still hardy enough to defend the reformed faith are sorely pressed. The darkest hour has arrived.

The usurper, Bolingbroke, is king. Feeling that his crown is insecure, he has courted the Romish clergy, who have not been slow in availing themselves of the royal disposition. A law has been passed in Parliament at the instance of Arundel, the new primate, ordaining "that none shall henceforth preach, hold, teach, or instruct openly or privily, or make or write any book contrary to the Catholic faith or determination of holy Church, or make any conventicles or schools." All books of heresy are to be delivered up within a month. Whoever offends is to be arrested by his diocesan, and "if he refuse to abjure or relapse, he is to be delivered to the sheriff or chief magistrate, to be *burned alive* in a conspicuous place, for the terror of others."

Baffled in their attempts to suppress the "heresies" by mere imprisonment, the incensed ecclesiastics have

proposed the stake as the only remedy for the evil, which extreme measure has been sanctioned by the Lancastrian usurper.

"Has your father come home yet?"

"Not yet," said Ina, putting a fresh pillow under her mother's head, for her mother had been ill.

"I am very comfortable now, dear. Will you read to me from the Bible?"

"Perhaps I had better not just now. You are tired and want sleep."

"I am tired of sleeping."

A flush came over Ina's face, and she looked confused.

"You like reading to me?"

"Yes, mother dear, I like nothing better, but I cannot just now."

"My child does not feel ill?"

"No, no, it is not that; but—but father always hides his Bible now."

The mother looked grieved, for she felt something was being kept from her; but she said no more about the reading. And not long after, her husband's familiar tread was heard in the hall below and then on the stairs that led to the chamber she was in.

"How is my Edith now?"

"Much better, as I always am directly you come home."

She had meant to ask him why he hid the sacred manuscripts, but he seemed so happy to find her better, she could not find it in her heart to hurt his feelings, and merely said—

"Will you read to me?"

"Gladly, dearest;" and he left the chamber, and returned with his Bible.

After reading to her for a long time, he again left the sick-room, and came back without the manuscripts.

"Where have you put them."

"In our bower."

"Ina could not find them when I asked her some time ago to fetch them and read to me?"

"I have thought it better to keep them in a more secret place than I have hitherto."

"Why?"

"Because they are too precious to leave lying about anywhere."

"Are they then more precious now than they used to be?"

"Yes," replied her husband, after a moment's hesitation. "A great many of the sacred writings have been seized of late by order of the bishops."

She did not ask him why he had not told her this before, for she knew full well what had kept him silent.

"Why do you never have the meetings now?" she asked, abruptly.

"Did I not tell my Edith that I feared our proceedings were being noticed?"

"But that was several months ago. There is something you are keeping from me. And you have looked sadly thoughtful and cast down of late. Tell me, dearest, what is it?"

"Thinkest thou I can look upon thy dear face growing thinner, and find the weeks slipping by and my Edith still an invalid, and look otherwise than sad?"

"But there is a double shadow on your brow, my poor

dear husband. Is the persecution becoming more bitter again?"

He did not give her a decided answer, for the pattering of little feet arrested their attention, and striding to the entrance-passage he caught in his arms a little girl of four.

"Kiss mother, little one, and tell her how much you love her!" he said, laying their youngest child close by the mother's side, and then againg stepping lightly across the room to prevent the too noisy entrance of the boys.

Edith had taken great pains in teaching her children to read. Now that the mother was ill, the task had devolved upon Ina.

One warm, dreamy morning, when the leaves were unstirred by a breath of wind, when the smoke from a recently erected chimney glided straight up into the azure, and the birds were singing blithely, the maiden sat outside the porch, her brother Ralph by her side reading, the other boys and her little sister playing in a field in front of them. Ina had enticed them away from the house, for her mother was asleep. Ralph was reading her a tractate by an eminent Lollard; but her mind seemed pre-occupied, for she made no comments—so pre-occupied that she did not notice a stranger approaching her, until the cessation of her brother's voice drove away her day-dream.

"Loot, Ina, 'is dood man's diven me a droat!" exclaimed her little sister, running up to her.

