THE SWORD OF DE BARDWELL

A TALE OF AGINCOURT

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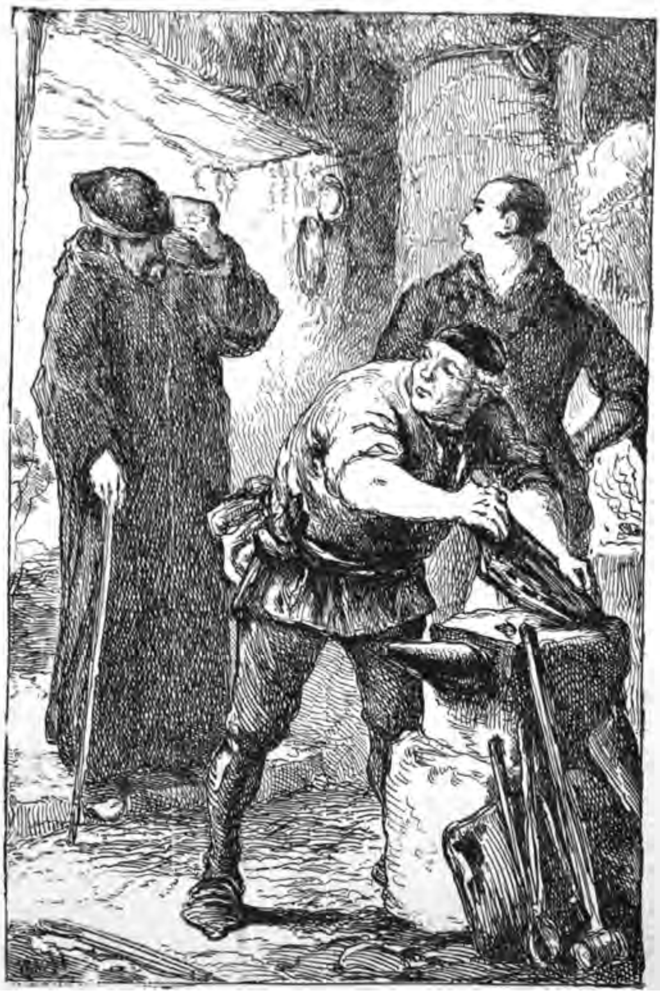

"Bardwell, turning hastily round, saw a tall, spare man, apparently rather past the prime of life." p. 37.

LONDON:
JOHN F. SHAW AND CO.,
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THE

Sword of De Bardwell.

A TALE OF AGINCOURT.

BY

C. M. KATHERINE PHIPPS.

"Their bones are dust;
And their bright swords are rust;
Their souls are with the saints, we trust."

LONDON:
JOHN F. SHAW AND CO.,
48, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

PREFACE.

THE leading idea of the following tale was suggested by an antique sword suspended against the chancel wall of the picturesque little church of Bardwell, Suffolk. This sword, so local legends tell, was once the property of a certain Sir William De Bardwell, Knt., who in the early part of the fifteenth century restored and beautified the sacred edifice, and in many ways approved himself a bounteous benefactor of the parish whence he derived his name.

With these circumstances the writer has been familiar from her earliest childhood; and many vague dreams and marvellous romances were in those by-gone days woven out of these scanty materials.

The sketch of Wingfield Castle and College, the account of the De la Pole family, the description of St. Edmundsbury in its early glory, and the exciting episode of the attempted rescue of James of Scotland, have in far more recent times been gleaned from county histories—the papers of the Suffolk Archæological Society, and from the entrancing pages of Mr. Hepworth Dixon's *Royal Windsor.*

In her brief sketch of a most interesting period of our national history it has been her endeavour "nothing t' extenuate, nor set down aught in malice;" but "to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure;" and she can only, in conclusion, express a hope that some participation in the pleasure which she has experienced whilst composing the narrative may be enjoyed by those who peruse it.

C. M. KATHERINE PHIPPS.

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THE

SWORD OF DE BARDWELL.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANQUET.

THE noonday sun shone brightly on the stately southern entrance of Wingfield Castle, upon the fair April morning on which my story commences. Little more than a year had elapsed since Henry of Monmouth had ascended the English throne, and the young monarch had already become the idol of his people; his youthful follies, and the defective title which he had inherited from his predecessor, alike forgotten in the admiration excited by his brilliant talents and captivating qualities.

The Earl of Suffolk had that morning received as his guest the eldest and favourite brother of his sovereign, the handsome and popular Duke of Clarence, and the spacious banqueting-hall of Wingfield was filled with a noble company, assembled in honour of the occasion.

At the centre of a table, on a raised dais at one end of the hall, sat the youthful prince, supported by his host and hostess. The Earl's beautiful ward, Lady Grace Mowbray, was seated on the other side of her noble guardian, while the remaining places at the high table were occupied by the noblest knights and barons of the neighbourhood, and by the principal members of the Duke of Clarence's suite. These honoured guests were waited upon, according to the custom of the times, by a gallant train of squires and pages, headed by the two sons of the Earl—Michael and William De la Pole; who, after duly performing the duties allotted to them, took their places at a long table in the body of the hall, where they were in their turn waited upon by the yeomen and men-at-arms.

The Duke of Clarence appeared to be in the highest spirits, and conversed freely upon topics of public interest with his noble host, who, wise in counsel and brave in war, was one of the most valued adherents of the royal Henry.

Towards the close of the repast, the conversation turned upon the probability of a speedy rupture with the French court, rumours of which were already in every mouth.

"Ay," said the Duke of Clarence, in answer to a remark of Lord Suffolk's, "before many months have elapsed, I fancy we shall be running a bloody tilt in honour of the fair Catherine de Valois, with the crown of France as the prize for which we strive. Harry is the more eager for the fight, that he invests the lovely young bride proposed to him with all the noble qualities of her sister Isabel, the girl-widow of the unfortunate Richard of Bordeaux. Strange that the memory of that unhappy prince should so strongly have impressed a child of her tender years, as to render her insensible to the attachment of my gallant brother."

"Think you, my lord," enquired Lord Suffolk, "that the young queen believed in the reported escape of her husband from Pontefract, and of his subsequent imprisonment in Scotland?"

"At one time she no doubt did," replied the young prince; "but the mission of Creton seems to have convinced both her and her family of the imposture of the mammet of Scotland, since she has now married her cousin, the young Prince Charles of Orleans."

"Yes," acquiesced Lord Suffolk, "and the recent ceremonial in honour of the reinterment of the unfortunate Richard, with the ample opportunities afforded to all to gaze upon the features of their former sovereign, should have convinced all of the reality of his decease. Yet I believe there are some who maintain that he is still detained by the Duke of Albany in the dungeon of some Scotch castle."

"They little know what they speak of," replied the Duke of Clarence; "were King Richard alive, Harry would not retain the sceptre for a single day. He took his knighthood from the hand of the ill-fated monarch, and has ever retained the most ardent affection for his person and memory."

"So I have heard," said Lord Suffolk. "But, my lord, your highness appears to have completed your repast, and when the loving-cup hath gone round, you will perhaps deign to accompany us to the tennis-court."

This suggestion met with the most joyful acquiescence, the young knights and squires being eager to engage in their favourite pastime. The Duke of Clarence, although, like his brother, a skilled player, preferred on this occasion to remain a passive, but by no means an uninterested, spectator of the feats of others, and with his noble host stood beside the seat provided for the ladies.

Reginald De la Pole, Lord Suffolk's orphan nephew, a delicate youth of about sixteen, also remained at his uncle's side.

For some time the conversation turned chiefly upon the varying circumstances of the game, till the Duke, turning somewhat suddenly to Lord Suffolk, remarked, "The scene before us, my lord, reminds me of the foolish jest of the French Dauphin, in sending my brother a box of tennis-balls in answer to his claims upon the duchies of Normandy and Guienne. You, I presume, have heard of the circumstance?"

"Some rumour of the sort had indeed reached me, my lord," replied Lord Suffolk, "but I could hardly credit the report."

"Nay, it is an over-true tale," replied the Duke, "and Harry swears that he will make the mocking prince rue the day that he sent him such a message; for that when he hath turned the balls to gun-stones, he will strike the crown of France into the hazard. Ha! by my halidom," broke off the lively Duke, "that last ball was well delivered. Who is the tall, dark squire who plays with so much skill? I marked him in the hall just now, but his features are not familiar to me. Does he belong to these parts?"

"Scarcely by birth, my lord; but he was brought here when quite a child by a good priest who resides at our little college yonder. His father, who was a knight, and the owner of some small property on the other side of the county, lost his life during the late troubles, and his mother, as I have heard, died of grief. The boy seemed a likely lad, with a fancy for a martial life, so I took him as companion to my own youngsters. Of late he hath seemed somewhat moody and reserved, and is much alone; I trust he hath not imbibed any dangerous doctrine; but I mind me he was once at Cowlinge with Reggie here, but that was before my unhappy kinsman incurred the displeasure of his majesty."

"Oh, no, uncle!" broke in Reginald eagerly, "Will is good and true; he cannot have been led into heresy or error. Ask Father Cyril about it, and he will tell you that he is ever reverent and devout. He may have some secret trouble;" but here the boy broke off in some confusion, as if he knew not how to complete his sentence.

"But it can be nothing of which he need be ashamed; is that what you would say?" interposed the Duke, kindly. "I can well believe it. My

Lord of Suffolk," he added, turning to his host, "I have some skill in the discernment of character, and never did I see truth and honour written more clearly than upon yonder noble brow, and in the glance of that keen dark eye."

"I trust you may be right, my lord," replied the Earl, "for Father Cyril loves the lad as if he were his own son; and I should myself be grieved did any harm befall him."

"By my troth, and so should I," said the Duke. "We shall need such bold and skilful players in this same French match. But it grows late, and I must take my leave of your lordship, with many thanks for your noble hospitality. We shall meet, I trust, at Leicester, whither Harry is about to summon the Parliament."

The Prince's words occasioned a general move to the courtyard. Horses were brought forth for the two young De la Poles, who were to escort the Duke to the confines of their father's property. A scene of some confusion arose in the crowded court, under cover of which Michael de la Pole contrived to approach a tall fair-haired girl, the daughter of one of his father's guests, who was standing somewhat apart from the rest of the company.

"Alice," said the young heir of Suffolk, in a low, tender, half-reproachful voice, "why are you so cruel? During the whole afternoon you have avoided me; and yet you know that I must shortly leave Wingfield, to join the household of my young Lord of Gloucester, and that, should this war break out, it may be months ere we shall meet again. Will you not at least reward my constant devotion with some slight token of your favour—a glove, a ribbon, or, dare I say it, a lock of that golden hair?"

"Alas! my lord," replied the maiden, "I would fain persuade you to cease these vain entreaties, and to seek a worthier bride than the portionless daughter of so poor a knight as my noble father can ever prove. Besides," she added, lightly touching the blue breast-knot which was almost her only ornament, "I am, as you are well aware, the destined bride of the Church, devoted from my childhood to the service of the blessed Virgin."

"Nay, but, Alice," pleaded the youth passionately, "such vows as yours, unrenewed in maturer life, can never be held binding, and ought not to be weighed against the happiness of both our lives. Yes, of *both*," he added, noticing her gesture of dissent, "for you love me, Alice; I know it in spite of your cold demeanour; you love me. It is impossible that you should be insensible to the passionate devotion which from my earliest boyhood has rendered me your slave."

"Oh! hush, hush, my lord," entreated Alice, "what words are these for you to speak, or for me to hear! Bethink you of your father, my lord, and of the honoured place which you must one day hold among the great ones of the land. But see, the Prince is already in the saddle; the stirrup-cup is about to be brought forth. Do not, I implore you, linger any longer."

"Give me the token," he urged; "be it, if you will, as a pledge of your pardon for my importunity, a memorial of our ancient friendship."

"*On those conditions*, my lord," she answered with marked emphasis, loosening as she spoke the knot of blue ribbon to which allusion has already been made—"*on those conditions, and on those alone*, it is yours."

"Farewell! may Heaven and all the blessed saints watch over you." The youth imprinted a passionate kiss upon the fair hand extended towards him, and hastily securing the precious token, he vaulted into the saddle and prepared to follow the Duke of Clarence across the drawbridge, which had already been lowered.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER CYRIL AND HIS PUPIL.

THE family of De la Pole had acquired the exalted rank which they held, during the half century preceding the period in which the events now to be related occurred.

The first Earl, Michael, the friend of Simon de Burley, had, like that bold warrior, been a faithful follower of the illustrious Black Prince, who on his death-bed had commended his son, Richard of Bordeaux, to the care of these valued servants. During the reign of that ill-fated sovereign, they had been placed in situations of great honour and emolument, and Michael's desire for rank and title had been gratified by his creation as Baron De la Pole and Earl of Suffolk.

These honours, heaped upon the head of a merchant's son (such was Michael's origin), aroused the jealous indignation of the old nobility, who, headed by the King's uncles, the Dukes of Lancaster and Gloucester, declared that all rule and order in the peerage had been violated by these creations.

In the Parliament of 1386, Pole's administration as Chancellor was violently attacked by the Duke of Gloucester. He was impeached, deprived of his honours and offices, and sentenced to imprisonment during the King's pleasure. Some time later he contrived to escape to France, where he died in exile. During the brief reaction which followed the downfall and murder of the Duke of Gloucester, his son was restored to all the titles and estates forfeited through the attainder of his father. Prudently avoiding all participation in the contentions which accompanied the return of Bolingbroke, the new Earl had acquired the confidence of the first two monarchs of the house of Lancaster, nor, at the time of which I write, did any English nobleman stand more highly in the opinion of his youthful sovereign.

After the suppression of the rebellion of the northern earls, Grace de Mowbray, the only daughter of one of the chief leaders of that ill-fated movement, was committed by King Henry to the care of the Earl of Suffolk.

Grace, at that time a beautiful and engaging child, over whose golden head twelve summers had passed lightly away, took up her residence beneath the roof of her noble guardian, where she grew up in habits of daily intercourse with the three young De la Poles, and with their companion in sport and study, William De Bardwell, "the tall dark squire" who had attracted the attention of the Duke of Clarence. Some similarity in their early history, perhaps, first created a bond of sympathy between the bold-spirited youth and the gentle maiden. For De Bardwell's father had forfeited life and lands through his participation in the abortive conspiracy of the Earls of Huntingdon, Salisbury, and Kent; his hall had been burned down by an ambitious rival, his young widow had perished in the flames, and her infant son had only been saved from a similar fate by the devotion of an old retainer, and the charity of the good priest of the parish.

Brought to Wingfield by the reverend Father, young De Bardwell was destined by his kind protector for the ecclesiastical profession; but the martial spirit of his forefathers, fostered by the stirring stories of old Ralph the armourer (the retainer above alluded to, who had accompanied his young master to Wingfield), was strong within the lad, and Father Cyril, wisely and generously relinquishing his own favourite project, sought and procured the admission of his pupil into the household of the Earl of Suffolk.

Upon the accession of Henry V., the forfeited estates of political offenders were restored to the representatives of their respective families. The beautiful and interesting orphan, Grace De Mowbray, suddenly became one of the wealthiest heiresses in the kingdom, and the Earl and Countess were, not unnaturally perhaps, anxious to secure her hand and fortune by a matrimonial alliance with one of their sons. Unknown to his parents, the young heir of Suffolk had already bestowed his love upon Alicia D'Hervé, the daughter of a poor but gallant knight, residing in the neighbourhood of Wingfield.

Equally unaware were the Earl and Countess of the strong mutual attachment which had grown up between their beautiful ward and the young dependent upon their bounties, William De Bardwell. Indeed, the squire and the maiden were perhaps hardly conscious of the strength of their own feelings, until the eyes of the former were rudely opened by the change of fortune, which seemed to place an impassable gulf between him and Grace; when the sudden reserve and distant coldness by which the youth sought to conceal sentiments which he knew it would be impossible to stifle, revealed to the maiden the condition of her own heart.

Grace grieved and marvelled over the changed demeanour of her formerly blithe companion, and it was long ere she divined the true cause of his altered behaviour.

Verifying the saying, that on-lookers see most of the game, Reginald De la Pole was the only member of the family circle who fully appreciated all the circumstances of the situation. Debarred by the delicacy of his constitution from any active share in the sports and occupations appropriate to his age, this lad had grown up with an unusual degree of thought and consideration. Treated by his cousins with rough, if not unkindly, contempt, the generous tenderness which Bardwell had always shown towards his weakness had inspired the boy with the most ardent affection for his kind protector, and it was with sincere grief that he saw gloom and despondency overshadow the manly brow he so much loved to gaze upon. With the instinct of affection, he had long discovered the nature of Bardwell's feelings towards their beautiful companion, and he longed, although at present ineffectually, to remove the obstacles which severed his friend from the object of his desire.

But the pangs of disappointed love were not the only cares which weighed down the spirit of De Bardwell. During his residence beneath the roof of Sir John Oldcastle, the young squire could hardly fail to be deeply struck by the noble qualities of that great leader of the Lollard party. Many of the tenets of the Reformers indeed jarred against the reverential feelings of Father Cyril's favourite pupil, but his open and candid mind could not refuse its meed of admiring pity for the zeal of these men, and for their self-sacrificing devotion to the cause which they had espoused, and the truth of which they were ready to seal with their blood.

The trial and imprisonment of Lord Cobham produced a powerful effect upon the young man's mind. He heard with a thrill of exultation of the escape of the revered Wycliffite from the Tower, but his rejoicing was soon overclouded by the tidings of Sir John Oldcastle's rebellion against his sovereign; for, young, ardent, and ambitious, our hero fully shared in the enthusiastic admiration with which Henry of Monmouth was regarded by all classes of his subjects. Such, then, was the situation of affairs at the time when my story commences.

A few hours after the departure of the Duke of Clarence from Wingfield, the tall form of William De Bardwell might have been seen traversing with hasty strides the stately avenue of beech-trees leading from the castle gate to the grey old parish church, close to which a picturesque collegiate building had been recently erected, as a Latin inscription, surmounting the low stone porch, informed the wayfarer :—"In pious memory of Sir John De Wingfield, Kt., on whose soul may God have mercy."

Beneath this low grey porch sat an old man, wrapped in the coarse white mantle of the Benedictine order, gazing with thoughtful, far-off gaze upon the smiling landscape spread out before him. He turned with a smile of cordial welcome to greet the young squire's approach, but a look of pain came into his placid blue eyes as he marked the dark cloud of gloom and despondency which darkened the brow of his favourite.

"Father!" exclaimed the young man impetuously, throwing himself on the ground beside the ecclesiastic, "it is of no use; I can no longer endure this life. To be ever near *her*—her whom my soul adores—and yet never to breathe one word of that passion with which my heart is filled; scarcely to venture to approach her, lest she should read in my fervent glance the sentiments on which I compel my tongue to be silent; it is more than I can endure. I must leave Wingfield, where, save Reginald, there will be none to miss me, and seek amid other scenes—not to *forget her;* no! that were indeed an impossible task; but to restrain my own passion, until perchance good fortune and my father's sword may raise me to a position from which I may with honour address her."

Father Cyril (such was the monk's appellation) cast upon his young companion a glance of affectionate compassion. "And how, my son," he enquired, in low, grave tones, "would you propose to effect your purpose? Whither would you turn your steps when you shall have left this home of your youth?"

"In truth, I hardly know, Father," replied the youth frankly. "I had at one time thought of joining Sir John Oldcastle amid the fastnesses of the Welsh mountains; but he, as I hear, hath raised the standard of revolt, and I should hesitate ere I took part in rebellion. Perhaps in the neighbourhood of my father's home, some knight or noble might be found who, for the memory of former days, would give safe asylum and the means of honourable employment to the son of an old companion in arms. You, Father, could, I think, assist me in my endeavour, if you would give me letters of introduction to the good Abbot of S. Edmundsbury."

The priest gazed kindly and thoughtfully into the eager upturned face of his young companion. "But, my son," said he, "the times of dissension and tumult are happily at an end, and I see little probability of your gaining by prowess in arms a position which should entitle you to address words of love to so rich an heiress as Lady Grace De Mowbray."

"Nay, Father," replied the lad, "the days of civil discord and dissension are indeed happily past, and Englishmen are no longer led to the field of battle to shed each other's blood; but soon, such is the intelligence brought by the Duke of Clarence, the fertile fields of France shall re-echo to the old war cry, 'St. George for merry England!' The glorious days of Crecy, Calais, Poitiers, and Navaretta shall be revived; and then, oh, then, my

Father, the sword of De Bardwell may carve out for its owner a way to fame and fortune!"

The old man was silent for some moments ere he replied, with grave, almost sorrowful, kindness: "I cannot altogether deny the force of your reasoning, my son; but the Earl of Suffolk, the generous patron of your boyhood and youth, will be one of the most prominent leaders in King Henry's army; why not seek under *his* banner to attain the objects of your ambition?"

