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Title: The Secret Chamber at Chad

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Release date: April 20, 2005 [EBook #15670]

Most recently updated: December 14, 2020

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Martin Robb

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THE SECRET CHAMBER AT CHAD

by Everett Evelyn-Green.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#): A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

[CHAPTER II](#): THE HOUSEHOLD AT CHAD.

[CHAPTER III](#): BROTHER EMMANUEL.

[CHAPTER IV](#): THE TRAVELLING PREACHER.

[CHAPTER V](#): A WARNING.

[CHAPTER VI](#): WATCHED!

[CHAPTER VII](#): AN IMPOSING SPECTACLE.

[CHAPTER VIII](#): HIDDEN AWAY.

[CHAPTER IX](#): THE SEARCH.

[CHAPTER X](#): FROM PERIL TO SAFETY.

Chapter I: A Mysterious Visitor.

The great house at Chad was wrapped in sleep. The brilliant beams of a June moon illuminated the fine pile of gray masonry with a strong white light. Every castellated turret and twisted chimney stood out in bold relief from the heavy background of the pine wood behind, and the great courtyard lay white and still, lined by a dark rim of ebon shadow.

Chad, without being exactly a baronial hall of the first magnitude, was nevertheless a very fine old house. It had been somewhat shorn of its pristine glories during the Wars of the Roses. One out of its original two quadrangles had then been laid in ruins, and had never been rebuilt. But the old inner quadrangle still remained standing, and made an ample and commodious dwelling house for

the family of the Chadgroves who inhabited it; whilst the ground which had once been occupied by the larger outer quadrangle, with its fortifications and battlements, was now laid out in terraces and garden walks, which made a pleasant addition to the family residence.

The seventh Henry was on the throne. The battle of Bosworth Field had put an end to the long-drawn strife betwixt the houses of York and Lancaster. The exhausted country was beginning to look forward to a long period of prosperity and peace; and the household at Chad was one of the many that were rejoicing in the change which had come upon the public outlook, and was making the most of the peaceful years which all trusted lay before the nation.

Several changes of some importance had passed over Chad during the previous century. The wars had made gaps in the ranks of the family to whom it had always belonged. There had been sundry edicts of confiscation--as speedily repealed by the next change in the fate of the day; and more than once the head had been struck down by death, and the house and lands had passed either to a minor or to some other branch of the family. There had been the confusion and strife betwixt the various branches of the family which was a characteristic of that age of upheaval and strife; but the present owner of the estate, Sir Oliver Chadgrove, seemed firmly settled in his place. He had fought on Henry's side at Bosworth, and had been confirmed by that monarch in the possession of the estate of Chad; and since that day none had tried to dispute his claim; nor, indeed, would it have been very easy to do so, as he was undoubtedly the rightful representative of the older branch of the family.

A just and kindly man, he was beloved of those about him, and would have been staunchly supported by his retainers had any adversary arisen against him. His only enemy was the Lord of Mortimer, who owned Mortimer's Keep, the adjoining property, and had cast covetous eyes on Chad during the stormy days of the late wars, more than once trying unsuccessfully to step in between the disputing parties and claim it as his own, not by the power of right, but by that of might alone. However, he had not been successful in this attempt; and for the past few years there had been a semblance of friendliness between Sir Oliver and his proud and powerful neighbour.

The knight was well aware that the friendliness was more a seeming than a reality. He was perfectly well acquainted with the rapacious character of the owner of Mortimer's Keep, and with his covetous designs upon Chad. He knew he was a secret foe, always on the watch for any cause of complaint against him; and he could often feel that it would take very little to stir up the old jealous strife and hostility. Still, for the present an armed truce was the order of the day, and Sir Oliver, knowing his own loyalty, the cleanness of his hands, and the uprightness of his dealings, was not much afraid that his enemy would ever succeed in ousting him from his lands, or in gaining possession of the fair park and house of Chad for himself.

Sir Oliver was personally liked by the king, which was another point in his favour. Without being a brilliant ruler like his successors, the seventh Henry had the faculty of choosing men of parts to place about him, and he had recognized in Sir Oliver Chadgrove certain qualities which he approved, and of which he wished to avail himself from time to time. So the knight was frequently summoned to attend the king, and occasionally his wife went with him and appeared at court. On this particular bright June night, both the master and the mistress were absent, being at Windsor with the king's court; and the three boys--the children with whom Providence had blessed them--were the only members of the family sleeping beneath the roof of the great house.