"Very interesting children, fair mistress," began the good man, doffing his bonnet to Ina; "your brothers and sister, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Ina, drawing the little one closer and smiling.

"And they can read I see," observed the stranger, glancing over her brother's shoulder. "By the mass! one of the Lollard tractates!"

Ina coloured, and snatching the dangerous parchment from her brother, placed it in a fold of her dress.

"May I not listen too?" asked the man, with an air of keen interest.

"You would perhaps not agree with what is written here."

"Indeed, I should be delighted to listen."

"You swore by the mass just now."

"It is a convenient way of avoiding suspicion."

Ina looked dubious.

"You need not fear me, lady."

"Do you, then, hold with the reformers?"

"It is not a safe question to answer in these days, but as I see you are not averse to the new creed, I need not mind. I am a stranger here, but have heard there are many in Kyngeston who remain loyal to the faith, and read the Bible."

"The persecution is becoming very severe, is it not?" inquired Ina.

"In some parts of the kingdom, but not here. It is for that reason I have come to Kyngeston."

"I am very thankful to hear you say so."

"Master Ellerdale has not given up his Bible, has he?"

"You know my father, then?"

"I was told he lived here. And the Bible?"

"Whom should he give it up to?" she rejoined, indignantly.

"Ah, to whom indeed!—yet he is a bold man to retain it. Does he hold any conventicles here, lady?"

"No—not now."

"Then he *has* held them?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I should like to attend them. But do not confide in me, if you have any doubts as to what I may be. I see you distrust me, nor do I blame you, in face of the late proclamations."

He waited, hoping she would say something; but she remained silent, and making a low obeisance he left her.

"What a nice man! Why did you not ask him into the house?" observed Ralph.

"Because I feared I might be betraying father."

And yet when she saw the stranger stop to talk to her brothers and watched his hand steal among the golden tresses of her little sister, and when he stayed for a few minutes to join in the children's game, she reproached herself for inhospitality.

But when she had related her interview with the stranger to her father, she almost wished she had been more reticent; yet she did not know why, for her father did not blame her for what she had said.

"Do you run a great risk in possessing the Scriptures?"

"Yes, Ina."

"Oh, father! have I betrayed you?"

"No, sweet child, no," he replied, caressing her.

"Ulric! at this time of the evening!"

"Thee must fly, Master Ellerdale."

"And why?" asked Ellerdale, coolly, for he had already divined the reason.

"Thee'st been scented by one of the Church blood-hounds."

"I know it, or at least I guessed it."

"Then why stay here?"

"Where can I go?"

"To the smith's home. 'Tis a poor one, but thee'lt find hearty welcome in't."

Ellerdale grasped Ulric's hand warmly.

"But surely," he said, "there is no immediate danger."

"There be. Thee must come to-night."

"No, Ulric, I cannot. The night air would kill my wife."

"Then it must be in the early morning," insisted the smith.

"How did you come to know they had found me out?"

Ulric explained that he had been in Kyngeston, and that Woofshod, a weaver in the town,—who possessed some of the sacred writings, and who, next to Ellerdale had most promoted the secret meetings,—had been accused by a Church spy of having prohibited books; that the weaver, who was meditating an escape that night to the North, had recommended Ulric to warn Master Ellerdale of his danger, for that the spy had tried to ferret from him some evidence against the merchant; and that he, the smith, had himself seen the emissary of the Church, whose personal appearance Woofshod had described to him.

"An' a more smooth-tongued, smiling carle ne'er stepped our borough," continued the smith, wrathfully. "Marry! an' he come near my dwelling, I may be tempted to let him feel the weight o' my sledge-hammer; I'll ha' none o' his oily words and grimaces. Good e'en to thee, fair mistress," he added, addressing Ina, who had entered the chamber.

"We must leave here, Ina," broke in her father.

"Oh!" she cried, "is it because of what I said to the stranger this morning?"

"No, no, my child," said her father, putting his arm protectingly round her slender waist. He had uttered a lie, but he had rather have cut off his right hand just then than tell her the truth. Nor did she ever know that she had been the immediate cause of what was to follow.