"Father," replied the young man sadly, "because I can no longer endure the covert sneers of William De la Pole, the careless contempt of Michael. Besides, even my noble patron hath, or I am much mistaken, grown cold in his behaviour towards me. No, Father, believe me, it is better that I should go forth. If you can aid me in my enterprise, you will add another favour to the load of benefits which already claim the gratitude of the friendless orphan who owes to you his life, his education, his everything."

"Nay, nay, my dear son, you must not speak thus. You well know my willingness to do for you all that the tenderest love of a father's heart could suggest. I will reflect upon what you have said, and it may be that I shall be able to assist your purpose. Meanwhile, farewell, and may God and the blessed saints have you in their keeping."

The youth knelt reverently to receive the benediction of his fatherly friend; then, silently rising, left the college.

CHAPTER III.

THE FORGE.

IN the meanwhile the two young De la Poles, having escorted the Duke of Clarence to the confines of their father's property, were returning slowly homeward, when the following conversation took place between them.

"Mike," began the younger brother, "I see you have not yet got the better of your admiration for old D'Hervé's daughter. How, think you, will you be able to communicate your infatuation to my father, who evidently expects you to make love to the beautiful heiress?"

"Nay, Will," replied the other with a careless laugh, "Grace and I have ever been good friends, as you know, but it has been after the manner of brother and sister; to think of any tenderer feeling between us were impossible, even were not my love wholly given to another. I shall be sorry to disappoint my father; but, after all, the heiress may be a prize for you, old fellow. The heir of Suffolk has no need to seek a fortune with his bride."

William De la Pole shrugged his shoulders. "The opinions of two, or perhaps three, parties must be consulted respecting the bargain you arrange so glibly; mine, the lady's, and last, but by no means least, the Earl our father's. For my own part it may seem no hard task to pay court to a young and beautiful girl, the owner of a splendid fortune (which a poor wretch of a younger brother cannot afford to disregard); for the lady, I well believe that she can hardly abide me, and I shrewdly suspect that she loves another. But what of that? Feminine prejudices may be overcome, and, as our neighbours over the water say, 'In love matters it is well to begin with a little aversion'—on one side, be it understood. But now comes the most difficult matter, the Earl's anger when he finds his favourite scheme traversed for the sake of (forgive me, Mike) the portionless daughter of a needy knight. I own that I see no probability of obtaining his approval."

"You are mistaken, Will; my father may be proud, but he is also both just and generous. Besides, he cannot fail to love Alicia as though she were his own daughter."

"Why, then," was the not unnatural question, "do you put off the auspicious day when you may present her to him in that character?"

"Alas!" replied the elder brother sadly, "because I have not yet been able to obtain my fair one's permission to make such a communication. But, Will, you hinted just now that Grace Mowbray had already contracted an affection for another man, which might prove a formidable obstacle to any suit of yours. Surely this can scarcely be the case; consider the secluded life which she has led. Why she has held intercourse with none save with ourselves."

"Even so, my most experienced brother; but what should hinder the melting strains of Reginald's minstrelsy from softening the maiden's heart? Why may not Bardwell's manly eloquence have pleased her ear? or your own splendid prospects have aroused her ambitious longings?"

"Pshaw," replied Michael, disdainfully, I have already told you that the intercourse between Grace and myself hath been that of affectionate kinsfolk. Reginald is, as you well know, destined to the ecclesiastical profession; while as for Bardwell, the idea is too absurd to be entertained for an instant. Besides, he avoids her society in the most apparent fashion."

"He does," acquiesced the younger De la Pole, "and yet," he murmured between his closed teeth, "and yet I am convinced that there is a secret understanding between them. But," he proceeded aloud, "since such is the case, and since the fair Alicia is so extremely coy, why do not you, my dear Mike, by a vigorous effort, overcome your early fancy, and at the same time pleasure my father and advance your own interest by paying your court to the beautiful heiress."

"Silence, boy!" exclaimed Michael, with unwonted passion. "You little know the strength of the feeling of which you speak so lightly! Overcome my fancy, indeed! Know that I have sworn that no other woman save Alicia D'Hervé shall ever reign in my heart, or influence my life. But enough of this, and since the evening closes in apace, and we are at some distance from home, were it not better that we should press forward a little faster?"

The pace was accordingly quickened to a fast trot, which put an end to all further conversation.

They did not draw rein or slacken speed until they had approached the confines of Wingfield Chase. By the edge of a small plantation, at some little distance from the road on which the young men were travelling, two figures were dimly discernible in the gathering twilight.

"Unless mine eyes deceive me," remarked William De la Pole, in a somewhat significant tone, "yonder stands our trusty Bardwell. I marvel what brings him from home so late in the evening."

"The plantation," answered Michael, carelessly, "is not far from the forge, and Bardwell will often pass an idle hour in listening to old Ralph's stories."

"He had a strange companion this evening," pursued William; "one who was closely wrapped in a long dark mantle, as though anxious to escape observation."

"Or more likely desirous to protect himself against the chill evening air. You are growing suspicious, Will. The stranger is most likely a wandering pilgrim or travelling pedlar, who stopped to enquire his road or to ascertain where he could procure a night's lodging."

They were by this time riding slowly up the broad avenue already alluded to. The drawbridge was lowered at their approach, and they were soon standing before the great entrance to the castle. At the same moment the bell clanged out its noisy summons to the evening meal, and William De Bardwell, who had just reached the door, stood aside to allow them to enter.

"You are late home, Master Bardwell," said the young heir of Suffolk, as he passed into the house.

"Yes, my lord," replied the squire. "I went to visit Father Cyril at the college, and afterwards transacted some business with Ralph the armourer."

"Oh," rejoined Michael, "we thought we recognized your figure near the copse by the forge. You must have walked quickly."

Bardwell made no answer to this remark, and the three young men, entering the hall together, took in silence the seats allotted to them at the supper-table.

As the conversation which enlivened the evening meal at Wingfield Castle had little bearing upon the progress of my story, I will, with my reader's kind permission, leave the company in undisturbed enjoyment, while I relate the proceedings and adventures of my hero on that eventful afternoon.

William De Bardwell, after taking leave of

Father Cyril in the doorway of the college, passed swiftly through the long, straggling village, tenanted by the retainers of the Earl of Suffolk, until he reached the forge and quiet homestead of his old friend, Ralph the armourer, which stood a little apart from the other dwellings, on the edge of a breezy common, but was sheltered from the cold north-easterly blasts by the little fir plantation above alluded to. Ralph's skilful workmanship had long since secured for him the principal custom of all the country side; whilst the stirring stories which he was able to relate of daring deeds by field or flood, rendered his forge the popular resort of the younger members of the community. Bardwell, the son of his former patron and commander, the boy over whose infant sports he had watched with almost parental pride and affection, was an ever-welcome guest beneath the old man's roof.

"Busy as ever, Ralph," exclaimed the young squire as he drew near to the forge, where the sounding anvil did indeed give audible tokens of the workman's industry. "Well, I shall soon, I trust, call upon you to furnish me with hauberk and beaver for my first campaign."

"Your first campaign, my young master? Ah, well-a-day," said Ralph, "would that I could see you go forth, like your brave sire, at the head of a gallant band of your own vassals. But against whom is your first assay in arms to be directed? I trust that your father's sword is to be employed in no ruining or plundering warfare."

"Nay, Ralph," replied the squire, "you should remember how sternly Lord Suffolk's household are prohibited from taking part in such dishonourable transactions; and 'tis said King Harry's own rules are equally strict. No; I trust the faithful steel which my father used so valiantly shall once again be wielded against the ancient enemies of our country; for the King is, I hear, determined to advance the claims on the crown of France which he inherits from his great-grandfather, of glorious memory, King Edward of Windsor."

"*His* claims forsooth," muttered Ralph contemptuously; "the claims of Bolingbroke's son. Well, well; times are sadly changed when your father's son is fain to seek honour and distinction beneath the standard of the usurping house of Lancaster."

"Nay, but, Ralph," remonstrated Bardwell, "bethink you, when the leopards of England are in the field against the golden lilies of France, were it not foul shame for the heir of Bardwell to remain in inglorious idleness? Surely the memory of my father's prowess, the love of my country's fame, should drive me to the field of battle, even without the hope of achieving personal distinction."

"Ay, ay, lad," said Ralph; "all this may be very true; but I am an old man now, and I cannot but mind me of former days, when your father was one of the Black Prince's own band of knights. Oh, had that gallant Prince but lived a few years longer, what a different world had this been to many of us! Poor little Lord Richard of Bordeaux too; I remember him well; a beautiful boy he was, and a brave, though all too fond of pleasure. He fell into evil hands, and then Harry of Bolingbroke stole away the hearts of the people, and——"

"Good evening, gentlemen," said a deep but not unmusical voice behind them. "Can you direct me to some hostelry or other place of entertainment for tired wayfarers, for I have——"

Bardwell, turning hastily round, saw a tall, spare man, apparently rather past the prime of life. The stranger's form was wrapped in a long brown mantle, similar to that worn by the Franciscan friars; the upper part of his countenance was almost concealed by the broad brim of his shadowy hat, and he bore upon his shoulder a square package or parcel, which seemed to be of considerable weight.

The squire was at first about to direct the new-comer to the college, where the good Fathers were ever ready to exercise the duties of hospitality enjoined by the rules of their order, but something in the appearance of the stranger reminded him so strongly of the Lollard preachers, or poor priests, whom he had met during his residence at Cowlinge, that, acting upon a sudden impulse for which he was unable to account, he made the signal by which the members of the Reformed party were accustomed to recognize each other. The appropriate countersign was promptly returned, and at the same time convinced Bardwell of the correctness of his surmise, and threw him into the utmost perplexity as to the course which he must now pursue.

To send a Lollard preacher to a college of Benedictine priests was impossible, nor would much less risk have attended his introduction into the orthodox household of the Earl of Suffolk; but the nearest hostelry was at a distance of ten miles, and the gathering shades of evening, and his own evidently exhausted condition, alike forbade any such addition to the traveller's journey. Could

Ralph be persuaded to give him a night's lodging? His comfortable home was, as has been already observed, at a little distance from the rest of the village; he, as Bardwell well knew, had a clean and well-ordered guest-chamber always in readiness; above all, his attachment to the young esquire, whom he regarded as his foster son, was intense, while the feudal ties which bound him to Lord Suffolk were comparatively weak. It seemed the best, indeed the only, way out of the dilemma, and our hero resolved to make the attempt.

Drawing the old smith on one side, he told him that he was about to put his devotion to a severe test. For reasons, he said, which it was perhaps better not to enter into more particularly—here he almost involuntarily glanced at the square pack which the stranger bore—he felt sure that it would be inexpedient to send the traveller to the college; yet what was to be done? He could not proceed much further on his journey to-night; would Ralph, Bardwell asked, from motives of affection for himself, and of humanity towards the stranger, allow the latter to share his evening meal, and to spend the night beneath the shelter of his roof?

At first Ralph shook his head. "No, no, Master Bardwell," said he; "I'll be no party to any such proceedings. Not but that he, or any other decent wayfarer, should be kindly welcome to their bit and sup, and to lie down on a bed which, though I says it myself, is as clean and as wholesome as any in the country side, that it be; but what I 'm a-thinking on, Master Bardwell, is the mischief that may arise should this matter come to the Earl's ears, as, with all those chattering pies down there" (and he made a scornful gesture in the direction of the village), "it is like enough to do."

"Very well, Ralph," said Bardwell, affecting to misunderstand the old man's meaning, "since you are afraid of the risk, *I* must take it upon myself. I cannot allow this stranger to fall ill, perhaps to perish by the wayside, for lack of assistance, and I must conceal him in my own apartment at the castle. You will, I am sure, not refuse to shelter him until the gathering darkness may permit his entrance thither with less danger of observation, and will afford him the refreshment of which he stands in need."

"Now, now, my young master," expostulated the old man, "can you think that it was of danger to myself that I thought? What could Lord Suffolk's anger do to me? I am like an old and blasted trunk, whose fairest branches have been carried away by the storm. With wife and children gone, why should I care for life, or seek to shun the wrath of man? It was of you that I thought; of you, the image of my dear old master; of you, whose young life is so full of promise and hope, which would all be cut off were you to be reported as a favourer and abettor of the new doctrine. Ay, I know well what I am speaking about. I marked your secret signals with yonder stranger, and I can form a shrewd guess at the contents of his pack. But since better may not be, I am content to entertain him for the night, and we must trust that the matter may remain a secret. But mark my words, Master Bardwell, I'm a plain man, and not one given to meddle with those who are wishing for change. The religion that served my father, and my father's father, ay, and his father too, for all I know, is good enough for me. I'll have no preachment here, and yonder pack (he eyed the offending parcel as though expecting it to explode suddenly) must not be opened under my roof; and the traveller must resume his journey with the morning light, and promise never to mention the place where he sojourns this night."

"Thanks, Ralph," said Bardwell, much relieved; "I will endeavour to obtain the stranger's consent to your conditions, which appear to me both just and reasonable."

The young squire then approached the stranger, and persuading him to accompany him to the little copse, stood there with him for a few minutes, engaged in earnest conversation, all unconscious that he was attracting the attention of the young De la Poles. At the close of this colloquy they returned to the forge, and the traveller, in brief but courteous phrase, signified his grateful acceptance of Ralph's proffered hospitality.

"Farewell, then, sir," said Bardwell; "I leave you in good hands, and shall hope to see you in the morning."

"Let it be early then," growled Ralph, who was only half satisfied with the arrangement. "And now make haste, Master Bardwell, or the castle gates will be closed against you, and then——"

"Nay, nay, Ralph," laughed Bardwell; "I know a short cut through the chase, and will be at the door before the sounding of the supper-bell. Once more, good evening."

And he bounded up the avenue at a rapid rate, which, as we have seen, just enabled him to effect his purpose.

CHAPTER IV.

A DISCOVERY.

ON the following morning, very early, before the first gleam of light was seen in the east, Bardwell left the castle by a small postern door, and once more wended his way to the armourer's dwelling. A dark, cold mist hung like a wet blanket over the whole country, while the searching easterly wind pierced through to the young squire's bones, despite the thick folds of the horseman's cloak which he had wrapped closely around him. It was, in fact, what, in the expressive dialect of the country, would be denominated "a very rafty morning." Early as it was, the resounding anvil proved that Ralph was already at his work.

"Good morning, Ralph," cried Bardwell; "you are up betimes, I see. Then, as he drew nearer, and perceived the unusual cloud of care and anxiety which hung about the old man's wrinkled brow, he added in a lower tone, "What is the matter, old friend? How fares your guest? Hath he already started upon his journey?"

"Started upon his journey, indeed," said Ralph, in answer to the last enquiry; "no, nor is he like to, so far as I can see. Matter, quoth a? matter enough I trow, to have my honest house turned into a hospital for sick heretics. There he is, moaning with pain whenever he tries to move, upon the couch in my guest-chamber. I have gathered a few simples out of my garden, and Marjory is making him a drink, but what more to do I wot not. I dare not send for the leech, lest the matter should get blazed abroad. Ah, well-a-day! good lack, good lack!"

And the old smith, with a mournful gesture more expressive than words, turned once more to his work.

"Indeed, Ralph," said Bardwell, in a tone of deep concern, "I am most grieved at this. I trust, however, that it may prove to be only a passing ailment, brought on by over-fatigue, and that a day's rest may so far restore the stranger that he may be able to resume his journey. Meanwhile, may I go up and see him? I learnt some leechcraft from Father Cyril in days gone by, and I may perhaps be able to afford him some relief."

Ralph led the way to a small but scrupulously neat apartment at the top of the house, the window of which overlooked the fruitful valley of the Orwell. There Bardwell found his acquaintance of the evening before stretched on a low pallet bed, his pack placed under his head, and his brown mantle serving as a coverlet. The Lollard's hazel eyes were bright with feverish light, and his hands, which were small and finely shaped, moved restlessly about. His forehead, which had been habitually shielded by his hat, was delicately fair, and contrasted strongly with the sunburnt and weather-beaten appearance of those features which had been exposed to all the inclemency of the changing seasons.

With Ralph's assistance Bardwell succeeded in placing the sufferer in a more comfortable posture, and the armourer's daughter entering at the next moment with the simple but fragrant remedy which she had prepared, the young man took it from her hand with a well-merited compliment on her skill. Marjory blushed hotly as she replied that "it was a remedy which Lady Grace had told her was much valued in cases of fever, and that the plants from which it was made had been given her from the castle garden;" for the armourer's daughter had spent some months at the castle as attendant and humble companion to the Lady Grace, who had always treated the gentle-mannered maiden with the kindest consideration.

When every attention allowed by the circumstances of the case had been paid to the comfort of the sufferer, Ralph and his daughter returned to their several occupations, while Bardwell, seating himself beside the couch of his new acquaintance, expressed his admiration for the courage and endurance which had enabled him, in spite of the approach of so painful an attack, to continue his difficult and toilsome journey.

The Lollard smiled gravely. "My son," said he, many years ago I learnt to endure hardness beneath the banner of an earthly commander; shall I then shrink from suffering in the service of the heavenly Leader, beneath whose standard I have now enlisted?"

The young man regarded the stranger with interest and curiosity. "You have then been a soldier, sir?" he hazarded, in a tone between enquiry and assertion.

"Yes, my son," replied the Lollard; "and in battles whose history will be recorded in the annals of our country, the name which I then bore was not altogether unknown to fame. But those days are over now, and I desire only to contend in that hardest and most honourable warfare, the fight of faith, the heavenly combat. No longer do I desire that my fame should be spread abroad amongst men, being solicitous only that my name should be written in the Book of Life."

Bardwell gazed at him in silence; he longed to hear more, but a feeling of awed astonishment forbade him to renew his enquiries.

Presently the stranger resumed, speaking apparently rather to himself than to his companion. "Yes, I have endeavoured to put away from me all carnal affections and worldly desires, yet something of this earth clings to me still, as is shown in my presence at this place." Then, turning suddenly to the young squire, he asked abruptly, "Doth not Grace Mowbray live here?"

Bardwell, surprised and somewhat offended at this curt allusion to the lady of his love, answered with as much dignified coldness as he could throw into his tone, "That the *Lady* Grace Mowbray, the

Earl of Suffolk's ward, *did* reside beneath the roof of her noble guardian."

A smile of peculiar meaning passed across the Lollard's countenance. "Strange are the changes of this life," he said musingly; "the infant whom I carried in my arms in days gone by is now a noble lady and a great heiress, of whom the poor Lollard preacher must speak with the deepest respect."

"Were you then acquainted with the Lady Grace's father?" exclaimed Bardwell. "Was it under his banner that you gained the distinction of which you speak?"

Again the same strange smile flitted across the sick man's face. "Ay, ay," he said, "I have fought beneath the standard of De Mowbray; and the Lady Grace's father," he added slowly and impressively, "was my brother in arms," he concluded after a slight pause.

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of old Ralph, who, apprehensive lest the young squire's prolonged absence should give rise to inconvenient enquiries, besought him to return to the castle.

"In a few moments, Ralph," said Bardwell, and bending over the couch he said in a low tone, "I fear I must leave you for the present, father, but ere I go let me ask you whether you have received any tidings from the Lord Cobham?"

"I left him, scarcely a week ago, in health and safety among the mountains of Wales," replied the Reformer, "and I trust that heaven will continue to preserve him from the bloodhounds who are upon his track. I have letters from him which should be delivered with all speed, and——"

Here Ralph's solicitations became so importunate that Bardwell was obliged to yield to them, and to take a hasty leave of the sick man, promising to repeat his visit at the earliest opportunity.

Several days passed without any event calling for especial notice. Bardwell spent much of his time with Henry Fitz-Thomas (the name by which the Lollard desired to be addressed), deriving ever-increasing pleasure from his society and conversation, while his connection with the family of De Mowbray continued as great a mystery as ever to his young companion.

At length one evening the mystery was explained in a most unexpected manner. The Lollard, now nearly recovered from his sickness, had strolled into the little copse which, as has been already mentioned, stood near the armourer's cottage. Grace Mowbray, who was in the habit of visiting the sick and afflicted in the village, being tempted by the beauty of the evening to prolong her walk after performing her benevolent errand, bethought her that it was sometime since she had seen her former bower-maiden, and resolved to call at the armourer's dwelling. On her way thither she also passed through the little plantation, close to the spot on which Bardwell and the Lollard were standing. A courteous inclination to the young squire, a hasty glance at his companion as they stood aside to allow her to pass, and she was gone. But when Bardwell's eyes, which had followed her retreating form as long as it remained within his range of vision, returned to the countenance of his companion, the youth was astonished at the change which during these few moments had been wrought in its expression. Admiration, thankfulness, tender affection, were all depicted in the most vivid characters, and, evidently unconscious of his companion's observation, the Lollard clasped his still feeble hands together, exclaiming, "My God, I thank thee that thou hast permitted me to see her! Make her as good as she is beautiful; the only child of my beloved brother."