The bedchamber of the three boys was a large, bare room looking out across the wooded park and ridge of hills, through which the little river of Chad meandered leisurely. The boys would have preferred the courtyard for their lookout; but a lover of nature could not but be struck by the exceeding beauty of the view from this row of latticed casements. And indeed the green expanse of

home-like country had its charm even for high-spirited boys; and Edred, the second child of the house, often sat for hours together on the wide window ledge, gazing his fill at the shifting lights and shadows, and dreaming dreams of his own about what he saw.

The long room contained three small narrow beds, and very little furniture besides. In each of these beds a boy lay sleeping. The moonlight streaming in through the uncurtained windows illuminated the whole room, and showed the curly heads, two dark and one fair, lying on the hard pillows, and shone so straight into the face of the eldest boy, that he stirred a little in his sleep, and half turned round.

He was a handsome lad of some eight or nine summers, with regular, strongly-marked features, and dark hair and eyes. The brown hand and arm which lay exposed to view showed a muscular development that betokened great strength to come when the boy should be grown to manhood, and the face exhibited a like promise of strength of will and character.

Bertram Chadgrove, half aroused by the strong light of the moon in his face, opened his dark eyes sleepily for a few minutes, and then turned over towards the wall, and prepared to slumber again. But before he had sunk to sleep he became further aroused by a very peculiar sound in the wall (as it seemed), close to which his bed was stationed; and instead of drowsing off again, he woke up with all his faculties on the alert, much as a watchdog does, and sitting up in bed he listened with all his ears.

Yes; there could be no mistaking it! There was certainly a sound--a muffled, curious sound--within the very wall itself. He pressed his ear against the panel, and his eyes shone brightly in the moonlight.

"It is some living thing," he whispered to himself. "Methinks it is surely some human thing. Rats can make strange sounds, I know, but not such sounds as these. A human being, and within the thickness of the wall! How can such a thing be? I never heard the like before. It comes nearer--I hear the groping of hands close beside mine ear. Heaven send it be not a spirit from the other world! I fear no mortal arm, of flesh and blood, but I desire not to see a visitor from the land of shadows."

For a moment the boy's flesh crept on his bones, and the hair of his head seemed to rise up from his scalp. The groping of those phantom hands against the wall just beside him was enough to fill the stoutest heart with terror, in an age when superstition was always rife. He strove to call to his brothers; but his voice was no more than a whisper, and his throat felt dry and parched. Failing in making himself heard by his companions, he cowered down and drew the clothes right over his head, shivering with fear; and it was several minutes before his native courage came to his aid, and he felt ashamed of this paroxysm of terror.

"Fie upon me for a white-livered poltroon!" he cried, as the chill sweat of fear ceased to break out upon him, and he rallied his courage and his determination.

"I am no better than a maid! Shame upon me for a coward! I will not call to Edred and Julian. It shall not be said of me, even by mine own self, that I dared not face even a spirit from the lower world alone. I will find out what this sound is, and that without the help of any other living soul, else shall I despise myself forever!"

And with that resolve hot within him, Bertram threw back his coverings and prepared to rise from his bed, when his attention was arrested by some strange stealthy sounds close against the great carved chimney piece, on the same side of the room as his own bed.

His brothers slept on the opposite side of the big room. None of the sounds which were so astonishing Bertram would penetrate to their sleeping senses. Had

the eldest boy not been awake at the beginning, he would scarce have heard the sound, so cautious and soft it was. But this noise was something new. It was like hands fumbling and groping in search of something. Bertram held his breath to listen, growing hot and cold by turns. But he drew some of his clothes cautiously towards him, and silently slipped into his nether garments. He felt that if there were some unseen enemy striving in mysterious fashion to penetrate into this room, he could better meet him if he were clothed, however scantily, than he could do as he was; and he had ample time to put on even his doublet and hose, and to cover himself up again in bed, with his small poniard closely held in his hand, before there was any further development of that strange night's drama which he was so breathlessly watching.