Later in the evening, as he stole softly into the chamber where lay a dearer one than Ina, many were the contending passions that struggled in his heart for the mastery. Pulling aside the bed-curtain, he gazed sadly on her who had made life dear to him. She looked really beautiful as she lay there peaceful and asleep; not even in the early bloom of her girlhood had she seemed to him more sweet than now. But, ah! that hectic glow that lit her cheeks was unnatural; and sinking into a seat beside her, he allowed his thoughts, as he gazed upon her face, to roam into dangerous channels. The devil was busy then suggesting the surrender of his loftiest and noblest instincts. "Deliver up your Bible," said the tempter, "and outwardly conform to Rome." But the devil fled confounded when the next minute Edith opened her eyes, and smiling, said—

"I was dreaming that you were reading to me from God's sweet Book of love."

"It shall be no dream, dearest," he replied, and he brought from its hiding-place his Bible.

"What is it you would say?" she asked, when, having read for some time and again secreted the precious manuscripts, her husband made several essays to speak, but each time stopped short.

"Do you think you could bear the fatigue of a little journey to-morrow?"

"Why?"

"Because it is dangerous to stay here."

"And where would you go?"

"To Ulric's."

"God will give me strength sufficient for my day."

"Dear Edith; and can you bear this news so tranquilly, and not even ask why it is we must fly?"

"I know the reason, and have been prepared for this, for though in tender regard for me, you have tried to keep it from me, you could not hide from your wife that anxious brow."

Next day, before the sun was high in the heavens, Edith was resting in Ulric's humble home.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Together freed, their gentle spirits fly
To scenes where love and bliss immortal reign."

THOMSON.

AGAIN our scene is in a bed-chamber. It is midday, but Edith is on her couch asleep.

It is a smaller chamber than she has been accustomed to, and the house is a much smaller one. Ulric's humble dwelling is situated on the confines of the town, close to the borough wall. A continuous succession of ringing blows comes from the adjoining smithy, but they do not apparently disturb the sleeper. She is resting very peacefully, and a smile is playing on her lips.

"I thank Thee, my God," breathes her husband, softly, and noiselessly leaving the room, he steps out into the road, and walks briskly towards the heart of the town, to a house where lives the Lollard merchant, John of Bruges.

Evening was closing in when he re-entered the smith's home, and his wife was awake, and talking to Ina.

"Come, Hubert, and sit beside me. I have been longing to see you," pleaded Edith.

And seating himself at the bedside, he told her how he had been occupied since the morning, and that John of Bruges had taken into his own house their children,

who were to remain with him for the present, perhaps until the persecution had subsided; for her husband buoyed her up with the hope that the tension now tightening on the faithful would soon relax. Nor was she aware of the severe mandate that had gone forth, imperilling the lives of all who refused to abjure the Lollard creed.

"And are they happy?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, they are happy, Edith. John's children, you know, are not much older than ours. Ah! and I am forgetting; Will is outside, and wishes to say something to you about Ina before he leaves for Flanders."

"Ina has been telling me all about it. And where is she?" added the mother, smiling.

Her father was not long finding her. She was outside talking in whispers with the eldest son of John of Bruges. Her father had given his consent to their affiance, and Mistress Edith's only remained, which she willingly conceded. Will was to leave the next day for Flanders: it would be some months ere he returned, and so perilous were the times, that he dreaded to think what might have happened by then.

"I am glad they are betrothed," said Edith, when the lovers had retired, "for I know he will be a true husband to her. Now that I feel all my children will be well cared for, I could die happy, but for leaving thee, my Hubert."

He drew the white hand that lay outside the coverlet to his lips, and tried to smile.

Will you read to me about that beautiful city of God, the Apostle John tells us of?" she asked, presently, "where there are no more partings, nor sorrow, nor weeping."

She never wearied listening to the gracious words of her Lord and of those favoured men whom He had chosen and inspired with thoughts Divine. And he never wearied reading to her their sublime utterances, which it was his joy to know she accepted for herself in childlike confidence.

And now he read her the passage she had desired, about the "holy city" resplendent with the glory of God.

"But that does not refer to the home our God will give us when we die, does it?"