"Your brother?" cried Bardwell in amazement; "your brother? Mr. Fitz-Thomas, is it, can it be possible? Ah!" he exclaimed, a sudden light breaking upon his mind; "can it be that in these coarse garments, under that humble appellation, the noble Lord Henry De Mowbray has been concealed?"

The squire's exclamation aroused the Lollard as from a trance. "It is true," he said; "you have solved the mystery which I had intended to have kept locked in my own breast. But my secret is safe with you,—you noble youth. After treachery had lured my unhappy brother to his death, I, who had been at his side through the whole of his ill-fated enterprise, escaped with difficulty from the fate which had overtaken him. For many days I wandered about, homeless, friendless, pursued by blood-thirsty enemies, and hardly daring to approach any human habitation. At length, when in the neighbourhood of Cowlinge, hunger overcame my fears, and I prayed for food and shelter. How my prayer was answered you, who know the nobility of Sir John Oldcastle's character, can easily imagine. My bodily wants were cared for with the most generous consideration, although Sir John was at that time one of the most illustrious leaders in the army of Bolingbroke. But far greater benefits did I receive during my residence at Cowlinge than the supply, however generous and timely, of my bodily wants. I entered its walls a proud, discontented, angry man, murmuring and, in heart at least, rebelling against the decrees of Providence. I left that abode of peace and holiness, by God's grace, a changed character; my mind enlightened by the holy doctrine of the saintly Wycliffe, my thoughts and aspirations elevated by the example of his worthy disciples and followers. But I feel my strength give way, and I must ask you to return with me to my lodgings."

On the threshold they encountered Grace, accompanied by Marjory. Once more the strange relatives, the beautiful heiress and the outcast heretic preacher, met face to face. An uncontrollable longing to hear the voice of his niece came over the Lollard, and raising his attenuated hand with a gesture of natural dignity he said, "Will you permit an old man, who knew and loved your father, to say, Heaven bless you, lady?"

Somewhat startled, Grace replied in a low, sweet voice, "I thank you, sir." Then, observing the deadly pallor which had overspread the stranger's face, she added, "But I fear you are ill—suffering; can nothing be done to relieve you?"

"Fear not, lady," said Bardwell, reassuringly; "this gentleman is but just recovering from a severe illness, and he has this evening somewhat overtaxed his strength. But you were about to return to the castle; may I be permitted to offer my escort?"

"I shall be most happy to accept it, Master Bardwell," replied the maiden, with more than ordinary cordiality in her tone. "Farewell, dear Marjory. Master Bardwell's courtesy will save you from a long walk; but we shall, I trust, meet again soon. Good-bye, sir," she added, turning to the Lollard; "I will pray that your health may be speedily restored. Good evening, Ralph."

Bardwell having also exchanged suitable farewell greetings with the inmates of the cottage, he and Grace started upon their homeward walk, which they pursued for some distance in silence, each absorbed in his or her own thoughts, and perhaps satisfied with the rapturous sense of the other's nearness.

Grace was the first to speak. "Is it not strange," said she, "that the aspect of one whom I saw to-day for the first time should have awakened in my breast the deepest sense of interest? Almost stranger, that something in his features, and in the tone of his voice, should seem perfectly familiar to my mind? I suppose it must be because he, as he said, knew and loved my dear father."

Bardwell made some rather confused answer about the force of unaccountable sympathy, while something of the thought which has been so well expressed by the venerable author of the *Christian Year* rose unbidden to his mind—

"No distance breaks the tie of blood:
Brothers are brothers evermore;
Nor wrong, nor wrath of deadliest mood,
That magic may o'erpower.
Oft, ere the common source be known,
The kindred drops will claim their own,
And throbbing pulses silently
Move heart towards heart by sympathy."

The young squire would probably have been unable to clothe his ideas in suitable language even had he not been restrained by the fear of betraying the confidence reposed in him by the Lollard. He hastily changed the subject of conversation by asking some trivial question concerning Grace's employments and amusements during the day.

"Ah, Master Bardwell," she replied with playful reproach, more pleasing to the young man's ear than the softest flattery, "you have been a sad truant of late, and Chaucer's lays have remained idly on the shelf for lack of their gifted interpreter."

"Indeed, madam," said the squire, "could I have imagined it possible that my absence would have occasioned you any deprivation, I would have endeavoured——"

"To have foregone some of old Ralph's tales? to have restrained your interest in the manufacture of the hauberk and cuirass, which are to excite the envy of all your warlike contemporaries? Nay, Master Bardwell, *such* a sacrifice could hardly have been expected at your hands."

"Madam," replied the squire, half offended and half gratified, "you well know that I could deem no price too high for the privilege of being in your company, much more for the satisfaction of contributing in the slightest degree to your enjoyment. My time, however, has not been passed in the manner you suppose; it has been chiefly spent beside the sick-bed of——"

"Of my interesting stranger? Is it indeed so, Master Bardwell? Nay, then, for *his* sake I must needs grant you absolution for the past, on condition that for the future you pay somewhat more regard to the claims of your older friends."

In such light conversation the moments sped all too swiftly—moments of happiness such as rarely brighten the pathway of life. The old familiar intercourse of former days seemed restored; the cold reserve which had of late interposed an icy barrier between them was for awhile removed. How often in the years that were to come would William De Bardwell look back with tender regret to that evening walk beneath the beech-trees of Wingfield Chase. Ah me! how many of us have had cause to re-echo thè lament of the poet:

"Break, break, break! at the foot of thy crags, O sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

CHAPTER V.

THE EARL'S ANGER.

ON the following morning a messenger in the royal livery arrived at Wingfield, and remained for several hours closeted with Lord Suffolk. The tidings which he communicated were apparently displeasing to the Earl, who descended to the midday meal with a gloomy cloud overshadowing his usually open and genial countenance, and whose manner showed such evident tokens of mental perturbation as could not fail to influence the rest of the company. The hour passed almost in silence, and the ladies rose from the board and returned to their own apartments.

The young men were about to withdraw from the hall, and to resume their several occupations and amusements, when the Earl sternly commanded them to follow him to his room, as he had a communication of importance to address to them. Much surprised, they all instantly obeyed, Bardwell alone having any suspicion as to the cause of this unexpected summons.

"Young gentlemen," said Lord Suffolk when he had taken his seat upon his favourite oak chair of curious workmanship; "young gentlemen, I must request you to be very careful how you answer the enquiry which I am about to address to you, and to pledge your honour to the truth of your reply. Has there to your knowledge been any stranger harboured in this village or neighbourhood within the last week? or have any of you held intercourse with any such?"

"Not I, father," said Michael, frankly.

"Nor I, uncle, indeed!" exclaimed Reginald.

Bardwell remained silent; but his firm-set lips and open, manly glance seemed to forbid the breath of suspicion to rest upon him.

"*I* have held *intercourse* with no stranger, father," said William De la Pole, in carefully measured words, "nor do I *know* of the presence of any such in the village; unless——" He paused as though unwilling to proceed, casting a hesitating glance, first on his brother, then on De Bardwell.

"Unless what, sir?" exclaimed his father angrily. "Speak out plainly if you have aught to tell."

"Indeed, my lord," replied De la Pole, still with the same cautious hesitation, "what I know is but little, and I should have been glad had it fallen to the lot of some one else to tell the tale, since Master Bardwell—though I protest I know not the reason—scarce holds me for his friend. But," he continued, observing that the Earl showed evident tokens of impatience, "your commands must of course be obeyed, unwilling as I am to excite suspicion against any man. In brief, my lord, as my brother and I were returning home last Tuesday week, after escorting my Lord of Clarence to the outskirts of your lordship's property, we descried two figures, apparently engaged in earnest conversation, standing beside the copse near the forge and homestead of old Ralph the armourer. One of the figures, so far as the failing light enabled me to judge, was Master Bardwell; the other I believe to have been a stranger."

"Thou hast taken long enough, Will, with thy brief tale," said the Earl, sarcastically. "Now, Master Bardwell, let us hear what you have to say in this matter."

"My lord," said Bardwell, in a low but distinct tone, "Master De la Pole was right in supposing that *I* was one of the persons whom he saw beside the copse that evening."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Earl; "and your companion, what have you to say of him? Whence came he? What is he? Where bides he now?"

"My Lord of Suffolk, the gentleman with whom I was conversing had been up to that very evening a complete stranger to me. He accosted me as I was speaking to Ralph on a matter of business, and asked me to direct him where he might obtain a night's lodging."

"And you?" enquired the Earl.

"He seemed sick and weary," proceeded Bardwell, speaking with evident reluctance, "and at my earnest entreaty Ralph consented to give him shelter for the night."

"'*At your earnest entreaty,*'" repeated the Earl; "you were strangely interested in this stranger whom you saw that evening for the first time."

"It is a duty, my lord, enjoined alike by nature and religion, to be forward to succour sick and weary wayfarers."

"Gramercy, young man, an' you be so prompt to lecture your elders upon their duty, it is a pity that you exchanged the cowl of the monk for the helmet of the soldier. And this strange *friend* of yours, this gentleman with whom you were conversing (I think that is the phrase), know you aught of his further proceedings?"

Bardwell was silent for some moments; then he said, in a very low but perfectly distinct tone, "I must entreat you, my lord, to excuse me from answering that question."

"How, sir!" exclaimed the Earl, in angry astonishment; do you refuse to give me the information I require?"

"An imperative duty compels me to do so," replied Bardwell sadly.

"Ralph may perchance prove more communicative," said the Earl, "especially since his refusal to obey my commands would entail the loss of his home and business."

"Oh, I entreat you, my lord," exclaimed Bardwell earnestly, "do not let poor Ralph suffer for that which was in truth no fault of his! Let me bear whatever punishment you see fit to lay upon me, but spare, oh, spare the old man who sinned, if sin it were, only out of affection for the son of his old commander."

"Indeed, Master Bardwell," said the Earl, somewhat moved by the youth's earnestness, "I am most unwilling to use harsh measures against either Ralph or yourself; but advices from a sure hand convince me that a dangerous heretic—an emissary from my unhappy kinsman, Sir John Oldcastle—is, or at least hath lately been, harboured in this neighbourhood, and I strongly suspect that your sick wayfarer was the man. Be frank with me, boy," he continued, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder; "bethink you, I have been the protector of your early years; I have it in my power to open out to you the pathway to prosperity and honour. What has this stranger done, what can he promise you, that may be compared with what I have already done, with what I am even now prepared to accomplish? Why then should his claims, his wishes, be preferred to mine?"

"My lord," replied Bardwell, in a voice which trembled with agitation, "it is indeed true; you have been the kindest, the most generous of benefactors and patrons; may heaven reward you for your goodness to the orphan lad. It grieves me to appear ungrateful for all the benefits which I have received at your hands, but I may not, I dare not, betray the confidence which has been reposed in me. One word more," he added, as the Earl was about to speak, "could I fully reveal the secret entrusted to my charge, I pledge my honour as a gentleman that my noble patron would dare all risks rather than a hair of this man's head should be imperilled through his means."

The Earl shook his head. "You speak boldly, Master Bardwell," he replied; "but I am no favourer of heretics, nor," he added significantly, "of their friends and helpers. Yet for the love I have so long borne you, I am unwilling to proceed to immediate extremities; until to-morrow, therefore, I will wait, in the hope that calm reflection may convince you of the duties which gratitude and loyalty alike impose upon you."

At a sign from the Earl the young men left the apartment, and Bardwell, who felt the need of solitude and quiet after the agitating scene through which he had just passed, and who besides fancied that his companions regarded him with some suspicion, repaired to his own chamber. Arrived there, his thoughts assumed a most gloomy character. He had little doubt that he would now be compelled to leave Wingfield, the only home which he had ever known, the abode of Grace Mowbray. But one immediate and paramount necessity superseded even this consideration—he must convey some warning to the fugitive Lollard. How could this be accomplished? His own movements, and more especially his visits to the home of the armourer, would, he felt sure, be exposed to the most jealous scrutiny. Whom could he trust? Michael De la Pole was kind and generous, like his father, but hasty, rash, and impetuous. His younger brother, Bardwell felt it impossible to trust. Reginald was thoughtful, considerate, gentle, and had a sincere attachment to Bardwell himself. But would it be right to involve one so young, delicate, and tender-hearted, in what might well prove a most dangerous secret. The stranger was Grace Mowbray's uncle, although she knew it not; should he confide in her? None could suspect *her* agency, and the necessary intelligence might be conveyed easily and safely through Marjory's instrumentality. The way to approach Grace was not difficult; the hour had even now arrived when she was accustomed to repair to Lady Suffolk's apartments to enliven the time which she and her maidens spent over their embroidery-frames by the well-chosen lay of some favourite poet. True he had of late somewhat neglected this pleasing duty, and in those blissful moments under the beech-trees (could it be only yesterday evening?) Grace had reproached him for his truancy. A design which he had drawn for her work lay upon the table beside him, and hastily inscribing upon it a few words, in which he begged her to accord him a short interview upon a subject of the deepest importance, he took it in his hand and proceeded to the workroom, a long, low apartment opening on to the broad southern terrace.

The ladies were already seated at their work when the young man entered the room, and they looked up with some surprise as he approached.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Master Bardwell," said Lady Suffolk with dignified severity. "It is long since we have been honoured with your company."

"The more to my grief and loss, honoured madam," said the squire, bending with easy grace to kiss the hand of the stately lady. "I have brought," he added—producing the drawing whilst he kept the writing carefully concealed—"I have brought this slight peace-offering in the hope that Lady Grace will embellish my poor design with her own inimitable skill."

The Countess glanced at it somewhat slightingly. "You were best show it to her," she said; "I pretend to no skill in such matters;" and turning to one of her maidens she added, "Since Master Bardwell hath at length honoured us with his presence, Philippa, you had better bring forth the volume of Chaucer, which hath been unused of late."

Bardwell meanwhile had taken advantage of the permission which he had received, and had presented his drawing to Grace, who received it with a bright smile of thanks and welcome. She regarded it attentively for some moments, and then said quietly, "Thanks, Master Bardwell; the device is exceedingly elegant, and will accord well with the work I have lately commenced. Methinks, however, that this branch," and she pointed to the one which overhung the writing, "is somewhat stiff and unnatural. There is a plant of the kind towards the end of the broad avenue leading to the college; if you will this evening fetch me a branch from thence I will before supper-time explain to you my meaning."

Their eyes met for an instant, and Bardwell divined that in these words she intended to indicate to him the time and manner in which she would grant his request.

"This trouble," she continued, "shall be your penance for your long withdrawal from our society."

"Fair lady," replied Bardwell, "trouble taken in your service must ever be the sweetest of rewards; your commands shall be punctually obeyed."

The book had by this time been brought, and Bardwell, his mind agitated by various emotions, was compelled to exert all his self-command in order to concentrate his attention upon the quaint conceits of the poet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRYST IN THE AVENUE.

IT may be easily imagined with what eagerness Bardwell awaited the approach of the twilight hour. To the ardour of a lover expecting a parting interview with the object of his affection there was added the disinterested longing of a generous heart to rescue the oppressed from impending danger. He was at the appointed spot long before it would have been possible for Grace to have arrived there. He broke branch after branch covered with the bursting buds of spring, which furnished the ostensible reason for his presence in the avenue, ever seeing one that seemed more lovely, or better adapted to the purpose of his design, than any of its fellows. Then, fearing that he had mistaken the place which Grace had indicated, he retraced his steps until he came almost within sight of the castle windows, in the hope of espying some trace of her graceful form. Again he was seized with dread lest she might have arrived during his absence, and he returned to the trysting-place. Thus he remained during what appeared to him an interminable time, alternately pacing up and down the avenue, and endeavouring to allay his impatience by collecting a bouquet of the various buds and blossoms which grew around.

At length—oh, joy of joys!—he saw her approach. A few hurried steps brought him to her side, speechless with conflicting emotions.

Grace was the first to break the silence. "You desired an interview with me, Master Bardwell," she said gently, "and such is my confidence in your honour that I have had no hesitation in coming hither to meet you. Tell me in what I can assist you. Your note spoke, I think, of a matter of life and death."

"Indeed, lady," replied our hero, "without your kind intervention it can I fear prove scarcely less serious to the unfortunate stranger, who was yesterday happy enough to excite some interest in your gentle breast."

"Ralph's visitor!" exclaimed Grace; "in what danger can he be placed? and how, oh, how can *I* assist him?"

"Lady, the stranger told you yesterday that he had known and loved your lamented father. He might have added that he was deeply engaged in the enterprise which cost Lord Mowbray his life, and that he narrowly escaped the fate which befell his leader."

"But," questioned Grace, "since the young King has issued a pardon for all political offences committed during the troublous days of his predecessor, how can this man be placed in any peril through his connection with my unfortunate father? Why Hotspur's son hath been reinstated in all the honours and estates forfeited by his father and grandfather, and is said to be high in favour at King Henry's court."

"True, lady," said Bardwell, "but there is unfortunately one class of persons who are excluded from the stream of royal grace and bounty which flows so freely for others. I allude to those who have embraced the doctrines first propagated by Dr. Wycliffe. To this class the stranger belongs. When he fled for his life from the fatal forest of Gualtree none could be found to take pity on the outcast fugitive save Sir John Oldcastle, the noble-hearted leader of the Lollard party. At his mansion of Cowlinge the homeless wanderer found shelter and refreshment; he left it the devoted adherent of the party in which his generous benefactor held so high a position. Lady, I see you are inclined to shrink with horror from the unfortunate man. Be it so; Lord Suffolk already suspects his presence in Ralph's guest-chamber; return to the castle and change that suspicion into certainty. I go meanwhile to warn the unhappy victim of fanatical bigotry, to defend him, or, if heaven wills, to share his fate. But in yielding to the stake the Lollard preacher, Henry Fitz-Thomas, know that you will deliver to that fearful death your father's most faithful follower and most constant friend, his only brother, Lord Henry De Mowbray."

"My father's brother!" cried the agitated girl; "is it possible? My uncle Henry, whose kindness to me as a child I so well remember; is it possible? Oh, Master Bardwell, you would not surely trifle with me upon such a subject. But my uncle, and —a heretic!"

"Yes, lady, it is even so," replied Bardwell; "*your* uncle and a Wycliffite preacher; one who hath travelled far and wide, through the length and breadth of his native land, bearing the glad tidings of the gospel message."

"Oh, Master Bardwell," cried Grace, "but the Lollards lie beneath the censure of the Church."

"I grieve that it should be so, lady; yet even at the bidding of the Church it were methinks cruel for a niece to deliver up her uncle to so terrible a fate. But his life lies in your hands; and so also does mine," he added, lowering his voice; "I go to share, if I may not avert, his doom."

He was turning towards the pathway leading to the forge when a low cry which burst from Grace's lips arrested him.

"Stay, Master Bardwell," exclaimed the agitated girl; "I—I will do what you wish. May God forgive me if I am acting wrongly, but I cannot betray nor forsake my uncle."

"Now heaven bless you for those noble words," replied Bardwell almost joyfully. "Believe me, you will never have cause to repent your generous decision. *My* visits to Ralph's forge or home are sure to be subjected to the most jealous scrutiny, but yours will be above suspicion. See Marjory; bid her tell her father's guest that—— Stay, the maiden is true as steel, yet it were perhaps inexpedient to admit her fully into our confidence. Bid her tell him that a sincere friend entreats him to leave Wingfield with all convenient speed, since his longer residence here may endanger the success of the business in which he is engaged. His packet of books may pass for a pedlar's fardel in her estimation. And now, Grace, dear, dearest Grace—oh, be not offended at my boldness—I cannot part from you, perhaps for ever, I cannot leave this much-loved spot, the only home which I have ever known, without once, only once, giving some expression to the feelings which I have so long struggled to conceal."

"For heaven's sake, Master Bardwell, talk not so wildly!" exclaimed Grace, in a voice which trembled with agitation. "Why should *you* leave Wingfield? Oh, surely, surely you are not involved in the proceedings of these misguided men who, as I have heard, are ready to rise in revolt against their lawful sovereign?"

"Lady," replied Bardwell, "I dare not deny that the teaching which I heard at Cowlinge, and which has been recalled to my mind by my intercourse with your uncle, appealed most powerfully both to my reason and my conscience; but rebellion, as we are taught in those Scriptures which John Wycliffe brought near to the homes of his countrymen—rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and I dare not take part in such an enterprise. I will assist your uncle on his journey to the utmost of my ability; I will defend him from his enemies, if need be, at the risk of my own life; but our roads will soon lie in widely different directions; for my departure is no sudden impulse, no result of the dangers of the moment, although recent occurrences may in some measure have precipitated the execution of the step which I had long contemplated. Father Cyril hath promised to provide me with letters of introduction to the good Abbot of St. Edmundsbury, to which town I shall in the first instance direct my steps. And now," he concluded, bending on one knee before her, and laying the buds which he had gathered at her feet, "farewell, dear, dear lady, and may heaven's choicest blessings ever attend your path."