That something or somebody was seeking to find entrance into the room, he could not doubt for a moment; but, on the other hand, it seemed an incredible surmise, because the wall along which the unknown visitor had plainly felt his way was an outside wall, and if there really were any person thus moving, he must be walking along some secret passage in the thickness of the wall itself.

Such a thing was not impossible. Bertram knew of more than one such passage contrived in the thickness of the wall in his ancient home, and all the family were acquainted with a certain secret hiding place that existed, cleverly contrived in the rambling old building, which, with its various levels and its wilderness of chimneys, might well defy detection, even with the most skilled search. But the boy knew of no such passage or chamber in connection with their sleeping room, and he was sure his parents did not know of one either, or any member of the household. Therefore it was immensely surprising to hear these uncanny sounds, and it was small wonder if they did give rise to a wave of supernatural terror, of which the boy was man enough to feel ashamed the moment reason had time to assert her sway.

"I have done no wrong; I confessed but three days since, and received blessing and absolution. If any spirit were to come to visit this room, it could do me no hurt. Besides, methinks a spirit would pass easily along the straightest place, and would not need to fumble thus as if in search of hidden bolts.

"Ha! what is that! Methought some spring shot back. Hist! here IT comes!"

The boy lay back upon his bed, drawing the clothes silently up to his very eyes. The moonlight had shifted just a little, and no longer illumined his face. That was now in shadow, and would scarce reveal the fact that he was awake. He lay perfectly still, scarce daring to draw his breath, and the next moment a strange thing happened.

The whole of one of the great carved pillars that supported the high mantle shelf swung noiselessly forward, and stood out at right angles to the wall. From where he lay Bertram could not see, but he could well understand that when this was done a narrow doorway had been revealed, and the next moment a shadowy figure glided with noiseless steps into the room.

The figure was poorly clad in a doublet of serge much the worse for wear, and the moonlight showed a strangely haggard face and soiled and torn raiment. Yet there was an air of dignity about the mysterious visitor which showed to the astonished boy that he must at some time have been in better circumstances, and lying quite still Bertram watched his movements with breathless attention.

With a quick, scared glance round him, as though afraid that even the silence might be the silence of treachery, the gaunt figure advanced with covert eagerness across the floor, leaving the door wide open behind him, as if to be ready for him should he desire to fly; and precipitating himself upon a ewer of cold water standing upon the floor, he drank and drank and drank as though he would never cease.

Plainly he was consumed by the most raging thirst. Bertram had never seen

anything but an exhausted horse after a burning summer's chase in the forest drink in such a fashion. And as he watched, all fear left him in a moment, for certainly no phantom could drink dry this great ewer of spring water; and if he had only a creature of flesh and blood to deal with, why, then there was certainly no cause for fear.

In place of dread and terror, a great pity welled up in the generous heart of the boy. He had all the hatred for oppression and the chivalrous desire to help the oppressed that seem born in the hearts of the sons of British birth. Who and what manner of man this was he did not know; but he was evidently some poor hunted creature, going in very fear of his life, and as such the boy pitied him from the very ground of his heart, and would gladly have helped him had he known how.

He lay for a few moments wondering and pondering. Certainly his father was no foe to any man. He could not be hiding from his displeasure. The fugitive had rather taken refuge in his house; and if so, who better could be found to help him than the son of the owner?

"Our father and our mother alike have always taught us to befriend the stranger and the oppressed," said the boy to himself. "I will ask this stranger of himself, and see if I may befriend him. I would gladly learn the trick of yon door. It would be a goodly secret to have for our very own."

It was plain that the fugitive, though aware that the room was tenanted, had satisfied himself that the occupants were all asleep. He had ceased his frightened, furtive looks around him, and was quaffing the last of the water with an air of relish and relief that was good to see, pausing from time to time to stretch his limbs and to draw in great gulps of fresh air through the open window by which he stood, as a prisoner might do who had just been released from harsh captivity.

The moonlight shining upon his face showed it haggard, unkempt, and unshorn. Plainly he had been several days in hiding; and by the gauntness of his figure, and the wolfish gleam in his eye as it roved quickly round the apartment, as if in search of food, it was plain that he was suffering keenly from hunger, too.

Bertram's decision was quickly taken. Whilst the man's face was turned the other way, he quickly rose from his bed, and crossing the room with noiseless steps, laid a hand upon his arm.