"Some think it refers to the last ages of the earth, when the beauteous city is to be a connecting link between heaven and earth; others that it is the nearest symbol our earthly minds are capable of receiving, for you know it is said that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive of the glories prepared for them that love Him."

"I shall soon know what heaven is like, and see Him in His beauty. Oh! that I had done more for so sweet a Lord. But I know He will welcome me," she added, softly.

And then her eyes settled on the bowed head of her husband, and a mist came over her eyes as she exclaimed—

"Oh, Hubert! if we could but die together!"

> "For she loved him so
> That none but He could woo her from his side,
> Or make her heart content to go from him
> To all the joys of heaven."

Next day her children gathered round her. She had

wished it so, for she felt the sands of her life were almost run.

"And you will be a mother to them, Ina dear, when I am gone?"

Yes, Ina would do her best to take the mother's place. But who could fill the empty gap for *her?* It was well for the maiden that she was beloved by one whose heart was pure and good; yet not even he could quite fill the vacant place.

"And now," said Edith, when alone again with Hubert, "I have only thee, my husband, to part with. Ah! I would almost wish that I might stay with thee, until thou too art called."

It was the bitterest trial of his life, yet he would not for the world have kept her back from Him who was beckoning her away.

"Nay, dearest, I would not withhold thee from Him who calleth thee, for He has made my bitterest affliction my sweetest joy."

He bent over the bed with his face close to hers, for her eyes were becoming dim, and her voice was failing her. She took his hand in hers, and prayed God to comfort him, and then she whispered,—

"Smile on me once more, and bid me go in peace. Bless me, dearest."

And he blessed her, and smiled upon her.

"Thee'st best go and see what keeps him," said Ulric to his wife, after the worthy pair had been waiting some time in vain for Ellerdale's appearance at the supper-board. "Dost know how the poor lady be?"

"I saw her not long since, and she seemed much the

REFORMERS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

same. Her husband were with her. But I'll go again and see if there be aught wrong."

Hastily returning, Bertha bade the smith come to the chamber they had given up to Ellerdale. The scene that there met his gaze brought tears to the honest fellow's face, the first he had shed for many a year.

A ray from the setting sun was stealing in through the little window and casting its mellow light upon a picture which, though deeply pathetic, had also a touch of sweetest beauty. There she lay as he had seen her in the morning, but her brow was whiter now, though a faint colour still lingered in her cheeks, that was heightened by the sunbeam's kiss. Her gentle spirit had flown to its eternal home.

But it was that other figure kneeling at the bedside, his face buried in his hands, his frame convulsed with sobs, that brought the tears to Ulric's face.

"'Tis best so," said Bertha, drawing her husband away; "we must leave him alone awhile."

The wish Edith had expressed that they might enter their last home together was to be almost fulfilled, for Hubert survived her but a month. His place of concealment was soon discovered. A few days after her death, he was arrested and brought before the Bishop of York. Steadfastly refusing to recant an iota of the reformed doctrines, he was delivered to the magistrate, and sealed with his life-blood his adherence to them.

And so Edith had scarcely entered the heavenly portals ere he joined her, "where the eye at last beholdeth what the heart has loved so long."

The double loss fell heaviest on Ina, but a husband's love tended much to assuage her grief. Her little sister remained with her, and her brothers found a home with their grandfather.

All the noblest and most consistent of the Lollard leaders lost their lives in the fiery persecution that had now set in. The Reformation was for the time subdued. Did Wycliffe and his disciples, then, spend their lives in vain? Let those answer who, throughout the century and a half that ensued, chose the flames rather than connive at the prevailing iniquity. True, their voices were speedily hushed by the implacable hatred of Rome, yet were these faithful witnesses as the lightning in a dark night, pointing out the narrow road to those timid ones around them who were continually losing the path. It was these ever-recurring rays of light that prepared the minds of men to welcome the outcome of that stronger light, which in the sixteenth century sprang forth from Eisleben.

No, our English Wycliffe spent not his life for naught. Had he not stood out in the midnight of time, and denouncing the rank apostasy of his day, raised aloft the long-lost Bible, pointing to it as the only hope of salvation, Luther would not have gained the heart of Germany and England as he did.

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