"Oh, Master Bardwell," repeated Grace, "why must you leave us? We have been so happy together."

"Wingfield," responded the youth warmly, "will ever be to my heart the dearest spot on all the earth's wide surface, and yet——"

"And yet you will leave it," she said reproachfully.

"And yet I *must* leave it," he corrected sadly. "Believe me, it is better so. Fortune has placed an icy barrier between me and yourself, lady, which it is impossible for me to overleap or to break through. In some happier hour perhaps,—but I dare not dwell upon that vision of hope. Farewell; think of me as kindly as you may, and, once more, may heaven bless and protect you."

He pressed a passionate kiss upon the fair hand, which she extended towards him, and after a long, earnest gaze, in which he strove to imprint her image indelibly in his memory, he rose hastily and was gone.

Grace watched his retreating figure until it was hidden from her sight, then raising the bouquet from the ground she placed it carefully in her girdle, and summoned all her resolution for the delicate task which lay before her.

"Marjory;" she said to herself, "that good girl shall *not* be involved in this dangerous enterprise. I will myself bear the warning to my uncle, who shall see that, feeble maiden though she be, Grace Mowbray possesses the courage which has always distinguished her race. So saying, and meditating upon the interview which had just taken place, our heroine hastened down the unfrequented pathway leading to the forge.

She found Ralph as usual busy at his work, his countenance wearing an expression of cheerful contentment which had not been seen upon it for many days. He rose at her approach, and expressed his deep regret at his daughter's absence.

"She hath gone into the village," he explained; "but she will be main sorry to have missed you, lady."

"I should have been glad to have seen her," replied Grace quietly, "but my visit to-day was chiefly to enquire after the health of your guest. He appeared but poorly yesterday, and I, as you know, pride myself somewhat upon my knowledge of the healing art."

"Ay, ay," assented Ralph, "that were right good stuff, that were, that you gave Marjory for my rheumatics. It did me a world of good, so it did. But I fear me the stranger who has been staying here will not be able to profit by your kindness, for he left Wingfield this morning."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Grace, with a throb of relief which she could with difficulty repress. "Indeed, was not that somewhat sudden? I mean," she added, rather confusedly, "he looked scarcely fit to undertake a journey. Know you whether he had far to go?"

"No, lady," replied Ralph, "I know little about him. He asked for a night's lodging, some ten days since, and in the morning he was too ill to move. Somewhat I heard him say of a message of importance to some lord, I think, at King Henry's court, but I know little about it."

Grace, anxious not to arouse the old man's suspicions by any show of unusual interest, now changed the conversation, and after chatting pleasantly on indifferent subjects for a short while, set out on her return to the castle.

The evening was by this time far advanced, and she found the whole family anxiously expecting her at the grand entrance. Reginald sprang forward to meet her, his face pale with agitation, his eyes suffused with tears. "Thank God that you have come back, Grace," he exclaimed. "We have been so uneasy about you."

"A fine time this for such as you to be abroad," said Lord Suffolk, addressing her, for the first time since she had resided beneath his roof, in a tone of stern displeasure. "But you *have* returned, and so far it is well. Henceforth you will be pleased to confine your exercise to more seasonable hours. Bid them raise the drawbridge, Mike," he added, turning to his elder son; "since Master Bardwell cannot conform to the rules of an honourable household, he may find his night's lodging where he can."

"Master Bardwell," cried Grace, "hath he not returned to the castle?"

"No, my young lady," replied her guardian, still speaking in the same harsh voice, "no, he hath not, although the supper-bell hath sounded some ten minutes since. Wot *you* aught of his movements?" he added, bending upon her a glance of the sharpest scrutiny.

"Only," replied Grace faintly, "that I met him about an hour ago in the avenue, when he gave me these buds, which, as Lady Suffolk is aware, I needed as models for my embroidery. He intended, I think, to visit Father Cyril at the college."

"And probably old Ralph at the forge," suggested William De la Pole, with a covert sneer.

Grace turned upon him with a look of supreme contempt. "It is scarce a noble or a manly deed to slander the absent," she said. "As it happens, Master De la Pole, your conjecture is devoid of foundation; I myself have but now left the forge."

"I meant no harm, lady, by the guess which I hazarded," replied De la Pole, apparently unabashed by her retort. "Master Bardwell hath spent so much of his time at the forge of late that the error was methinks not unpardonable."

"No, indeed, maiden," said Lady Suffolk severely, "Will said no harm, and I marvel at your boldness in thus openly avowing your interest in the penniless upstart whom only this afternoon you distinguished with such exaggerated tokens of your favour."

"Come, come, my lady mother," said the cheery voice of her elder son, who had just returned after delivering his father's message to the warder in charge of the drawbridge, "be not too hard upon Grace; this lovely evening may well excuse the tardiness of her return home. And, Grace," he added in a tone so low as to be inaudible to the rest of the company, while he bent towards her and offered to conduct her to supper, an office usually performed by the Earl himself, "be not over-anxious concerning Bardwell; the warder hath promised to admit him on his return, and to warn him not to appear in my father's presence until the morning."

Grace thanked him with an expressive glance, for conflicting emotions rendered her for the moment incapable of speech. The Earl and Countess, unable to hear the words of their son, marked with considerable satisfaction the signs of his confidential intercourse with their beautiful ward. The party therefore sat down to supper in greater apparent harmony than could at one moment have been anticipated.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND SON.

BY noon next day much excitement arose in the castle because no tidings had been heard of the absent squire. It had at first been conjectured that he had remained all night at the college, but as the hours of the morning passed by and he did not make his appearance this idea was abandoned. The warder of the drawbridge, examined both by the Earl and by his son, declared that he had not seen Master Bardwell since the previous afternoon. All the members of the household with whom the young man had been wont to associate were subjected to a rigorous examination, but none of them were able to throw any light upon the cause of his disappearance. Reginald, pale and agitated, professed equal ignorance of his friend's intention to leave Wingfield. The Earl even proposed to subject his ward to a similar interrogatory, but the decided opposition of his eldest son induced him to abandon this portion of his plan. Perhaps he was secretly mollified by the interest which Michael displayed on Grace's behalf, and which seemed to promise well for the success of his darling project. He sent down to the college to request Father Cyril to visit him at his earliest convenience, while a yet more peremptory summons was despatched to the armourer's forge.

Little information could, however, be obtained from either of these persons. The ecclesiastic admitted that Bardwell had visited him at a somewhat late hour on the previous evening, but he declined to give any account of the conversation which had taken place between them. His sacred office protected him from any forcible measures which might have been taken to overcome his reserve. He stated, however, that he had had no knowledge of Bardwell's intention to leave Wingfield on the previous night, but had understood that he was about to return to the castle when he left the college.

As for Ralph, he baffled all enquiries with a mixture of affected simplicity, dogged obstinacy, and native shrewdness, to which Lord Suffolk, in spite of his intense irritation, could hardly refuse some measure of amused admiration. "Had Master Bardwell been much at the forge of late?" "Well, yes, a good deal." Ralph hoped *that* was no offence. The young gentlemen had always been in the habit of coming down now and again to hear an old soldier's tales; and Master Bardwell had been especially fond of listening to them, for his father, as Lord Suffolk had doubtless heard, was one of the Black Prince's own band of knights. Besides, Ralph said, he had been doing some work for the young squire of late—hauberk and mailcap and other pieces of armour—and young men were often very fond of watching the progress of such workmanship. So, on the whole, Ralph opined that there was not much difficulty in accounting for Master Bardwell's visits to the forge.

Strangers? did his lordship say. Well, there were often strangers coming and going, and passing through the village. But his little place lay, as the Earl well knew, somewhat apart from the highway, so he saw little of them. Besides, they mostly went either to the castle or to the college. Any guests staying with him of late? Now, what should a poor working man like him want with guests?

Ah! ah! Yes, there had been one—a sort of pedlar like, who seemed half dead from fatigue and exposure to the weather. He did beg a night's lodging, which Ralph felt it would have been a want of common humanity to refuse. He seemed a decent, quiet man enough; but what could the noble Earl have to do with the likes of him?

No, Ralph did *not* know where the stranger had gone; had not asked him; never did make it his business to enquire into other people's affairs.

Yes, Master Bardwell *might* have seen him at the forge; most like he did; in fact, Ralph felt almost sure that such had been the case. But they had not left Wingfield together. He should think not, indeed. His old master's son was not likely to go travelling about the country with a common packman.

It was evident that no information could be extracted from Ralph, and he was dismissed with a sharp reprimand, and an injunction to let Lord Suffolk know if any suspicious strangers should appear in the neighbourhood.

As a last resource, the Earl directed the apartment which Bardwell had occupied to be strictly searched. No clue was found to the movements or intentions of the absent squire; but just as the baffled seekers were about to leave the room, William De la Pole espied the corner of a square black volume, which on being brought to light proved to be a portion of the Holy Scriptures, as translated by Wycliffe, beautifully copied on vellum. The cover was curiously chased and worked, and had evidently belonged to Bardwell's father, whose arms and monogram formed its central ornaments.

In vain did Reginald point out these circumstances to his angry uncle, who declared "that such heretical poison should not remain in his house for another hour," and commanded his eldest son to see that it was instantly committed to the flames. Michael, with much reluctance, was about to execute his father's orders, when he was met by Grace Mowbray, who asked to see the book and hear where it was found. Glad, it may be, of any excuse for delaying his unwelcome task, Michael complied with her request, and related to her the full particulars concerning the discovery of the volume. When she heard of the order for its destruction, she exclaimed, "Oh! no, no, that were sad pity! The last relic, it may be, which the poor lad possesses of his father's love. Oh, the Earl cannot be so cruel! Michael, *you* will not have the heart to execute such a command. Give it to me; I will keep it safely until I can find means to restore it to its rightful owner."

Michael paused with a look of perplexity on his comely, but not very intellectual, countenance. "I know not, lady," he said. "My father's orders were precise, and you know he brooks no opposition to his will. Besides, to give it to *you?* You know that such reading is forbidden to women and children."

"Did not the Primate Courtenay extol the good Queen Anne of Bohemia for her diligent study of the Holy Scriptures?" retorted Grace, "and was not she a woman? Come, you were ever wont to be good-natured; and, besides, oh, Mike, if you have ever known what it is to love, if you have ever longed for some remembrance of an absent loved one, give me the volume. Give it me quickly," she continued; "methinks I hear steps approaching; and should your father or your brother find us, all hope will be over. Come, Mike, give it to me!"

"I cannot resist you, Grace," he answered, placing it in her hands. "Take it, but for Heaven's sake conceal it carefully."

She placed it in the bosom of her dress, saying, with quiet satisfaction, "Now let who will come, they will never search for it there." It was only just in time; ere the last word had passed her lips, almost before she had re-arranged her attire, the Earl entered the gallery where they were standing, closely followed by his nephew and his younger son. Lord Suffolk cast a sharp scrutinizing glance upon Michael; but, pleased at finding him engaged in conversation with the lovely heiress, he did not press him very closely as to his execution of the commission entrusted to him, but was satisfied with hearing that the volume was no longer in his possession.

At the conclusion of supper that evening, when the ladies had left the great hall, and Reginald, worn out with the events and emotions of the two preceding days, had retired to seek the rest, both of mind and body, which he so much required, Lord Suffolk, turning somewhat abruptly to his elder son, expressed the pleasure with which he had noticed the intimate and friendly relations which seemed to subsist between that young gentleman and his lovely ward. "I may have been a thought rough myself," acknowledged the Earl, "when she returned home yesterday evening. I was provoked by the extraordinary conduct of that ungrateful young rascal—that Bardwell! But I was right pleased to hear *thee* speak out in the fair lady's defence, Mike."

"And, indeed, sir," interposed Michael, with some embarrassment, "I trust I said nothing unbecoming; I have always regarded your beautiful ward as I should have done a sister of my own, and she looked so distressed, so cast down, I was obliged to take her part."

"Quite right, Mike. I tell thee," repeated his father, "it did my heart good to hear thee. But I would have thee beware of this same *brotherly* affection; thou knowest that Grace is in no way related to thee."

"No, father; still, as her guardian, you stand to her *in loco parentis*, and I am sure that in affection you regard her as your daughter."

"Very true, very true, Mike," laughed the Earl, "and I count upon thee, lad, to make her so in fact —or at least in law."

"Nay, indeed, my dearest father," expostulated his son, in ever-increasing confusion, "I am sure that you would be most unwilling to destroy the peaceful harmony which subsists between me and Grace; to break up our pleasant friendly intercourse; to——"

"Nay, nay, Mike; spare me any further rhapsody. Thou art growing poetic under the inspiration of thy love, lad; but an old fellow like me is but an unsympathising auditor. However, take thy own course and thine own time in addressing her. Thou wilt speed none the worse for knowing that thy father's blessing goes with thee. Thou mayst be right in beginning with this friendly and fraternal footing; that may be the best way now, though it was far otherwise when I was a young man."

"Father," broke in Michael, who felt that it would be dishonourable to leave the Earl any longer in ignorance as to his real sentiments, "father, I am very sorry to see that you are so bent upon my marriage with Lady Grace Mowbray, for I fear that it can never take place."

"Ha!" exclaimed Lord Suffolk, with forced calmness, "and why not, if I may presume to ask?"

"Because," replied Michael, sadly but firmly, "the heart of one at least of us is entirely filled with the image of another."

The Earl's anger was about to break out in stormy invectives when William De la Pole interposed.

"May I be allowed, most honoured father," he said, in a tone of studied moderation, "may I be allowed to suggest that my noble brother hath been perhaps unreasonably displeased by the evident tokens of interest which the Lady Grace hath shown in the young man who so recently departed from this house?"

"Is that so?" enquired Lord Suffolk, somewhat mollified by the suggestion. "Is it even so, Mike? Why, thou foolish boy, even were the lad here, what girl of any sense could hesitate between you? And the fool hath gone, no one knows whither, leaving thee without even such rivalry as *he* might have been able to raise."

"My honoured father," replied Michael, "it would ill have become me to reveal the nature of another's sentiments, and that other a noble maiden, even had they been known to me. No, father, I spoke not of any affection which the Lady Grace might feel for Bardwell, or for any other man. I spoke of myself, of the passionate love which hath long burnt in my breast for the lovely, the adorable Alicia D'Hervé!"

The earl stared at his son as if scarcely able to comprehend his words. "Alicia D'Hervé," he repeated, "the scheming daughter of a penniless adventurer. Is it for her that you reject the loveliest, the wealthiest maiden in England? for her who——."

"Hold, father!" cried Michael, "and before you say that which it may ill become you to speak, or me to listen to, hear my solemn declaration that Alicia D'Hervé is the only woman whom I can ever love, and that, so help me heaven, I will never wed anyone else!"

"Listen to him, the hot-headed boy," exclaimed Lord Suffolk, whose anger was now thoroughly roused; "but I have a hold upon you yet, my young master! The title of Suffolk must, indeed, be yours so soon as these old bones shall be laid in their last resting-place; but the broad acres and grand old halls of Wingfield are mine, absolutely mine, and on the day when you marry this beggar maiden you may bid good-bye to them for ever."

"You are unjust, father," said the young man. "Poor and portionless, save for her charms and her virtues, Alicia may be. For the rest, were I but sure of her consent, I would gladly endure any punishment which your severity could devise."

So saying he retired into the oriel window, to conceal his emotion; and the Earl soon after left the apartment. He had, it need hardly be said, no serious intention of executing his threat, and disinheriting his eldest and favourite son. But, irritated by what he considered as Michael's perverse opposition to his long-cherished plan, he was determined to employ every means to bring him to submission. His angry passions had, moreover, been violently excited by recent occurrences.

After their father's departure, William De la Pole, advancing to his brother's side, laid his hand upon his arm, and said, in a tone of apparent affection and concern, "I am most deeply grieved, my dearest Michael, that you should thus have incurred my father's displeasure. But surely you were unwise to choose such a moment to make your communication."

"Let me alone, Will!" exclaimed the elder, with, for him, unusual irritability in his tone. "I beg your pardon," he added almost immediately, his natural good temper regaining the ascendant, "you are a good fellow, and I believe mean kindly by me; but I feel that I cannot at present discuss this matter with any one."

In fact, Michael De la Pole's character was passing through a momentous crisis. For the first time in his easy, careless, pleasure-seeking life his feelings had now been thoroughly aroused, and depths were revealed in his own heart of whose very existence he himself had hitherto been entirely unconscious. No wonder, therefore, that the workings of his mind were an inscrutable mystery to his shrewd and calculating brother, who had been accustomed to lead his good-tempered elder brother very much according to his own pleasure. Perceiving, however, that no cajolery would for the moment be of any avail, William soon afterwards prudently abandoned his brother to his own meditations. What the fruit of these proved it must be left to a future chapter to make known.

CHAPTER VIII.

ST. EDMUNDSBURY.

THE brilliant sunshine of a fair May morning was lighting up the road in front of the eastern entrance of St. Edmundsbury as a travel-stained wayfarer approached that quaint old East-Anglian city. The traveller, a young and well-built man, was dressed in the close-fitting dress of chamois leather usually worn by esquires of noble households, with a mantle of dark blue cloth, lightly edged with fur, thrown across his right shoulder. The many steeples of the town sent forth their joyous music, as though to celebrate some local festival. The wayfarer gazed around him with the apparent curiosity of a stranger; yet his own birthplace, and the home of his fathers for many generations, was situated at a distance of only a few miles. For this stranger, as my readers may probably have already divined, was no other than our hero, William De Bardwell, the fugitive squire, whose sudden and complete disappearance had occasioned so much excitement in the household of Wingfield Castle.

After parting from Grace Mowbray, in the manner already described, De Bardwell hurried to the college, where he communicated to Father Cyril, that circumstances which had recently occurred compelled him to put into immediate execution his long-formed project of leaving Wingfield, and added that his departure might not improbably take place on the morrow.

The worthy ecclesiastic was visibly pained by this resolution of his favourite pupil, and used many arguments to induce him to change his purpose. Finding, however, that the young man's resolution was firmly fixed, Father Cyril withdrew his opposition, and furnished the squire, not only with the promised letter to the Abbot of St. Edmundsbury, but with a sum of money sufficient to provide for his needs until he could obtain admission into some noble household. He then took a most affectionate leave of the youth, over whose early years he had watched with such loving care, and bestowed upon him his parting benediction, which Bardwell received with the utmost reverence.

As Bardwell was about to return to the castle, he saw with some surprise the now familiar figure of the Lollard preacher, at some considerable distance on the road leading past the college.

Was it possible, he thought, that the warning conveyed by Grace had already taken effect? Fitz-Thomas (for by that name the Lollard was ordinarily designated) had, in fact, as we have already seen, left the armourer's cottage some hours earlier in the day. His main object in visiting Wingfield had been accomplished—he had seen his brother's daughter; his health was now tolerably restored, and he was anxious to resume his labours. He had lingered in the vicinity of Wingfield, keeping chiefly in the woods and unfrequented pathways, until the shadows of evening drawing on reminded him that he had some distance to traverse ere he could obtain food and lodging. All these circumstances were, of course, entirely unknown to our hero at the time when, standing near the college doorway, he gazed after the fast fading figure of the man whom he had learned to regard with feelings of more than ordinary respect and esteem. Should he leave him to encounter unaided the dangers which beset his path? On the other hand, could he thus abruptly depart from Wingfield, without a word of farewell to Reginald, of gratitude or regret to Lord Suffolk?

With a sharp pang Bardwell felt that he must adopt this latter course, although he saw only too clearly to what accusations of cowardice and ingratitude he would thus lay himself open. But the safety of another was at stake, and that other was Grace's uncle! Concerning Ralph's position he felt little anxiety. The armourer's risk would, he knew, be greatly lessened by the departure of his guest; and he had a well-grounded confidence that the old man's native shrewdness would protect him against any remaining danger.

Bardwell's personal possessions were few, nor, excepting the book inherited from his father, which, as we have seen, was afterwards discovered in his bedchamber, did he much regret having to leave them behind him. He was, by the good priest's generosity, supplied with means for the journey; and, after all, he did but anticipate by a few hours the intended period of his departure.

> Thoughts from the (*pen*) which slowly part,
> Flash quick as lightning through the heart.

And in far less time than it has taken me to write these lines, our hero's mind was made up, and he had resolutely turned his back upon his former life, and was straining every nerve to overtake the Lollard.

Young, active, and accustomed to every athletic exercise, though he was, this proved no easy task, so braced was Fitz Thomas by a life of hardihood and endurance, and so ardent was his desire to press forward on his appointed course. It was, however, at length accomplished, and in the exchange of confidences which followed, Bardwell learned the circumstances concerning his friend's departure which have just been related, and the Lollard heard for the first time of the suspicions which had been aroused by his residence at Wingfield. For some days they journeyed together, until they had left the sphere of Lord Suffolk's influence far behind. Then their paths separated, Bardwell proceeding to St. Edmundsbury to deliver Father Cyril's letter to the abbot, while Fitz-Thomas set out for Westminster, where he hoped to be able to execute the commission with which he had been entrusted by the leaders of his party.