"Hist, friend!" he whispered whilst the start given by the other, and the hoarse exclamation that broke from his lips, might have wakened sleepers who were not healthy, tired boys. "Fear not; I am no foe to betray thee. Tell me who and what thou art, and I will help thee all I may."

The frightened eyes bent upon him bespoke a great terror. The man's voice died away as he tried to speak. The only word Bertram could catch seemed to be a prayer that he would not betray him.

"Betray thee! Never! Why, good fellow, dost not know that the Chadgroves never betray those who trust in them? Hence sometimes has trouble come upon them. But before we talk, let me get thee food. Methinks thou art well-nigh starved."

"Food! food! Ah, if thou wouldst give me that, young master, I would bless thee forever! I have well-nigh perished with hunger and thirst. Heaven be thanked that I have tasted water once again!"

"Come hither," said Bertram cautiously. "First close this narrow doorway, the secret of which thou must teach me in return for what I will do for thee, and then I will take thee to another chamber, where our voices will not disturb my brothers, and we can talk, and thou canst eat at ease. I must know thy story, and I pledge myself to help thee. Show me now the trick of this door. I swear I will make no treacherous use of the secret."

"I will trust thee, young sir. I must needs do so, for without human help I must surely die.

"Seest thou this bunch of grapes so cunningly carved here? This middle grape of the cluster will turn round in the fingers that know how to find and grasp it, and so turning and turning slowly, unlooses a bolt within--here--and so the whole woodwork swings out upon hinges and reveals the doorway. Where that doorway leads I will show thee anon, if thou wouldst know the trick of the secret chamber at Chad that all men have now forgotten. It may be that it will some day shelter thee or thine, for thou hast enemies abroad, even as I have."

Bertram was intensely interested as he examined and mastered the simple yet clever contrivance of this masked door; but quickly remembering the starved condition of his companion, he led him cautiously into an adjoining room, where were a table and some scant furniture, and gliding down the staircase and along dim corridors just made visible by the reflected radiance of the moon, he reached the buttery, and armed himself with a venison pasty, a loaf of bread, and a bottle of wine. Hurrying back with these, he soon had the satisfaction to see the stranger fall upon them with the keen relish of a man who has fasted to the last limits of endurance; and only after he had seen that the keen edge of his hunger had been satisfied did he try to learn more of him and his concerns.

"Now tell me, my good friend, who and what thou art," said the boy, "and how comes it that thou seekest shelter here, and that thou knowest more of Chad than we its owners do. That is the thing which has been perplexing me this long while. I would fain hear from thy story how it comes about."

"That is soon told, young sir. Thou dost not, probably, remember the name of Warbel as that of some of the retainers of thy grandsire, but--"

"I have heard the name," said the boy. "I have heard my father speak of them. But I knew not that there were any of that name now living."

"I am a Warbel--I trow the last of my race. I was born beyond the seas; but I was early brought to England, and I heard much of the strife that encompassed Chad, because my father and grandfather both knew the place well, and would fain have gone back and lived in the old country had not fortune otherwise decreed it. To make a long story short, they never returned to the place. But when I was grown to man's estate, I was offered a post in the household of the Lord of Mortimer, and as it was the best thing that had fallen in my way, I accepted it very gladly; for I knew that name, too, and I knew naught against the haughty lord, albeit my father and grandsire had not loved the lords of that name who lived before him.

"For many years I have been in his service, and for a while all went well with me. I was made one of his gentlemen, and he seemed to favour me. But of late there has been a change towards me--I know not how or why. I have offended him without intending it, and he has sometimes provoked me almost beyond endurance by his proud insolence. But that I might have borne, for he was my master, had it not been for the insolence and insults I had to bear from others amongst his servants, and from one youth in particular, who seemed to me to be trying to oust me from my place, and to get himself the foremost place in his master's favour. That made my hot blood boil again and again, until at last the thing I believe they had long planned happened, and I had to fly for my life."

The man paused, and Bertram, who was drinking in this story, asked eagerly: "And what was that?"