And now, as he approached the picturesque town of St. Edmundsbury, a new chapter seemed to open in the life of our hero. Was it not an omen of success that the sun should shine that morning with such especial brightness, that the birds should seem to sing their most cheerful lays, the spring blossoms to give forth their sweetest perfume, the bells to ring their most joyous welcome? The heart of De Bardwell throbbed higher with youthful hope and aspiration than it had done since his departure from Wingfield. The first stage of his journey was almost accomplished, and, in imagination, he already felt his foot firmly planted on the first rung of the ladder of success. All around too, wherever he cast his gaze, he saw only visages lighted up with joyful expectation.

The hamlets and villages sent forth streams of peasants in holiday attire, while troops of well-appointed men-at-arms, headed by gallant knights and noble barons, issued from every castle, hall, and tower. De Bardwell gazed with some astonishment at these festive bands, all wending their way towards St. Edmundsbury, and at length perceiving a lad of about fourteen years of age leaning idly against a gate he enquired the cause of the general rejoicing. The boy gazed at the good-looking stranger with a look of that contemptuous pity inherent in the rustic mind towards one who displays ignorance of transactions or customs of his own peculiar locality. "Your honour will be a foreigner most like," he asserted rather than enquired, using the term as synonymous with stranger, a sense in which it is still commonly employed in the eastern counties. "Yes, you must be a foreigner, or you would have known that our new lord and father, the Abbot Eustatius, is this day to be installed in the great church of St. Edmund, and that his admission feast is to be the grandest ever known since—since that of the blessed Edmund himself," concluded the lad, in blissful ignorance that the royal saint had won the crown of martyrdom nearly two hundred years before the foundation of the abbey which bore his name!

"The new abbot!" exclaimed Bardwell. "Is Abbot Nicholas then no more? I was carrying a letter to him from one who was formerly a member of this holy community."

"Ah, welladay!" responded the lad; but he added in a consolatory tone, "Father Eustace hath for many years assisted the abbot in the management of affairs; so it is probable he will be able to forward your friend's business as well as the good father could have done himself."

"I trust so," replied the squire, "since I am myself much interested in the success of my mission. But tell me, good youth," he continued, changing the subject, "is there not in this neighbourhood a village named Bardwell, or Beardewell?"

"Ay, truly is there," answered the boy. "My Aunt Dorothy lives there; she was bower-woman to the last Lady De Bardwell—her as died in the great fire when the old hall was burnt down. Many's the time that I have heard my aunt tell the tale."

"Ah! and think you," continued Bardwell, "that I could procure horses and a guide to take me to the place? I know somewhat," he explained, "of the De Bardwell family, and am anxious to visit their former habitation."

"Ay, marry," replied the lad, "my father keeps the best hostelry in all the country side, and will be proud to supply your honour with whatever you may require; while for a guide, I see not but what I could serve your turn as well as another. I know every inch of the way, and Aunt Dorothy would make us kindly welcome, especially since you know the old family of whom she thinks so highly. But you will bide in the town until after the admission feast," added the lad, a sudden fear seizing him that he might lose the long-anticipated festivity. "Your honour will surely not go away without seeing *that*. Why there has been an ox roasted alive in the market-place, and tables are spread for all comers in the great court of the abbey; and the Duke of Exeter is to be there, and the Bishops of Norwich and of Ely, and a *wonderful sight* of lords and knights; and there are to be shows, and a miracle play, and games, and—and—I wot not what beside," concluded the boy, out of breath with his own volubility.

Bardwell smiled at the lad's eagerness, and agreed to accept his proffered services, provided he were able to make a satisfactory agreement with his father. "But," he added, "how will you be able thus abruptly to quit your present employment?"

The boy gave an odd sort of laugh. "You see, your honour, I does a chance job here and there, and have no regular employment, as you may say. Sometimes my father wants me about the house; sometimes one of the guests that come to the inn will give me a job, or I gets one at one of the neighbouring halls. I'll serve you honest, I do assure you," he added earnestly; "and any of the neighbours will tell you that Job Morrison, that's my father," he explained parenthetically, "has always borne the very highest character."

They were now entering the town, and our hero was glad to accept the lad's guidance to the Angel, the sign by which his father's house was distinguished, which was situated on the rising ground opposite the great entrance to the abbey. After agreeing with his host, a portly and thoroughly respectable man (who, dressed in his robes as a town councillor, was about to join his fellow-townsmen in the Church of St. Edmund's), for a room for the next few nights, and for the use of a horse when he should require it, Bardwell retired to make some necessary alterations in his dress, and then likewise made his way into the grand old church.

A most imposing spectacle was presented to his gaze, as he paused beneath the stately western doorway, surmounted by the noble Norman tower, perhaps one of the most splendid specimens of that style of architecture to be found in England. The spacious area beneath the lofty dome, which it is said was equal in grandeur to the Cathedral Church of St. Peter at Rome, was crowded with knights, squires, and ladies in the picturesque costume of the period. Within the chancel screen the gleaming lights fell upon the kneeling figure of the newly-elected Abbot, in his jewelled mitre and gorgeous robes of office.

As Bardwell entered, the Bishop of Norwich, having placed the emblematic ring upon the finger of the new dignitary, and saluted him with the fraternal kiss, raised him from his lowly posture, and conducted him to the chair of state, where the Duke of Exeter, as the representative of his royal nephew, waited to receive the oath of homage and allegiance. Then, supported by the Bishop, and by the Royal Duke, the representatives of civil and ecclesiastical authority, the Abbot was conducted to the seat prepared for him; the chancel gates were thrown open, and one by one the white-robed brethren approached their new superior with the usual pledge of canonical obedience and spiritual homage. They were followed by a long file of the abbey vassals, who came to do homage for their feofs and holdings, bringing free-will offerings of corn, poultry, honey, and other country produce.

After the conclusion of this ceremony the long and stately procession, headed by the Abbot and his supporters, moved down the lengthy nave, passed under the noble western doorway, crossed the Lark by the Abbot's Bridge, traversed the wellcultivated garden, and advanced to the beautiful and strongly-fortified gateway tower.

The ponderous gates rolled back to admit the new superior, who entered the palace with his royal and illustrious guests, while visitors of humbler degree were accommodated in the refectory, or at the tables which were prepared in every available locality.

A feeling of loneliness and depression crept over Bardwell's spirit as he turned away from the scene of festivity. Strong excitement had borne him up at the time of his departure from Wingfield; the companionship of the Lollard had sustained his spirits during the early part of his journey, while anxiety for his friend's safety had occupied his mind almost to the exclusion of all other subjects. Now, a stranger, although within a few miles of his ancestral home, a prey to melancholy thoughts and sad forebodings in the midst of general mirth and rejoicings, he felt utterly and hopelessly alone.

He returned to the inn, which he found almost deserted, mine host taking part in the civic banquet, given in honour of the occasion, his young guide of the morning sharing with companions of his own age in the general merry-making. Bardwell with a little difficulty obtained some refreshment from the one servant left in charge of the house. He then, in the solitude of his own chamber, gave himself up to earnest and somewhat gloomy reflections upon the events which had occurred.

He felt with, perhaps, exaggerated bitterness the blight which had fallen upon his future prospects, through the loss of Lord Suffolk's favour, entailing as it did the cutting asunder of all old associations and family ties, the loss of the friendly companionship of Reginald De la Pole, absence from the loved vicinity of Grace Mowbray. Then the death of the good Abbot to whom he had been recommended, what difficulties might not this circumstance create in his future course? Yet the cheering voice of hope and courage still whispered comfort to his heart. The new Abbot would not utterly disregard the appeal of so well known and sincerely respected an ecclesiastic as Father Cyril—one who but a short time previously had been a distinguished member of the community over which the Abbot was called to preside.

During the week through which the festivities were to last some opportunity must surely be afforded for presenting the letter with which he was provided. And if not, his visit to Bardwell might enable him to ascertain whether any former associate of his father's still resided in the neighbourhood, who would be likely to afford to the son of his old companion protection, and the opportunity for honourable employment, with the chance of acquiring distinction. Having arrived at this resolution, Bardwell sallied forth to visit some of the noble monuments and stately buildings for which the town was justly celebrated; but, wearied with his journey, he soon returned to the inn, and after a frugal supper retired early to rest.

Several days passed in much the same manner. Bardwell took little part in the general merry-making, but was ever on the watch for any opportunity which might present itself of obtaining an audience of the Abbot. No such had, however, as yet occurred, and the last day of the festival had arrived. One chance still remained. On the afternoon of this final day, the Abbot, arrayed in full pontificals, and bearing his pastoral staff of office, was to take his seat beneath the carved canopy of the gateway fortress, and all who had any petition to lay before him were invited to draw near. Bardwell resolved to prefer his suit among the rest; and as the appointed hour approached, he took up a position in the open court in front of the abbey. Scarcely had he done so when his attention was attracted by a group of persons listening to the impassioned utterance of an orator, in whose animated features Bardwell, with great astonishment, recognized those of his late companion, Henry Fitz-Thomas. (It afterwards transpired that the Lollard, having learned that Lord Scrope had left London for Leicester, where the Parliament was about to assemble, had come to Bury, hoping to persuade Bardwell to accompany him on his altered course.)

Our hero was conscious of a slight feeling of impatience at the reappearance of his companion, but he quickly shook it off and joined the group of the Lollard's attentive auditors. The first words which reached his ear inspired him with mingled admiration for his friend's zeal and alarm at his rashness. The orator was comparing the hard and laborious lives of the first preachers of Christianity with the self-indulgence, luxury, and pride of those who claimed to be their modern representatives. "Are these stately palaces," he exclaimed, pointing to the beautiful abbey, "fitting residences for the disciples of the meek and suffering Saviour? or is it meet that the Shepherd of God's flock should be entrenched behind a fortress, to bar the approach of those committed to his care? How long, ye men of Bury, will ye suffer these things? How long will it be ere ye claim the heritage so freely purchased for you? and which has been so clearly proclaimed in the preaching of holy John Wycliffe. How long, I say, will ye suffer these men to lord it over the people of the living God? Why do ye not rise and *tear* that stately structure, built to overthrow your liberty, till not one stone be left upon another?"

"Hold thy peace, fanatical traitor," exclaimed a stern voice from the outskirts of the crowd, as the reeve or steward of the abbey pushed his way through the group surrounding the rough platform on which the preacher had mounted, the peasants and townspeople separating in some confusion at his approach. The angry bailiff seized the arm of the orator, and would have dragged him from his elevation, and perhaps done him further injury, had not Bardwell interposed.

"Why this violence?" exclaimed the squire, in a tone of expostulation. "Why this unseemly violence—breaking in upon an occasion of such general rejoicing? If this *gentleman* has said aught that is unbecoming, let him be examined before the lawful authority, and——"

"And who art thou, my young master," cried the reeve, "that dar'st oppose the bailiff of St. Edmundsbury in the execution of his office? Have a care lest thou also know somewhat of the *authority* of which thou talk'st so glibly. For the moment thy youth and ignorance may serve as thy excuse, since I have other work in hand; but for this fellow, whom I have caught in the very act of stirring up the vassals of the abbey to mutiny and sacrilege——" He made another attempt to drag the Lollard to the ground, and a serious riot might have ensued, when a cry arose which arrested the attention of all parties.

"The Abbot comes! The holy father hath taken his seat! Long live our reverend lord!"

The ponderous gates were rolled back, and the Abbot, clad in his gorgeous attire, wearing his jewelled mitre, and bearing in his hand the curiously-carved pastoral staff of his office, approached the seat prepared for him, and was about to ascend the steps of the dais on which it was placed, when his eye was attracted by the group we have been considering, and he advanced towards it with a stately step. All bent in lowly reverence to greet their spiritual superior. Bardwell, half involuntarily, joined in this token of respect; the Lollard alone stood erect and unmoved. A few moments of almost breathless silence ensued, during which the calm grey eye of the Abbot surveyed the scene before him, noting the unabashed and fearless countenance of the heretical preacher, the eager watchfulness of the young man, who stood evidently prepared to resist any fresh attempt at violence on the part of the angry reeve. He noted too the gloomy discontent visible in the countenances of some of the crowd, contrasting strangely with the gay hilarity which had hitherto prevailed, and he felt that upon his action during the next few moments depended the lifelong estimation in which he would be held by those whom he was called to govern. Happily for the Lollard—happily also, in all probability, for our hero—the new Superior of St. Edmund's Abbey was one in whom zeal for the Church to which he belonged was tempered by a liberality and an enlargement of mind and of character, unusual in the age in which he lived and in the order to which he belonged.

"How is this, my children?" he exclaimed, in a deep, sonorous tone. "Are these the glances with which the people of St. Edmundsbury greet their spiritual father upon his first appearance among them? Who is this, Ringan?" he continued, "and what hath he done that you treat him with so much violence?"

"Reverend sir," replied the bailiff, still retaining his hold upon the Lollard, "this fellow was stirring up the sworn vassals of the halidome to sacrilegious insurrection against your lawful authority; and when I, in the discharge of mine office as steward of the abbey lands, would have apprehended him, this young gentleman interfered, and——"

"Hold," said the Abbot, in the calm voice of authority, "let us conclude one matter first. You accuse this person of attempting to incite to sacrilegious revolt the vassals of this halidome. It is a weighty charge. What, friend," he continued, turning to the Lollard, "what hast thou to answer to it?"

"That I," said the enthusiast, "am ready to defend the cause of truth against thee or any of thy false brotherhood; and that I will yield my limbs to the rack and my body to the stake, if need be, but I will not resign one jot of the liberty which holy John Wycliffe so ably defended against the Roman antichrist in the reign of our late dread lord King Edward III. Nor, while the power is left me, will I cease to cry aloud until all the inhabitants of this land have claimed the glorious inheritance thus opened out to them. I am in thy power; deal with me as you will."

They stood confronting each other in silence for some moments, neither flinching from the steady gaze of the other. The bailiff, like a hound straining at the leash, seemed eager to spring once more upon his prey, but dared not advance without the command of his master. Bardwell with breathless anxiety awaited the issue. At length the Abbot spoke: "Thou hast spoken thy mind boldly, and hast not shrunk from using terms which addressed to some of my brethren would have put thy liberty, it may be even thy life, in the utmost jeopardy. Thou dost deny my right to be termed a preacher of that gospel of which thou thyself dost claim to be the herald. Be it so. Let us see whether thou or I do best fulfil its sacred precepts. Thou hast defied and insulted me; thy fate is in my hands. One word of mine could condemn thee to the lowest dungeon beneath yonder abbey, and I will *not* speak it. Go! I pardon, and will pray for thee, little as thou dost, I fear, value my prayers. Go, thou art free! Unhand him, Ringan."

A murmur of applause ran through the crowd at this unexpected act of generosity. The Lollard seemed for an instant stunned with astonishment; then approaching his benefactor with the lowly obeisance which he had before denied to him: "Thou hast shown me," he said, in a loud, clear voice, "that in every class our Lord has reserved to Himself hearts truly devoted to His service. I yield that honour to thy nobility of character which I would never have rendered to thine exalted position. Thy power might have restrained my body; thy generosity hath cast fetters upon my spirit. The Abbot of St. Edmundsbury has taught me to think more kindly than I have hitherto done of the order to which he belongs." So saying, and with another obeisance, the Lollard abruptly turned, and making his way without much difficulty through the crowd, who separated at his approach, he left the place. The Abbot gazed after him, a gleam of proud satisfaction lighting up his handsome features; then, as he turned to resume his seat, his eye fell upon Bardwell.

"And now, sir," he said, "we will attend to your business. You are, I think, a stranger in this town."

"First, my Lord Abbot," said the young man, kneeling reverently on one knee, "first permit me to express my unfeigned admiration for the noble deed to which I have this instant been a witness.

Then," he continued, drawing Father Cyril's letter from his bosom, "then would I crave permission to place in your lordship's hands this letter, addressed to your sainted predecessor (whose soul may God assoilzie) by a venerable ecclesiastic, once a brother in this abbey, but now for many years a resident in the little college of Wingfield on the other side of the county."

"It shall receive our best attention," said the Abbot graciously, as he raised the kneeling youth, and by a gesture of command required his attendance as he returned to the gateway fortress. Bardwell remained standing beside the chair while several petitions were presented to the Abbot, to all of which he accorded an attentive hearing and appropriate answer. Then, having perused Father Cyril's letter, he turned once more to our hero, enquiring of him what were his immediate plans for the future.

"My lord," replied Bardwell, "I had hoped to-morrow to have visited my father's home, my own birthplace, and the place of my mother's burial. I have not seen it since my infancy, or at least the blackened ruins which alone mark the place where it once stood. I hear that a former dependant of my family, the relative of the host with whom I am now staying, resides near the spot, and her nephew has offered to act as my guide."

"So be it," said the Abbot kindly; "it is a good and pious purpose; but you must permit me to provide you from the stables of the abbey with a somewhat better steed than you could probably procure from the good host of the Angel. Meanwhile I will consider whether I can in any way promote your future interests."

Highly gratified with the result of the day's proceedings, Bardwell then took a respectful leave of the Abbot, and returned to the inn.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESOLATE HOME.

ON the following morning Bardwell, mounted upon the fine steed with which the Abbot's thoughtful kindness had provided him, set out upon his long-projected expedition. Passing through the north gate of the town, he and his young attendant wended their way through the little village of Fornham, passing close under the boundary wall of the Franciscan Priory, and after passing through Timworth, arrived at the grey abbey of Ixworth, a daughter-house from St. Edmundsbury, where they were offered the simple meal which, according to the statutes of the order, was always provided for weary travellers, and which their morning ride through the keen north-easterly breeze rendered extremely acceptable. Refreshed and cheered by the hospitality of the good fathers, they resumed their journey with renewed vigour, the boy beguiling the tedium of the ride with many a legendary story and tale of local interest, to which Bardwell listened with dreamy interest, as the half-effaced recollections of his childhood awoke in his memory.

An hour's further journey brought them to Bardwell, and our young hero was soon standing beside the blackened ruins and desolate hearth-stone, which alone marked the site of the happy home to which his father had, thirty years before, conducted his young and lovely bride. The feelings with which the last of a gallant race gazed upon this desolate scene may be more easily imagined than described. He stooped to pluck an ivy spray which, like a messenger of hope and consolation, had grown up amid the blackened embers; and then, with compressed lips and knitted brows, turned away from the melancholy spectacle, and prepared to follow his young companion, who, meanwhile, was clamorously announcing his presence to the inmates of a small cottage in the immediate vicinity.

Just as Bardwell reached the door of this small but apparently comfortable homestead, it was opened by an elderly woman with an extremely pleasing countenance. She was attired in dark woollen kirtle and skirt; a checked handkerchief was neatly folded across her chest, while the bands of her smooth grey hair appeared beneath the spotlessly white plaits of her cap.

"Aunt Dorothy," the boy began eagerly, "this gentleman"—but here he stopped abruptly, startled by the effect produced upon his aged relative by the sight of his new employer.

Dorothy Morrison first started back in amazement, not unmixed with terror, then as suddenly sprang forward and seized the young man's hand, exclaiming, in a voice broken with agitation:

"In mercy tell me who you are that appear to me in the likeness of my beloved master! Is it possible that his spirit hath been permitted to reanimate the form which once it bore, and once again to visit the home he loved so well! Oh, if there be anything which I can do to secure the rest of his soul, or of that of my dearest mistress, do but tell me, and, at whatever cost of time or labour or suffering, it shall be accomplished to the utmost of my power. Speak to me, I conjure you."

"Mother," replied Bardwell in soothing tones, "I must crave your pardon for having, however unwittingly, caused you so much agitation. I am but a homeless, well-nigh friendless, stranger, come to gaze upon the ruins of his father's dwelling. From your words I should imagine that you mistake me for that father's spirit. I am the only son of Sir Reginald De Bardwell. Do I indeed so greatly resemble the parent whose features I am unable to remember?"

"Never did my eyes behold such a likeness,', asseverated the old woman earnestly. "Even so looked Sir Reginald, ere care and sorrow had traced their deep furrows upon his smooth brow. But you have a look of your sainted mother also," she continued, gazing earnestly into his face, as though studying every line of his features, "and when you speak, it is as though I heard once more the voice which read blessed words of comfort out of the square black volume she was wont to prize so highly."

"Ah!" cried Bardwell, suddenly remembering how this sacred legacy had been abandoned at the time of his abrupt departure from Wingfield. "Alas!" he murmured, "what hath now become of those holy writings? Hath the Earl commanded their destruction? or hath Michael tossed them carelessly aside? Have they served as the foundation for William De la Pole's crafty accusation, or as the aliment of Reginald's faithful friendship? Why, ah, why was I so thoughtless as thus to part from the precious memorial of both my parents?"

"Have you indeed *lost* the volume, sir?" enquired the old woman anxiously.

"I fear so," he replied sadly. "I have at least left it in the home which has sheltered me since my childhood, but which I am little likely ever to see again."

"Then, sir," she resumed, "you must accept from me some extracts which your blessed mother copied for me with her own hand. I have studied them until the words are deeply engraven in my memory, and now my old eyes are scarce able to discern the characters. But come in," she continued, "come in and take some rest, and such refreshment as my poor dwelling can afford, although it is, I fear, little meet for your honour's acceptance. But such as it is it is offered with hearty good will, and Joey can bestow your steed in yonder hovel, where, happily, there are both litter and food, which I collected for my cow."

Bardwell, fearing to put the kind old woman to much trouble and inconvenience, was at first disposed to decline her offer, pleading in excuse the refreshment of which he had partaken at Ixworth; but with ready tact he perceived that by so doing he would cause real disappointment to the good woman, as well as to her young relative, who scarcely waited until his master had accepted the invitation before taking his allotted share in the proposed arrangement by leading the horses towards the shed indicated by his aunt, and then entering the cottage, which was already pervaded by a savoury odour most grateful to the nostrils of a lad whose youthful appetite had been sharpened by recent exercise in the keen spring air.

A hot dish of eggs and bacon was soon placed before the hungry travellers, who, especially Joey, did ample justice to it. Then Bardwell asked his kind entertainer to conduct him to the church where his parents had so often worshipped, and which was situated at a short distance from the site of their former home.

Those of my readers who have visited this quiet little country church, as it is now restored and beautified by loving, reverent hands, can form little idea of the appearance of forlorn desolation which it presented to the eyes of our hero on the bright

May morning of which I now speak. Nay, even had we seen it ere the hand of the restorer had redeemed it from the dreary barrenness into which, in common with too many of the houses of God in our land, it had been allowed to fall, this would give us only a faint conception of its condition at the time of which I write; for the neglect and irreverence of the early part of the present century bore, in outward appearance at least, little resemblance to those of pre-Reformation times, however truly they might be traced to the same origin,—the tendency of the human heart, uninfluenced by divine grace, to teach for doctrines the commandments of men; to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator; to give to the servant, whether as preacher, priest, or confessor, the honour which should have been given only to the Master.

The spectacle of a church parcelled out into irregularly-shaped enclosures by unsightly divisions, turning, as to a centre, to the tall erection popularly known as a three-decker pulpit, which the expression, "a neglected, desolate-looking church," so naturally suggests to the mind of the modern Englishman, was a thing unknown for centuries after the period of which I now write. Before the

Reformation our churches were not, as they became in later times, temples for preaching, but they were, alas! only too often made houses of merchandize, if not, in very truth, dens of thieves. The dark and gloomy confessional then held the place afterwards occupied by the pulpit, and equally, nay, to a still more injurious extent, permitted the human messenger to usurp, in the eyes of the penitent sinner, the position and importance which should have been given to God alone. Nay, on the very altar was placed, not the simple emblematic cross of primitive times, nor even the crucifix, but the representation, as in the instance of which I now speak, of the blessed Virgin, or of one of the apostles or other followers of the Lord; or, it might be, even of one who, by the authority of the Roman pontiff, had been invested with the title of saint, little as his life might have been marked by that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

Bardwell entered the low doorway (the lofty tower which has now for centuries served as a landmark to the surrounding country was then unbuilt) and stood in the centre of a bare space, the walls adorned with rude fresco representations of the legend of St. Christopher and the martyrdom of

St. Catherine, stained in many places through the influence of the weather, and festooned with webs of the spider.

A few seats were dotted about here and there, one in the chancel, surmounted by a worm-eaten canopy, being appropriated to the patron of the living, while the chancel arch was half blocked by the huge confessional, behind which was seen the high altar, covered with a rich but faded cloth, and surmounted by the figure of the blessed Virgin, in which she was represented, not as the humble maiden, meekly replying to the angel's salutation, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me even as thou wilt;" not as the loving mother, pondering over the wondrous words and actions of her holy Son; but as the queen of heaven and earth, with star-spangled robe and crown-encircled brow, with the globe beneath her feet, and the sceptre of sovereignty in her right hand.

Beside the altar an inscription announced that on the following Sunday Father Philip, from the abbey of St. Edmund's, would celebrate mass in this church, and that by the authority of the holy father at Rome he was empowered "*to sell, at exceedingly low rates, indulgences which should* *ensure to their purchasers the plenary absolution of all their sins, whether past or future.*" Bardwell felt chilled and saddened by the appearance of the church, which contrasted sadly with that to which he had been accustomed at Wingfield. He felt that in many respects things must have deteriorated greatly since the days when good Father Cyril ministered to the people among whom he dwelt. Our hero was not greatly shocked by the undue exaltation of the blessed Virgin, an error almost universal at the time; but the teaching which he had received at Cowlinge, revived by his recent intercourse with Fitz-Thomas, could hardly fail to render the announcement of the proposed traffic in pardons deeply offensive in his eyes. The sale of indulgences was indeed one of the most crying evils of the unreformed Church, and accounted for, if it did not justify, many of the excesses into which a few of the early Reformers were unhappily betrayed.

As Bardwell left the church he registered a secret vow, that, should God ever grant him the power to do so, this sacred edifice should be made more meet for the holy purpose to which it was dedicated.

The squire and his companions were lingering for a few moments in the churchyard, when they were startled by the sound of a horse's hoofs advancing rapidly along the rough highway which led past the consecrated ground. Peering across the boundary fence they perceived a magnificent hunter approaching them at a headlong pace. His rider, a slender and apparently youthful lady, had evidently lost all control over his movements—the reins had escaped from her nerveless hand and floated wildly in the breeze, in danger at every moment of becoming entangled in his feet.

"Holy virgin!" exclaimed Dorothy, aghast. "The poor, dear young lady! If her horse goes down Stony Grip at that pace, may God have mercy upon her soul; for——."

Even as she spoke Bardwell's quick eye had perceived the imminent peril in which the young lady was placed, and his ready mind had suggested a remedy. Springing across the fence which separated the churchyard from an adjoining field, he ran at full speed, and in an oblique direction, to a spot where, as he rightly judged, he would be able to arrest the frantic flight of the runaway steed before he reached the steep declivity to which the old woman had alluded. In the tilt-yard at Wingfield Bardwell had frequently won distinction and honour among his youthful companions by his skill in all manly and athletic exercises; and never had his powers of speed and endurance been put to a more severe test, and never were they more unsparingly exerted than on the present occasion, when the life or death of a fellow-creature seemed to depend upon his swiftness of foot and soundness of wind.

He leaped the last hedge, dropped down the steep bank, and, having obtained a firm foothold against the gnarled root of a spreading oak, awaited the approach of the fugitive horse and his affrighted rider, now scarcely a hundred yards from the dreaded declivity. Just as the steed came within his reach the young man, with consummate skill, seized the loosened bridle; but such was the violence of the shock that Bardwell was carried along for some yards ere he could arrest the horse's progress, which he only succeeded in doing at the brink of the precipice. Our hero was for some moments entirely engrossed in calming the frightened animal, and leading him into a place of safety. When this had been effected he turned with expressions of courteous enquiry and sympathy to the no less alarmed rider, whom he had rescued from so terrible a fate. He beheld the finely-formed features and fair flowing curls of a very beautiful and evidently high-born maiden. A deadly pallor now indeed overspread her countenance, and her golden locks were in wild disorder.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, "how can I ever express my gratitude? My father——."

At this moment a knight, somewhat past the prime of life, rode hastily up to them, and, with an agility which would have done credit to a younger cavalier, sprang from his steed and caught the young lady in his arms, exclaiming, in a voice broken with agitation, "Thank God, my child, that I find you in safety!"

"That you do so, my dearest father," she replied, returning his embrace with much affection, "is, under God, due to the gallantry of this young gentleman, to whom I was even now endeavouring to express the gratitude which *you* will be far more able to make known."

The knight turned towards Bardwell; and the latter with some surprise recognized the stately form and noble features of Henry Beaufort, Duke of Exeter.

"Sir," said the Duke, "words are but poor exponents of a father's feelings on such an occasion as the present. From my heart I thank you, and shall esteem myself fortunate, if any influence which I may possess at the court of King Henry can enable me to promote the welfare of one to whom I am so deeply indebted. Meantime this dear girl hath urgent need of rest and female attendance. May we so far trespass on your kindness as to ask you to direct us where these can be procured?"

"My lord Duke," replied Bardwell, with a profound obeisance, "the slight service which it has been my good fortune to render to this noble lady amply repays itself. At a short distance from this spot is the humble residence of a worthy dame, formerly a dependant upon my family. She will, I doubt not, do all in her power to assist the lady, and beneath her roof, if your highness will deign to listen to it, I will relate the short sad story of my early life, in order that you may judge how far it may be your pleasure to extend to me the advantage of your protection."

This proposal having been accepted with grateful alacrity, Bardwell hastened back to Dame Morrison and her nephew, and gave them a brief and hurried account of all that had taken place. The whole party then adjourned to the good dame's neat though humble abode, and the Lady Cecilia accompanied her kind hostess to an inner chamber, to repair the disorder which her recent adventure had occasioned in her dress.

The Duke of Exeter then courteously reminded Bardwell of his promise to recount the adventures of his past life, saying with a gracious smile that he was quite sure that nothing in such a recital could diminish the interest which he felt in the preserver of his daughter's life.

After gazing for an instant at the blackened ruins of his father's hall, our hero thus began his recital: "My father, my lord Duke, was a member of that distinguished band of knights who were specially attached to the person of the renowned Black Prince, and he attended his royal master on the glorious fields of Crécy, Poitiers, and Navaretta. The hardship and fatigues of the Spanish campaign seriously affected my father's health, and when the prince returned to Bordeaux he obtained leave to quit the army, and spend the remainder of his life in his native land. He retired to his ancestral hall, the happy home of which only those few charred fragments now remain. To that home he brought my mother, the loveliest and most gracious lady in all the country side.

Ten peaceful years rolled on, my father keeping aloof from the strife of court and council, until he heard of the deposition of the son of his old commander, and the accession to the throne of the young Duke of Lancaster. He heard too that the Earls of Huntingdon, Rutland, and Salisbury were about to make a vigorous effort for the restoration of their unhappy sovereign.

In an evil hour my father joined in their conspiracy. Their plans were discovered, and all who had taken part in them perished on the scaffold. My father shared the fate of his confederates. His lands were declared to be forfeited to the crown, and were bestowed upon an ambitious rival. The vassals, who had dearly loved their old master, rose to defend what they regarded as the rights of his son, and endeavoured to repel the intruder. In vain; the old hall was set on fire, my mother perished in the flames, and I, a child of five years old, was only saved by the fidelity of an old retainer, and the kindness of the good priest of the parish. I was taken to Wingfield, where my kind old tutor obtained admission into a collegiate establishment, and I was taken into the household of the Earl of Suffolk. There

I remained, until a few weeks since I incurred the displeasure of my noble patron, and was compelled to leave the shelter of his hospitable home. Father Cyril, my early protector, gave me a letter of recommendation to the Abbot of St. Edmund's, from whose kindness I hope to obtain the opportunity for honourable employment. A strong desire to revisit my father's home brought me to this spot, happily in time to perform the slight service which has procured for me the honour of your highness's notice."

The modest, yet manly, manner in which Bardwell had spoken confirmed the favourable opinion which the Duke of Exeter had already formed of his character, and at the conclusion of the young man's tale he renewed his generous offer of patronage and protection, proposing that Bardwell should accept in his own household a position similar to that which he had recently held in that of the Earl of Suffolk.

To so kind a proposition there could be but one reply, and with joyful alacrity Bardwell expressed his readiness to follow his new patron, as soon as he should have acquainted the good Abbot of St. Edmundsbury with his good fortune, and have returned with many thanks the steed with which he had been supplied by the generosity of that ecclesiastic.

To this request the Duke, who was himself a guest at the abbey, at once acceded, and the Lady Cicely being now completely restored, the whole party, after liberally rewarding Dame Morrison and her nephew, mounted their steeds and rode away.

CHAPTER X.

NEW FRIENDS AND OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

AFTER a few weeks, during which everything tended to confirm the favourable impression which the Duke of Exeter had from the first conceived of his young *protégé*, Bardwell accompanied his patron to Leicester, whither King Henry had summoned his Parliament.

Many of the most distinguished prelates, nobles, and knights of the kingdom were already assembled in the town, and at the first court festivity to which he followed his master Bardwell immediately recognized the Earl and Countess of Suffolk, and their beautiful ward. William De la Pole also he soon discovered amongst a party of the younger knights and squires; but his astonishment was great when, after the most careful survey, he was unable to see anything of the young heir of Suffolk. The Earl was standing among the highest nobles of the land, and in immediate proximity to the person of the sovereign. The beautiful heiress was surrounded by a band of gallant admirers, and although Bardwell fancied that he detected a wistful tenderness in the glance of recognition which she bestowed upon him, he was unable to approach her. William De la Pole showed no inclination to renew his acquaintance with his former companion. Thus it was not until after the lapse of several weeks that Bardwell, encountering an old retainer of the house of Suffolk, to whom during his residence at Wingfield he had been able to show some slight kindness, learned that, shortly after his sudden flight from the castle, the young heir of Suffolk had also left his father's home, and had gone no one knew whither.

"My lord have never been like the same man since that day," pursued the honest fellow, "nor nothing haven't fared to go rightly neither without the young lord's cheery smile and fresh young voice. Blessings on his noble heart! I say nothing against Master William, nor it isn't fitting that I should; but he will be like his brother never!" added John, emphatically, "and there be not man nor boy about the place but will tell you the same."

"I am sincerely grieved to hear your news, John," answered Bardwell, "and can well understand that the young lord must be greatly missed at Wingfield. But we must hope that his absence will be but for a short time. Had there been any quarrel, think you, between him and his father?"

"I don't rightly know, sir," said John cautiously; "some do say as my lord was mightily set upon his marrying the Lady Grace, as why should he not, and she such a sweet young lady? but whether my young lord did not rightly take to the plan, or whether Master William wor jealous like (for my young lord was always one to give in to his brother), I can't justly say. But there were high words atween the three one night in the big hall, and the next morning my young lord comes to me, and says, 'John, I be going a bit of a journey; just saddle me the bay horse,' says he, 'and put up this here bit of a valise. I shan't want no one to go with me.' So I was always ready to do anything for him, and, for the matter of that, so were we all, but it seemed to me there was something queer-like about the business, so I says, 'Beg pardon, my lord, but ain't this something sudden?'

"'Never you mind that, old John,' says he; 'you do as I tell you, and say nothing about it to no one; and here,' he added, bending from his horse when he was ready to start, 'take this for your trouble, John, and be sure you're kind to Madge' (that's the brown and white spaniel, sir, that he brought up from a puppy), 'and good-bye, John.'

"He pressed two broad-pieces into my hand, sir, and was gone before I could say another word, and I doubt I shall never look upon his handsome face again. But here comes Master William, sir, with another gentleman; best not let him see me talking to you; and, for the sake of the blessed saints, do not let him know what I have told you."

"Have no fear, John," replied Bardwell; "your confidence has not been misplaced. But I have heard nothing about yourself and the friends whom I left at Wingfield; old Ralph, for instance, and Father Cyril. Can you visit me this evening at the Duke of Exeter's quarters, and tell me about them?"

"Thank you kindly, sir," said John; "I shall be glad to do so." And with a respectful salutation he passed on his way, whilst Bardwell returned home musing deeply on the intelligence which he had just received.

Soon, however, his attention, like that of all his contemporaries, was absorbed by the progress of public events. Encouraged by the Primate Chicheley, by his uncle Exeter, and by the general support of his brethren, kinsmen, knights, and nobles, Henry of Monmouth openly announced his intention of reviving the claim which his great ancestor, Edward III., had laid to the crown of France, and of attempting the conquest of that country.

The invasion of France was always a popular project among our mediæval forefathers, and many circumstances in the condition of both countries conspired to render the early part of the reign of Henry V. a favourable opportunity for such an enterprise. The young, ardent, and ambitious sovereign of England had already given proof of his courage and military ability, and of a statesmanlike power for the conduct of public affairs still more rare in the age in which he lived. The defective nature of his title to the throne of England was forgotten, in the admiration excited by his brilliant and attractive qualities; while the Earl of March, whose hereditary claims to the crown might have rendered him a most formidable rival, had been completely won by the generosity with which he had been treated by his kinsman, who during the preceding reign had been appointed his guardian. Henry's brothers, the young Dukes of Clarence, Bedford, and Gloucester, were devotedly attached to his person; the Beaufort princes, the Duke of Exeter and the Bishop of Winchester, lent him the aid of their experience and counsel; the Earls of Salisbury, Warwick, and Suffolk, Sir John Talbot, Sir Thomas Erpingham, and other warriors of fame, were eager to follow the banner of England to the fields on which so many laurels had already been won by British valour.

On the other hand France at this time was torn by contending factions, headed by ambitious princes, intent only upon securing each for himself the power which had escaped the nerveless hands of their unfortunate kinsman and sovereign Charles VI., who, deserted by his profligate consort, abandoned by selfish courtiers, and a prey to severe mental disorder, dragged out his miserable existence in the Hotel Saint Pol, where he was often destitute of the barest necessaries. To this unhappy monarch, or rather to the prince who for the time being had seized upon the reins of government, ambassadors were sent by the King and Parliament of England, demanding the acknowledgment of Henry's claim to the French crown, as derived from Isabella of France, the mother of King Edward III., but offering to accept the hand of Catherine the Fair, the youngest daughter of the unfortunate Charles, together with Normandy, Guienne, Aquitaine, and all other possessions in France formerly held by the English sovereigns.

In view of the not improbable rejection of these exorbitant demands, the King and nobles of England at once began to make vigorous preparations for war. After the completion of the business of Parliament Henry removed to Winchester to await the return of his ambassadors, and to superintend the equipment of his fleet at the neighbouring seaport of Southampton. The two stately castles possessed by the ancient city afforded ample accommodation for the King, the princes, and the chief nobles of the court; Henry and his brothers being entertained by the Bishop of Winchester at Wolvesey Castle, where the Duke of Exeter was also received, in virtue of his near relationship to the proud prelate who then occupied the chair of William of Wykeham. The other princes, the nobles, and the knights and squires in attendance on the royal party, were accommodated in the stout fortress of the Norman conqueror, and in the adjoining houses.

Some weeks had elapsed since the removal of the court to this city, already so famous in the annals of England—the burial-place of many of her ancient kings. The ambassadors had returned, bringing back vague and uncertain answers to the message with which they had been charged, but promising the speedy arrival of messengers from the court of France, with full powers to treat with the King and his advisers. Henry was perhaps not displeased to have this opportunity of showing to these French representatives, whose approach was now hourly expected, the advanced state of his preparations, and the prosperous condition of his countrymen.

The Dukes of Clarence and Exeter, and the Earl of March, who had been appointed to receive the ambassadors, were already at Southampton; our hero had been selected to accompany his royal patron on this expedition, the Duke of Exeter's followers being left under the command of Master Nicholas Drury, his senior squire.

Bardwell's heart leaped high at this temporary release from the conventual strictness of the episcopal household, where he had been in constant dread of the discovery of the precious volume which he had received from Dorothy Morrison, since Bishop Beaufort was, at that time at least, principally remarkable for his intolerant hatred of the Lollard party, and for his zeal for the interests of the ecclesiastical order to which he belonged.

On a bright day in June, a party of the young knights and squires of King Henry's camp, having clambered up the side of St. Catherine's hill, threw themselves down on the grassy slope, lazily admiring the splendid prospect spread out before them, whilst they drew vivid pictures of the feats of arms which they expected to accomplish, and of the glories which they hoped to acquire in the approaching campaign.

"My father," said one, "won his spurs on the field of Crécy, and I trust that those of his son may be acquired at a battle of equal fame."

"My uncle," exclaimed another, "was one of the band of whom brave Sir Walter Manny was the chief, who covered their right eyes with a black patch, which they swore never to remove until some gallant deed had ensured their fame."

"And mine," said a third, "was the companion and friend of Sir John Chandos, the constable of Aquitaine, and——."

"Well," said Ralph Percy, the son of the gallant but unfortunate Hotspur, "I would these French ambassadors would arrive; for I am well-nigh as sick of this idle life as my father was when the Scotch borders had been quiet for a season."

"You may chance to have your wish, my young master," said Nicholas Drury, who had just joined the group; "for I have this moment received a missive from my lord the Duke, announcing the arrival of these same French envoys, and his speedy return hither in their company."

"Indeed, Master Drury," exclaimed Ralph; "but this is news indeed! I marvel much," added the thoughtless youth, "that you were not chosen to accompany the Duke on this expedition."