"It was four days ago now, in the hall where we had supped. We had drunk much wine in honour of our master's birthday, and then we began playing and dicing to pass the time till we retired to bed. My adversary was this youth whom I so greatly distrust. As we played I detected him in unfair practices. He vowed I lied, and called upon me to prove my words at the sword's point; but in my fury

and rage I sprang upon him with my bare hands, and would have wrung his neck--the insolent popinjay--had I been able. As it was, we struggled and swayed together till my greater weight caused him to fall over backwards against one of the tables, and I verily believe his back is broken. I know not whether he is living yet. But as he is not only a great favourite with the Lord of Mortimer, but a distant kinsman to boot, no sooner was the deed done than all in the hall called to me to save myself by flight, for that the master would revenge such a death upon the perpetrator of it without mercy, and that if I wished to spare my neck I must fly without an instant's delay.

"I knew this but too well myself. The baron was a fearful man to meet in his rage. Where to fly I knew not, but stay I could not. I had bare time to rush to my room, don a dress that would not excite inquiry if I had to lie hid in the forest a few days. I did not think flight would be so difficult a matter, but I knew that every moment spent in Mortimer's Keep was at peril of my life; and I had but just made my escape through a small postern door before I heard the alarm bell ring, the drawbridge go up, and knew that the edict had gone forth for my instant apprehension."

He paused with a slight shudder, and seemed to be listening intently.

"There is naught to fear here," said Bertram. "Tell me more of thy flight."

"It was terrible," answered the man. "I had not looked to be hunted like the wild beasts of the forest; and yet an hour had not gone by before I heard, by the baying of the fierce hounds that are kept at Mortimer, that a hunting party had sallied forth; and I knew that I was the quarry. I doubled and ran like any hare. I knew the tricks of the wild things that have skill in baffling the dogs, and at last I reached the shelter of these walls, and ran there for protection. I had thrown off the dogs at the last piece of water; and in the marshy ground the scent did not lie, and could not be picked up. For a brief moment I was safe; but I was exhausted almost to death. I could go no further. I lay down beneath the shadow of some arbour within the sheltering precincts of Chad, and wondered what would become of me."

"Yes, yes! and then--?"

"Then I remembered a story told me by my grandsire, years and years gone by, of a secret chamber at Chad, which had sheltered many a fugitive in the hour of peril. Lying out in the soft night air, I recalled bit by bit all that I had been told--the very drawings the old man had made to amuse me in a childish sickness, how the door opened, and how access was had to the chamber. I knew that the country round would be hunted for days, and that I could never escape the malice of the Lord of Mortimer if I pursued my way to the sea. He would overtake and kill me before I could make shift to gain that place of refuge. But I bethought me of the secret chamber and its story, and methought I might slip in unseen did I but watch my opportunity, find my way up the winding stair to this room, and so to the secret chamber beyond."

"And thou didst?"

"Ay, I did, the very next morning. I saw thee and thy brothers sally forth a-hunting. I saw the men follow in thy train. I had heard that the knight and his lady with their retinue were absent at Windsor. It needed no great skill to slip in unseen and gain the longed-for hiding place. I had some food in my wallet. I fondly hoped it would prove enough; but the sounds of hunting day by day all around have told me too well that I must not venture forth; and as this room was slept in by night, I feared to sally forth after food, lest I should be found and betrayed. I had heard of the merciful nature of the master of Chad; but in his absence I knew not what his servants might say or do. Doubtless there is a reward offered for my apprehension; and if that be so, how could I help fearing that any hired servant would betray me to my lord?"

"And thou thoughtest that servants slept in this room, and dared not show thyself either by day or night for fear thou mightest be betrayed! And only hunger and thirst drove thee forth at length?"

"Ay. And from my heart do I thank thee for thy kindness, young sir; and gladly will I show thee in return the trick of yon chamber. If thou canst kindle a torch it will light us better, for the way thither is wondrous tortuous and narrow."

Bertram had a little lantern--a very treasured possession of his--and after the usual tedious process of lighting had been gone through, he softly led the way back to the sleeping chamber. With his own hands he undid the fastening of the door and saw it swing open, and then the two passed through into a very narrow aperture, which proved to be a long narrow gallery contrived in the thickness of the wall, which would only just admit of the passage of one figure at a time.

As they went in they drew to the door, and the fugitive showed his young companion how the bolt upon the inner side might be unloosed.