"Nay," interposed William De la Pole with a sneer, "*that* honour was of course reserved for the Duke's young favourite—Master William De Bardwell."

"Your former schoolmate and companion, De la Pole?" suggested Percy. "I marvel why you so dislike him; he seems a likely youth enough, though something of the quietest."

"Who, I?" said De la Pole with well-assumed indifference. "I care little about him; saw too much of him at Wingfield, it may be."

"Well," said Drury, who had now recovered the equanimity which had been somewhat disturbed by Percy's inconsiderate question, "whatever Master Bardwell's faults or merits may be, it had been, methinks, somewhat ill-considered to have left him in command of my lord's followers, and——."

"Ay, indeed," broke in De la Pole hastily, "who knows what *heresy* he might have introduced into that gallant band!"

"*Heresy!*" exclaimed Percy; "you do not surely mean that the youth is a gospeller!"

"Nay, I *mean* nothing," answered De la Pole, with emphasis, "only he was for some time the guest of that arch-heretic Sir John Oldcastle, and his residence at Wingfield was brought to an untimely conclusion through his intercourse with a suspected Lollard. But it grows late, and my Lord of Clarence will require my attendance. Farewell, my masters!" "Nay," said several of the group, "we may as well return with you." And so, after a few more observations of no particular interest, the merry company descended into the city.

That same evening the French Ambassadors, the Archbishop of Bourges, the Bishop of Lisieux, and the Earl of Vendome, entered the venerable city, and were escorted by the English princes to the apartments prepared for their use. During their journey from Southampton, the French envoys could not help remarking, with admiration somewhat akin to envy, the contented and peaceful appearance of the inhabitants of the country through which they passed, as they recalled the anarchy and distress which at that time desolated their native land.

As Bardwell, in close attendance upon his princely patron, turned from the lodging assigned to the French Ambassadors, he, to his intense surprise, recognized the well-known figure of the Lollard Fitz-Thomas, or De Mowbray, engaged in apparently earnest and confidential conversation with Lord Scrope, one of the most favoured nobles of King Henry's court. It was but a momentary glimpse; the Lollard disappearing down a side street, whilst our hero's duty called him to follow the receding form of the Duke of Exeter; but Bardwell was certain that he could not have been mistaken in his recognition of that tall attenuated form, and those deep-set, piercing eyes.

At noon on the following day, King Henry proposed to receive the message in the great hall of Wolvesey. The scene presented would afford a fit subject for the pen of the poet, or for the brush of the painter; and was well calculated to arouse the admiration of all beholders. The young king, tall and stately, with frank open countenance, penetrating and commanding glance, and mobile and expressive features, stood on a raised dais, surrounded by brethren, kinsmen, and nobles, to receive the answer to his message of defiance.

The Archbishop of Bourges, after dilating at considerable length upon the blessings of peace and the miseries of war, exhorted the King to relinquish his designs upon the crown of France, accepting as the dowry of the Lady Catherine a large sum of money, and some of the provinces which his highness claimed by hereditary right.

At Henry's command, Archbishop Chicheley replied to his harangue, giving the French ambassadors to understand that the repose of Christendom, and an amiable correspondence with foreign princes, had been all along the King's inclination, that in order to this end he had assembled his Parliament, and sent an embassy to France to demand those provinces which had been formerly in the possession of his ancestors; but his ambassadors receiving no satisfactory answer from Charles, the King had raised an army, furnished himself at all points for war, and was now ready to set sail for France; and since the French would take no notice of his right, he was resolved to push his fortune, and endeavour a revenge for the injustice.

However, to show the world how much he disliked extremities, and how unwilling he was to be forced upon the effusion of Christian blood, his highness was willing to recede from some part of his right, to disband his army, to marry the Lady Catherine, and agree to a peace, provided the duchy of Aquitaine, the earldom of Anjou, and the other provinces formerly enjoyed by his ancestors, were restored.

If these conditions were not accepted, then the King would immediately descend upon France, harass the country with fire and sword, and never give over the ravages of war till he had recovered his right and set that crown upon his head. Lastly, he appealed to the Almighty for the justice of his cause, and expressed a hope that he would prosper the expedition. The violence with which the Archbishop of Bourges replied to these propositions gave great offence; and the King, after reprimanding him for his misbehaviour, commanded that all the French Ambassadors should immediately leave the kingdom.

As Henry was leaving the council chamber the Earl of March requested the favour of a private audience with his majesty. Almost at the same moment a paper was placed in the King's hand which had, it was said, been just received from Lord Abergavenny, the Warden of the Welsh Marshes. A cloud of sorrowful displeasure passed over Henry's handsome features as he perused this document, but instantly recovering his dignified composure, he commanded the Dukes of Bedford and Exeter and the Earl of March to attend him to his private apartments, and with his usual gracious smile dismissed the other members of the assembly, exhorting them to diligence and despatch in the completion of all preparations for a speedy departure for Southampton.

The privacy of the royal apartments had hardly been attained before the Earl of March, throwing himself at the feet of his astonished kinsman, revealed the existence of a dangerous conspiracy, entered into by the Earl of Cambridge, Lord Scrope, of Masham, and Sir John Grey, a Northumbrian knight, three of the most trusted nobles of King Henry's court, for the assassination of the King, and the recognition of March's own hereditary right to the crown. The Dukes of Bedford and Exeter instantly proposed the arrest and summary punishment of all who were concerned in the plot, including the self-accused informer; but Henry, with wonderful magnanimity, kept them from their purpose, and raising his prostrate kinsman from the ground, said, in tones of deep and sorrowful emotion:

"Alas! my cousin, this is but one link in the long chain of misery which my father forged when he seized the crown of the ill-fated Richard. Already the gallant Hotspur, my first instructor in the art of war, fills a rebel's grave; here," producing the scroll which he had so lately received, "have I the most convincing proof that Sir John Oldcastle, my companion in the campaign against Glendower, hath indeed broken every bond which once united him to his sovereign; and now I learn that three noble gentlemen, on whom I reposed the most unbounded confidence, have been guilty of a crime which as a man I *may*, and as a Christian I *ought*, to pardon, but which as a *King* I cannot allow to remain unpunished. Oh, Edmund, willingly would I resign to thee the royal dignity to which thou art by birth entitled, but I have a mission to accomplish which I may not delegate to another. Forgive me, my cousin, and continue, as thou hast hitherto been, my faithful kinsman, counsellor, and friend."

Overpowered by such unexpected generosity, March threw himself once more upon his knees, and poured forth protestations of affectionate gratitude which were never belied during the whole course of his subsequent career.

On the following morning orders were proclaimed throughout the host for the immediate departure from Winchester. The nobles and knights who were to hold positions of trust and importance were desired to assemble in the great court of Wolvesey Castle to receive their promised commissions. There, in the manner so graphically described by the greatest of English poets, King Henry made known to the three conspirators the fact that their treasonable projects had been discovered and frustrated. The indignation of all present was at once excited, and the hasty trial and summary execution of the culprits did not long delay the royal departure. After an uneventful journey King Henry arrived at Southampton, whence favouring breezes soon conveyed him to the opposite port of Harfleur.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LOLLARD'S RETREAT.

ON the very day on which the royal squadron left the harbour of Southampton, Sir John Oldcastle, at the head of a small band of defeated but still resolute partisans, entered one of the caves so abundant on the rugged ridge of the Snowdon hills. On the countenance of the great Lollard chief there was no trace of that discouragement which the failure of his recent enterprise might naturally have been expected to produce.

"My friends," he said, surveying the scanty numbers of the group which now gathered around him, "my friends, let us thank God, who hath once more brought us, in diminished numbers it is true, to a place of safety. Those who have been taken from us have fallen in a righteous cause, and which of us would not be ready at any moment to follow them to the death? Our Lord can save by few as well as by many; and we may soon find another occasion to strike a blow against the oppressors of His people. For the present we must hide ourselves for a little moment until this tyranny be overpast."

Silently the greater number of his followers withdrew to their several abodes, until the great leader was left alone with Thomas Payne, his trusted chaplain, counsellor, and friend, the man to whose skill and devotion he had owed his escape from the Tower of London.*

Then, no longer compelled to maintain a courageous appearance, for the sake of encouraging his followers, the great chieftain sank down upon a rough seat, and resting his elbow upon a table of equally rude construction, covered his face with his mantle, and remained for some moments in an attitude of the deepest dejection. Payne stood regarding him with eyes in which intense devotion was mingled with the most entire sympathy. At length the chaplain broke the painful silence.

"My honoured master," he exclaimed, "you must not allow this despondency to creep over you on account of the failure of this one effort. At any moment fresh succour may be sent to the holy cause in which we are engaged. I myself have formed a scheme to which I would fain crave your earnest attention, and our good friend Fitz-Thomas may return this very day from his mission to Lord Scrope, with the promise of protection from that powerful nobleman."

A shudder seemed to pass through Sir John Oldcastle's frame as he listened to these last words.

"Ay," he murmured, "we do indeed little know when Fitz-Thomas may return, or what will be the nature of the tidings which he may bring. To God's holy cause I have devoted my life; for that I am ready to sacrifice my allegiance, my worldly honour, my name, my family, my friends—all that makes life valuable to the sons of men. But amongst these rugged mountains I cannot but remember the princely lad who once rode by my side through their rocky defiles, as we pursued the traces of Glendower and his men. Oh, Harry, Harry, the friend whom I loved, the sovereign whom I would have followed to the death, would to God I had died ere ever I had seen this day!"

Before Payne could frame a suitable reply to the words of his patron, who seemed indeed to have forgotten his companion's presence, tumultuous greetings were heard in the outer part of the cavern, and in a few moments Fitz-Thomas stood before his chieftain.

Lord Cobham raised himself from his despondent position, and fixed his earnest gaze upon the face of the new-comer; but no word issued from his lips, and it was Payne who at last broke in with the hasty enquiry, "What cheer, Fitz-Thomas? what tidings bring you from the Lord Scrope?"

The messenger, whose toil-worn countenance seemed marked with fresh lines of weariness and pain, replied sadly, "Alas! alas! not yet will God deliver His people out of captivity! Vain is it to trust in any child of man. Lord Scrope's plans have been discovered, and he himself, with his principal associates, hath been barbarously executed by the command of the tyrant, who is about to set out upon a fresh path of bloodshed and violence."

To the astonishment of both the Lollards, a bright light seemed to dawn on the face of their chieftain, as he listened to the intelligence which to *them* appeared so gloomy. "Thank God!" he murmured, "my hands are clean from the blood of the Lord's anointed. Courage, my friends," he continued aloud, turning to his two followers; "the success of our holy cause is not, as you but now reminded me, dependent upon the will or assistance of any human being, nor is it rendered hopeless by the failure of any single scheme. You yourself, friend Payne, spoke of a project which you had formed for its advancement. Hath Fitz-Thomas's news rendered the scheme abortive?"

"No, my most honoured patron," replied Payne, delighted if somewhat perplexed to see his leader resume thus suddenly his usual confident and resolute manner—"No, my master; rather through the return of this trusty comrade I hope to obtain that skilful co-operation in my endeavours, for which I should look in vain to the untutored savages who compose the greater part of our force." And he proceeded to unfold to his astonished listeners one of the most daring plans ever conceived by political agitator or religious enthusiast, in pursuance of which he and Fitz-Thomas were to set out together for Windsor. Arrived in that royal town, Payne proposed that he and his confederate should take up their abode with a family of their co-religionists, on whose secrecy and fidelity he could rely, and while carefully shunning unnecessary notice should endeavour to master every detail with regard to the fortifications of the stately castle, and especially with the outlets, approaches, and surroundings of the Devil's Tower, in which James of Scotland sat in gilded but apparently hopeless captivity.

Oldcastle listened with ever-increasing interest and astonishment as his devoted follower laid out before him the particulars of this remarkable project.

"And do you really think," he enquired, as Payne paused in his narration, "that you will be able to penetrate into the innermost recesses of this hitherto inviolate prison?"

"My honoured patron," replied Payne, in a tone of firm assurance, "the man who by God's help obtained access to the dark dungeon in which you lay confined may well hope that, in dependence upon the same all-powerful assistance, no other captive cell shall be beyond his power to open."

"True, my trusty friend; it were indeed the basest ingratitude on my part to throw any doubt upon your skill in accomplishing such an enterprise. But this young prince; is he, think you, a favourer of our righteous cause? Otherwise how shall his enlargement promote the spread of the gospel light throughout this kingdom?"

"My lord," answered Payne gravely, "it were, methinks, sufficient answer that King James is our fellow-sufferer through the tyranny of the usurping line of Lancaster. Besides, it is said that in his solitary life he hath read much which hath opened his eyes to the errors and superstitions of the Church. He would owe his liberty to *us*, and might be by God's blessing the instrument for introducing the lamp of truth into his native kingdom. But above all his escape would concentrate the attention of the Bishop of Winchester and of the Duke of Bedford (who during King Henry's absence have been appointed lieutenants of the kingdom) upon the northern border, and will prevent their attempting anything against us in the west."

After some further conversation it was agreed that the enterprise should be attempted, and a few weeks later the two confederates set out for Windsor, Fitz-Thomas having exchanged his brown cloak and broad hat for the black jerkin and square cap of the substantial yeoman, while Payne wore the gown and hood of a university student.

They obtained lodgings in the suburbs of the royal town with a family who, as Payne well knew, were strongly attached to the reformed opinions.

Here they avoided as much as possible all intercourse with the townspeople, going out chiefly in the evening, quiet and unassuming in their manners, and secretly observant of all the approaches and surroundings of the royal castle.

Here we must leave them for a time to their investigations, while we follow the steps of our hero to the harbour of Harfleur and the banks of the silver Seine.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BELEAGUERED TOWN.

BORNE onward by favouring breezes, the English squadron had entered the Norman seaport of Harfleur with swelling canvas and flowing pennons. A herald with a flag of truce was sent to summon the town to open its gates to the high and mighty Prince, Henry, by the grace of God King of England and Duke of Normandy. But the governor, confiding in his strong garrison and ample supplies, and in the promises of succour held out to him by the French princes, declined to listen to the summons. Henry resolved to lay siege to the town: his powerful fleet gave him the command by sea, and enabled him to keep open his communication with his native dominions. After several desperate and bloody assaults the bridge over the Seine, which connected the harbour with the town, was taken by the English; but the other fortifications resisting all attacks, the King was compelled to adopt the slower process of a siege, and confided the important post already gained to the care of his uncle of Exeter, to form a beleaguering camp around the city. Thus it happened that on the bright summer evening on which we resume the thread of his history, William De Bardwell was standing a watchful sentinel, gazing upon the swiftly-flowing waters of the silver Seine. It was the first time that so important a post had been confided to him, the duke and his senior squire having retired to seek some necessary repose, and the young man's heart beat high with the earnest desire to prove himself worthy of the confidence reposed in him. For some time all seemed perfectly still; no sound was heard save the hum of voices as the companions of his watch told over their supper their tales of former campaigns. Bardwell stood alone, his gaze directed sometimes to the star-lit heaven, then to the apparently slumbering town, and again to the broad expanse of ocean. All was still. He paced with measured tread along the bridge, then leant against the parapet, and gazed upon the swiftly-flowing tidal river. His thoughts reverted to scenes of long ago—to his rambles with his young companions along the banks of the Orwell. How changed was everything now. William De la Pole and his father were indeed in the camp of the English army, but no friendly intercourse was possible between them and the former member of their household. Grace and Reginald were, he supposed, at Wingfield. Did they ever think of him with friendship and (dare he utter it even in the inmost recesses of his own heart) with love. And Michael, the young heir of Suffolk, the leader in all their youthful sports—bold, handsome, hasty, generous Mike, what had become of him? An outcast from his father's love, a fugitive from his father's home, where, where was Michael De la Pole?

Why did the thought of a certain young man, whose name seemed known to no one, and who, though wearing the dress of an esquire, was not, apparently, attached to the household of any knight or noble, involuntarily present itself to our hero's mind. Could it be *only* because the stranger's well-formed figure had the commanding height of Michael De la Pole? because the bright chestnut locks which strayed from under the steel cap he had never been known to lay aside were of the same hue as those which adorned the head of the young heir of Suffolk? The "Squire of the Azure Bow" the stranger was called, from the simple device (a knot of blue ribbon) which, with the brief motto, "For Her," alone figured upon his shield. He held aloof from the companionship of his fellows, but some slight courtesies had passed between him and Bardwell, whose life had lately been spent in almost equal isolation, the hints thrown out by De la Pole of the heretical tendencies of his former companion having led many of the other squires to avoid his society.

How long Bardwell had remained absorbed in these meditations he never knew; but he was suddenly aroused by the firm but kindly pressure of a hand upon his shoulder, whilst a deep musical voice exclaimed—

"How now, sir sentinel? Asleep upon your post! A grave military offence. Awake, awake, and stand upon your guard!"

Looking around in some confusion, Bardwell perceived the subject of his recent thoughts, the Squire of the Azure Bow, standing beside him. "Indeed, indeed, sir," he faltered, "I have not been asleep; but all seemed quiet, and as I leaned against the parapet the thoughts of other days came back with such force upon my mind that I lost all recollection of my present surroundings. But"—glancing hastily around where the group of archers still sat beside their watch-fire, and the town lay in apparent tranquillity—"no evil hath, I trust, resulted from my want of vigilance?"

"No danger, at least no *immediate* danger, threatens the post on which you stand," replied the strange squire. "But see down there"—and he pointed to the portion of the camp in which, as Bardwell well knew, the followers of the Earl of Suffolk had their quarters—"down in yonder quarter, a brave captain, to whom methinks you owe no little gratitude, *is* exposed to serious danger, and unless speedily relieved by valiant comrades can hardly escape from entire destruction."

Following the direction indicated by his companion, and steadying his gaze as well as he was able, Bardwell did indeed perceive evident tokens of a tumultuous conflict raging around the spot on which the proud banner of Suffolk had been planted on the previous day. All thoughts of recent disagreement faded from his mind as imagination pictured the brave old Earl, the generous protector of his orphaned childhood, struggling with desperate courage against his country's foes. He longed to fly to his relief, but how could he forsake his present post? Hastily entreating the Blue Squire to wait for him, and shouting a few words of command to the companions of his watch, he sprang with eager footsteps to the tent of the Duke of Exeter.

On the entrance of his squire that valiant prince started up in haste from the rude couch on which he had been lying, and while Bardwell, in eager, almost incoherent, terms related what had occurred, quickly resumed the garments which he had laid aside. With scarcely a word of reply he hastened to the bridge, followed by Bardwell. The signs of tumult had increased during Bardwell's absence, and the Duke of Exeter at once saw the necessity of sending a party to the relief of their over-matched countrymen. Bardwell and the Blue Squire instantly offered to take the command of this party, and many brave men were ready to accompany them. As they sped swiftly and silently along their ranks were filled by volunteers from other companies, until they presented a formidable array.

As they drew near to the post of danger they could recognize the form of the brave old Earl standing beneath his banner, and vainly endeavouring to raise the courage of his dispirited followers. A cry of horror burst from the lips of Bardwell and of the Blue Squire, as they saw the sabre of a French horseman swung over the head of the gallant veteran. As by a common impulse they sprang forward, De Bardwell seizing the uplifted arm of the Frenchman, while his companion received into his arms the exhausted form of the noble old warrior who had already received many serious wounds.

The fury of the foe was at once turned against their new assailants. Bardwell was especially marked out for their revenge, as his companion's first object was to convey his helpless burden to a place of safety. Our hero, on the other hand, after a short but severe struggle with the horseman first encountered, sprang to the relief of William De la Pole, whom he saw at a little distance contending with three enemies. Perhaps at that moment a struggle, fiercer far than any which raged around him, was carried on in the heart of De Bardwell, and a victory won over pride and resentment more glorious than the slaughter of a hundred foemen. The strife was as brief as it was fierce; nor could the closest observer have marked the momentary hesitation ere De Bardwell stood by the side of his former rival, while the cheery shout rang out, "A rescue! A rescue! St. George for Merrie England!" The Frenchmen, now outnumbered in their turn, began to give way, and the arrival of the Duke of Clarence with a numerous band completed their discomfiture. Some escaped into the town; others were slain, wounded, or taken prisoners.

All now were anxious to learn how it had fared with the brave Earl of Suffolk. The Duke of Clarence led the way to the veteran's tent, where he was found lying on a low couch, the life-blood slowly flowing from a wound in his chest. Kneeling by his side was the Squire of the Azure Bow, his helmet, now laid aside, discovering the fair face and chestnut locks of the Earl's eldest, and long his favourite, son, Michael De la Pole, the brave young heir of the house of Suffolk. A cry of astonishment burst from the lips of all beholders. The Duke of Clarence alone showed no sign of surprise, as he advanced to the couch and laid his hand kindly on that of the wounded man. The Earl strove in vain to speak, but he pointed with a look of indescribable affection to his recovered son, glanced with evident satisfaction at the banner which Bardwell had brought with him from the fray, laid his head upon young Michael's shoulder, and breathed his last.

"He has died a soldier's death," said the Duke of Clarence at length, breaking the solemn pause. "Peace be with his soul. It will be a lasting comfort to you, my lord," he added, turning to the young Earl, who was bending in silent sorrow over the lifeless form of his parent, "that the estrangement between your noble father and yourself was at last healed, and that you were permitted to receive his dying blessing. You are astonished, gentlemen, at the sudden appearance of this noble youth," continued the Duke, addressing the crowd who had gathered around the entrance of the tent, "and at a more fitting moment I shall be happy to expound the mystery. For the present I see tokens on the countenance of another gallant friend which call for instant care and attention. How is it with you, Master Bardwell?" he proceeded, laying a kindly hand upon the young man's shoulder; "I fear you have sustained some injury during your late valiant exploit."

Bardwell in vain endeavoured to assure the Duke that the wound he had received was nothing—a mere scratch, unworthy of his highness's notice.

His ever-increasing pallor belied his words; his brain grew dizzy, and he would have fallen to the ground had he not been caught by the outstretched arms of the young Earl of Suffolk. Medical aid was instantly procured, and under the direction of the surgeon the young man was carefully conveyed to the Duke of Exeter's quarters, where on examination it was discovered that he had received a deep sabre cut close to his right shoulder, the effusion of blood from which had caused this deadly faintness. The leech pronounced the wound to be severe and painful, but not likely, unless aggravated by inflammation or fever, to entail any danger to life or limb. He bound it up carefully, and administered a cooling potion; then, after desiring his patient to remain perfectly quiet, he left him in order to attend on those who had more pressing need of his services.

The sortie through which the Earl of Suffolk lost his life was almost the last effort made by the beleaguered garrison, and the town of Harfleur soon afterwards surrendered at discretion. King Henry's clemency on this occasion was as remarkable as the valour which he had displayed during the whole course of the siege. The peaceful inhabitants of the town were left in undisturbed possession of their houses and property. The Governor, and the troops under his command, were allowed to depart, after laying down their arms, and promising not to resume them during the present campaign. Their places were taken by an English garrison, under the command of the Duke of Exeter, and King Henry, at the head of the main body of his army, set forth in search of fresh opportunities for the display of their intrepid bravery.

William De Bardwell, still unable to use his sword arm, remained at Harfleur with his noble patron. For some time the accounts which the newly-appointed Governor received from his royal kinsman spoke only of fame and glory and easily-acquired success. The terror of the English arms seemed to go before them, and the British soldiers appeared to conquer by their very presence. Rumours were indeed heard of a mighty host raised to oppose them, but the dissensions rife among the French princes still delayed its appearance. But soon another tale was told: the invading army was brought low by an enemy, against whom their valour and strength were alike powerless. Disease and death stalked with resistless force through the camp, which no human foe had been able to assault.

The sultry heat of the September sun, the foul odours from the undrained marshes of Piccardy, the luscious fruits of which the British warriors partook with unrestrained self-indulgence, sapped the strength of the stalwart soldiers who had so lately set sail, flushed with anticipations of victory and conquest, from the port of Southampton.

The royal Captain of the now shattered and diminished, but all-unconquered host, had, through the strict temperance which he ever observed, escaped the fearful ravages of fever and dysentery which had proved fatal to so many of his followers. But the ever-increasing anxiety to which he was a prey began to tell upon his health, and to overcloud his brave spirit with gloomy forebodings. The weakened condition of his forces compelled him for the time to relinquish all idea of further advance; he gave orders to return to Calais, leaving to a future campaign the prosecution of any further designs which he might yet harbour against the crown and kingdom of France. The French princes, stung with shame at having allowed so apparently feeble an antagonist to march almost unopposed into the very heart of their native land, threw off their selfish schemes and dishonourable dissensions, and prepared to cut off the retreat of the invader, and to crush him by the force of their overwhelming numbers.

Believing the English monarch to be wholly in their power, they sent insulting messages to him, desiring him to fix the amount of the ransom with which he would be prepared to purchase his personal safety. Henry's reply is well known, and has been well-preserved by our great national poet. Disdaining to make any terms for his individual security as distinct from that of the meanest of his followers, he bade the French herald tell those who had sent him that his own lifeless body would be the only ransom which they should ever receive from the King of England. Being further interrogated as to the route which he designed to follow, he answered with characteristic frankness, "By that which leads straight to Calais, and if my enemies attempt to intercept me it will be at their peril; I shall not *seek them*, but I will not move a step slower or quicker to avoid them."

> "If we may pass we will; if we be hindered
> We shall your tawny ground with your red blood
> Discolour; and so, Mountjoy, fare you well.
> The sum of all our answer is but this:
> We would not *seek* a battle as we are,
> Nor as we are, we say, we will not *shun* it."

The ford of Blanchetacque, so memorable in the history of Edward III., had almost been the scene of another battle no less important than that of Crecy; but the French force posted on that portion of the banks of the Somme was too strong to be dislodged by the English army in its present condition, and Henry was compelled to seek a less strongly guarded passage. This he fortunately discovered near Bethencour, a little higher up on the course of the river, and he was able to convey his whole army across in safety. It soon, however, became evident that a general engagement could not be long delayed, the huge host of the French being discovered drawn up upon the plains of Azincour in a position which precluded all possibility of escape. The similarity of the situation occupied by the English army with that which their forefathers had held upon the field of Crecy, inspired the followers of Henry with the hope of a deliverance equal to that obtained through the former great national victory. Henry did everything in his power to revive and sustain the courage of his troops, and by his skilful dispositions, to increase the chances of success. Mounted upon a white charger, clothed in shining armour, with a crown of gold enriched with precious stones, he rode along the ranks cheering and encouraging the meanest of his soldiers with words of courteous affability.

> "Calling them brothers, friends, and countrymen,
> Upon his royal face there was no note
> How dread an army had surrounded him,
> Nor did he dedicate one jot of colour
> Unto the weary and ill-watched night;
> But freshly-looked, and overbore attaint
> With cheerful semblance and sweet majesty."

At ten o'clock on the morning of the 25th of October, the French showing no anxiety to commence the attack, Henry commanded his trumpeters to sound a charge, and the battle was begun by the advanced guard of the English army, which was under the command of Sir Thomas Erpingham.

The heavy shower of English arrows told with immense effect upon the serried ranks of their opponents, who, in the confined position which they had taken up, were rather encumbered than assisted by their own numbers. Dismay, confusion, and terror soon prevailed among the ill-disciplined troops of the French vanguard; and the English horsemen, perceiving their advantage, rushed upon them with their battle-axes, and the field was presently strewn with slain. The battle now became general, and Henry, who in person commanded the main body of his army, was several times exposed to the utmost personal danger. The Duke of Clarence shared the perils of his royal brother, and the young Earl of Suffolk, who was in close attendance upon this illustrious prince, was struck down mortally wounded.

A false report of a successful rally of the French rearguard induced Henry to sully his fame by a barbarous order for the slaughter of the prisoners who had been taken. Many illustrious captives perished before the mistake was discovered, and the carnage arrested. Never was victory more complete. The Constable D'Albret, and seven members of the French royal family, lay dead upon the field; five princes had been taken prisoners, together with fourteen thousand persons of inferior rank.

But, turning aside from the scene of triumph and victory, let us enter the tent in which the banner of Suffolk once more hangs in mournful folds above the dying couch of the chieftain whose device it bears, and listen to the faltering accents which the gallant young Michael De la Pole, the third of his name and title, pours into the attentive ear of his former companion in arms—William De

Bardwell, who kneels beside the prostrate form of his old comrade.

For our hero—now completely recovered from the wounds which he had received at Harfleur, and burning with desire for the realisation of the dreams of daring deed upon the tented plain, which he had not yet been able to achieve—no sooner heard of the near prospect of a general engagement to be fought in the neighbourhood of the river Somme, than he sought and obtained the Duke of Exeter's permission to accompany the reinforcements which that prince was about to send to the assistance of his royal nephew. Arriving upon the field of battle at the very moment of the most sanguinary struggle, Bardwell was one of those who rescued the royal Henry from the determined attack of the eighteen valiant French knights who had forced their way up to the royal banner.

As he was turning away, after the accomplishment of this purpose, Bardwell saw the mangled Suffolk and insensible form of the young Earl of lying upon the ground. Raising it in his arms the young squire bore it carefully to a tent, where he endeavoured, by every means which his limited knowledge of the healing art suggested, to restore his friend to consciousness, and to staunch the blood which flowed from the deep wound in his side. In the former object he at length succeeded; but the latter was beyond his skill. Michael opened his eyes, and after gazing wildly around him for a few moments recognized his old playfellow. With a strenuous effort he drew from an inner receptacle of his doublet the knot of blue ribbon which so many months ago he had received at Wingfield from the fair hands of the lady of his love. Pressing it passionately to his lips, he said, in tones which strong emotion and the near approach of death rendered almost inaudible, "The token—take it—to her;—it has lain—nearest my heart. Tell her my father—at the last—gave *us* —his blessing." The effort was too great, and the young nobleman sank exhausted into a sort of stupor from which he never afterwards recovered. He died that evening, his head still resting upon De Bardwell's shoulder.

But the gallant deeds of the young squire were not to pass unnoticed or unrewarded. The King himself, at the warm recommendation of the Dukes of Clarence and Exeter, bestowed upon him the honour of knighthood, and having been graciously pleased to listen to the account of his early life, restored to him all the property formerly in the possession of his family. Yet no gleam of satisfaction appeared upon the grave, sad countenance of the young recipient of these honours and emoluments. The dying message of Michael De la Pole, which he wrongly imagined to be addressd to Grace Mowbray, seemed ever ringing in his ears, a death-knell to all his fondest hopes. For well he knew that Grace would never have given such a token to any but the possessor of her undivided heart, and that to such an one she would prove equally constant in death as in life. His only desire now was to revisit Wingfield, restore to her the precious token—precious, for was it not the emblem of her love?—and then never to see her face again.

Meanwhile the young knight had to play his part in the gorgeous pageants with which an enthusiastic people welcomed home the victors of Agincourt.

The gloominess of his countenance, so little in harmony with the general rejoicing, could hardly fail to attract attention, and much wonder was expressed at the apparent intensity of his affection for the memory of the brave young Earl.

"Marry," added some observers, "his own brother shows far less sorrow for his death!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERER.

THE stately avenue leading up to Wingfield Castle was glowing with the last brilliant tints of autumn as Sir William De Bardwell entered its once familiar shelter. He had easily obtained the Duke of Exeter's permission to pay a visit of condolence to the widowed and bereaved Countess who still resided within that noble mansion. He did not, of course, mention the token which, in accordance, as he believed, with the last wish of his former companion, he was about to convey to the beautiful heiress of the house of Mowbray, although this was in fact the main object of his journey. The Duke of Exeter had, it may be observed, considerately suggested that his former squire should remain a member of his household until such time as his own home at Bardwell should be ready for his reception. As the young knight rode slowly along the beautiful avenue, memories of bygone days crowded thick upon his mind. Above all, the scene of his farewell interview with Grace, almost upon this very spot, was as vividly present in his thoughts as on the day of its occurrence. "Was it possible," he asked himself, "that the words she then uttered, and the beaming glances which had fallen from her bright eyes, kindling his soul to lofty hopes and high desires, had been but the expression of simple friendliness and compassion?" It must have been so, else never could the token which now lay so close to his heart have been bestowed upon another and more favoured suitor.

As he raised his eyes and gazed sadly round upon the well-remembered scene, his glance fell upon two persons pacing along at some little distance in front of him. With a thrill of pleasure, which was almost painful from its very intensity, his eye once more drank in every line of the lovely form of her whom he loved so deeply. True, her face was turned away, but every movement of her graceful form, every turn of her shapely head, every rippling wave of her golden hair, sent a rapturous throb through each fibre of her adorer's frame. Absorbed in the contemplation of *her* loveliness, it was some minutes ere he perceived that the form of her companion was almost equally familiar to him; and recognized with intense surprise the attenuated form, stately bearing, and eager gestures of the outlawed Lollard, Henry Fitz-Thomas.

Anxious to learn what motive could have induced the preacher to return to Wingfield, Bardwell hastened after the pedestrians, whom he overtook just as they, whilst turning to retrace their steps, confronted the new-comer.

Leaping from his horse, and passing his arm through the bridle, he advanced towards them, and greeted the lady with cold but courteous formality, mentioning the ostensible object of his visit—to convey to Lady Suffolk the expression of his heartfelt sympathy with the heavy sorrows which had befallen her during the recent campaign.

Then turning to the Lollard, he expressed his unfeigned astonishment at finding him in this locality.

"My affection for this dear girl," replied Fitz-Thomas, "first drew me hitherward, and I rejoice that I have been able to assist her in studies and researches to which you, my son, were the first, although probably the unconscious, means of directing her attention. You may perhaps have heard that the apparently well-laid scheme by which my friend and I had hoped to have effected the liberation of the captive King of Scotland was foiled at the last moment by the machinations of King Henry's guard.

"Payne was taken prisoner, but the arch-persecutor, Cardinal Beaufort, has been marvellously employed for the salvation of this servant of the Lord, whom he has refused to deliver up to the secular arm."

"And you yourself, father," enquired Bardwell, "how did you escape? and what fortunate chance guided your steps hitherward?"

"I had been directed," replied Fitz-Thomas, "to be in readiness with the horses that had been engaged for the journey, at a small hostelry a little to the north of the castle gate. The hour which Payne had appointed was past, but I was not much astonished, as I knew that he apprehended some difficulty in overcoming the scruples of the hapless Stewart, over whom Harry of Monmouth seems to have cast the same glamour which hath blinded the eyes of Mortimer, Earl of March. Yet as time went on, and I saw no sign of the approach of my comrades, I began to fear that something had occurred to render our efforts unavailing. At length a small boy, repeating the words which Payne was to use as a signal, placed in my hands a scrap of paper, on which my unfortunate companion had scrawled the short sentence, 'Save yourself; all is lost!' I as quietly as I could informed my host that the friends whom I had been expecting had determined to delay their journey, but that my own business was too pressing to permit me to wait for them. I paid him liberally for the time the horses had been kept waiting, and taking one of the beasts set out on my solitary journey. My first purpose was to have rejoined Sir John Oldcastle amid the fastnesses of the Welsh mountains; but I feared lest by so doing I might draw additional danger to the path of my revered chieftain. The recollection of old Ralph's hospitality, and the desire to see something more of my brother's child, led me to Wingfield; nor have I had reason to regret my decision. And now, my dear child," added the Lollard, turning to Grace with the utmost affection, "were it not better that you should return to the castle, lest Lady Suffolk should be alarmed at your long absence? Good-night; and God bless you.

You have in this good youth a kind and honourable companion. Good-night to you, too, my son. I need not bid you take care of *her.*"

The Lollard hardly waited for any reply from his companions before, turning down the by-path leading to the armourer's cottage, he disappeared rapidly from their view, and once again Grace Mowbray and William De Bardwell found themselves pacing side by side, and alone, the broad pathway leading to the Castle of Wingfield.

The recollections of the past crowding tumultuously into both their minds checked the flow of coversation, and it was not until the entrance gate was full in sight that De Bardwell said with evident hesitation, "I must entreat you, lady, to grant me the favour of a private interview to-morrow morning. I have a sacred message to deliver to you from one who is no longer a denizen of this earth, or, believe me, I would not thus presume upon your kindness."

Grace blushed deeply as she noted the cold formality of her companion's manner; but she answered with her usual frank cordiality, "I will await you, Sir Knight, on the southern terrace immediately after my return from early mass. I, too," she added, after a slight pause, "have a sacred treasure which I must seize this opportunity of returning to its rightful owner."

The castle door was now reached, and amidst the slight confusion, inseparable from the arrival of an unexpected visitor, Bardwell was unable to enquire into the meaning of the lady's last observation.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE next morning arose fair and cloudless, one of those brilliant autumn days which sometimes, even on the threshold of winter, revive the brightest memories of summer. William De Bardwell, leaning against the stone parapet which bounded the terrace, strove to collect all his resolution for the final parting with her on whom his heart's best affections had so long been centred. The token, stained with the heart's blood of the gallant young nobleman, whose cheery voice would never again ring gaily through his ancestral home, the precious, fatal token was in his hand. Again, as on that spring evening so long ago, he looked and listened with yearning eagerness and a beating heart for the first tokens of Grace Mowbray's approach.

At length he perceived her slender, graceful form advancing slowly up the pathway leading from the parish church. Bardwell met her at the foot of the terrace steps, and with courtly formality led her to one of the seats which had been placed for the convenience of the family or guests at the castle.

"Lady," he said, "I am deeply sensible of your goodness in according me this interview, and thus affording me the opportunity of fulfilling the sacred commission entrusted to me by my late noble companion-in-arms, and restoring this precious token to the worthy object of his dear heart's love.

"'Tell her,' said the gallant youth, in a voice whose accents were rendered almost inaudible by the near approach of death, 'tell her that it has never yet left my bosom, that my father with his latest breath gave us his blessing.' Here, lady," continued the young knight, bending on one knee before her, "here is the token, the stains upon its surface can but render it more precious in your sight."

Grace gazed at him in startled bewilderment. "Of whom do you speak, Sir Knight?" she said at length.

"Of whom?" repeated Bardwell in equal amazement, "of whom could I speak but of our gallant young companion, whose short but brilliant career was terminated by his glorious death upon the field of Agincourt."

"Alas!" she exclaimed, "there must be some strange mistake in all this. Michael was indeed dear to me as a kind kinsman, a loving brother, might have been; but no token of other affection ever passed between us; nor had I ever any reason to suppose that he honoured me with such love as you would seem to imply. Nay, I could have been sure that—ah, yes; and on that bright morning when the Duke of Clarence feasted in our hall I noticed that the blue breastknot which she always wore was missing. It must be so. I thank you for your courtesy, Sir Knight," she added with gentle dignity, "and will take care that bow and message shall be duly conveyed to her to whom they were in truth addressed.

"And now," she continued, raising from the seat beside her a square package which Bardwell had not previously noticed, "and now, let me in my turn fulfil a sacred duty, concerning which no mistake can possibly arise, by restoring this precious volume to its rightful owner."

Bardwell, dizzy with conflicting emotions, received the packet almost mechanically, and after unfastening the silken cord by which it was secured, recognized with extreme surprise the carved cover of the Holy Bible, most precious legacy of his parents' love, which had been left behind at the time of his hurried departure from Wingfield.

"Oh, it is too much, far too much!" he exclaimed, "to receive from *your* hands this sacred and inestimable treasure! To hear from *your* lips words which embolden me at length to make known to you the love which I have so vainly endeavoured to conceal! Oh, Grace, surely you will not now drive me back to the lowest depths of despair!"

It seems unnecessary to follow the conversation any further, especially as such interviews, however delightful to the parties more particularly concerned, are apt to become wearisome to less interested observers. Suffice it to say that when Lady Suffolk, some time later, descended into the great hall, she was greeted by a formal request for her sanction, as the young lady's guardian, of the betrothal of Sir William De Bardwell and the heiress of De Mowbray. Although greatly surprised, and perhaps a little disappointed, at the turn events had taken, the Countess could not refuse her consent; and after a few ineffectual remonstrances, her son, the new Earl, also withdrew his opposition.

The marriage, which took place in the following summer, in the grey old church of Wingfield, was graced by the presence of the King himself, as well as by that of the Dukes of Exeter and Clarence.

The bridal pair were accompanied to their newly-erected home at Bardwell by Reginald De la Pole, who, at the urgent request of the friend of his boyhood, had consented to undertake the charge of the beautifully restored parish church of Bardwell.

One of Sir William's earliest acts after his marriage was to make arrangements for conveying the greater portion of his wife's ample fortune to her uncle, Lord Henry De Mowbray, or, as he was more generally called, Father Henry Fitz-Thomas.

After the capture and death of his revered leader, Sir John Oldcastle, De Mowbray gradually relinquished the itinerant labours of which age and infirmity rendered him less capable than he had once been, and resigned himself more and more to the loving care which his niece and her husband were ever ready to bestow upon him. A small but comfortable apartment in their commodious home was assigned to him, and always kept in readiness for his occupation.

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Sir William and Lady De Bardwell were happy in each other's love, and in the endeavour to instruct their children in the holy truths contained in the square black volume which they had both learned to prize so highly.

We may now, I think, take leave of the personages whose history we have followed with, I trust, some little interest, in the peaceful, earnest discharge of daily duties, striving, according to the light given in due measure to each, to serve to the best of their ability the Master who is in heaven, and looking forward to that blessed time—

> "When all that pained or seemed amiss
> Shall melt with earth and sin away,
> And saints before their Saviour's eye,
> Filled with each other's company,
> Shall spend in love th' eternal day."

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