"It is easy enow in the light, but hard to feel in the black darkness," he remarked; and then they pursued their devious way on and on through this strange passage, which wound up and down and in and out, and landed them at last at the foot of a spiral staircase, so narrow and squeezed in by masonry as to be barely serviceable for the purpose for which it was contrived. It led them to a small door, through which they passed, to find themselves in a room of fair size but very low, and without any window, which seemed to occupy (as indeed it did) a portion of the house between two of the other floors, and was so contrived as to absolutely defy detection by the examination of the structure of the house never so exhaustive. If the secret door were not found, nothing else would ever betray this cunning hiding-place. Doubtless that was why, during the many changes that had prevailed at Chad during the past fifty years, the knowledge of its very existence had been lost.

"Air comes in freely through many cracks and slits," explained the prisoner. "It is not an unpleasant place save in the heat of the middle day, when it becomes like a veritable oven. That is why my thirst was so unbearable. There is a bed, as thou seest, and a chair and a few other things. One could be comfortable here were it not for starvation and thirst."

"I will feed thee so long as thou remainest hid," cried the boy, with generous ardour. "Thou shalt hide there by day, and by night shalt wander abroad as thou wilt, to breathe the air and stretch thy limbs. My brothers and I will be thy friends. Thou needst fear nothing now. We will find out when it is safe for thee to leave thy retreat, and then thou shalt go forth without fear; or, if thou likest it better, thou shalt abide here till our father returns and take service with him. I doubt not he would be glad enow to number a Warbel again amongst his trusty servants."

The man's face lighted up wonderfully.

"If he would do that," he cried eagerly, "I should have no wish for anything better. But my master, the baron--"

"My father fears not the baron!" answered the boy proudly; "and, besides, his young kinsman is not dead. We heard something of his side of the tale, and the youth is not even like to die now. My father could protect thee from his wrath. Stay here, and thou wilt have naught to fear."

The fugitive took the lad's hand and pressed it to his lips.

"I will serve thee for ever and ever for this boon," he answered; and Bertram went back to his room, to lie awake and muse over what had befallen till the dawn broke and his brothers awoke to the new day.

To keep any secret from his two brothers was a thing impossible to Bertram,

and before they had finished dressing that morning, Edred and Julian were both made aware of the strange adventure of the night previous. Looking up to Bertram, as they both did, as the embodiment of prowess and courage, they did not grudge him his wonderful discovery, but they were eager to visit the fugitive themselves, and to carry him food and drink.

The days that followed were days of absolute enchantment to the boys, who delighted in waiting on Warbel and passing hours in his company. He told them entrancing stories of adventure and peril. He was devoted to his three youthful keepers, and wished for nothing better than to enter service with their father.

Later on, when all hue and cry after the missing man was over, and when Lord Mortimer's young kinsman was so far recovered that it would be impossible to summon Warbel for any injury inflicted on him, Bertram conducted him to the hut of one of his father's woodmen, who promised to keep him safe till the return of the knight.

When Sir Oliver came back, Warbel was brought to him, told a part of his tale, and was admitted readily as a member of the household; but the story of his incarceration in the secret chamber remained a secret known only to himself and the three boys. So delightful a mystery as the existence of this unknown chamber was too precious to be parted with; and it was a compact between the boys and the man, who now became their chief attendant and body servant, that the trick of that door and the existence of that chamber were to be told to none, but kept as absolutely their own property.

Chapter II: The Household At Chad.

The office of mistress of a large household in the sixteenth century was no sinecure. It was not the fashion then to depute to the hands of underlings the supervision of the details of domestic management; and though the lady of the Hall might later in the day entertain royalty itself, the early hours of the morning were spent in careful and busy scrutiny of kitchen, pantry, and store or still room, and her own fair hands knew much of the actual skill which was required in the preparation of the many compounds which graced the board at dinner or supper.

Lady Chadgrove was no exception to the general rule of careful household managers; and whilst her lord and master went hunting or hawking in the fresh morning air, or shut himself up in his library to examine into the accounts his steward laid before him or concern himself with some state business that might have been placed in his hands, she was almost always to be found in the offices of the house, looking well after the domestic details of household management, and seeing that each servant and scullion was doing the work appointed with steadiness and industry.

There was need for some such careful supervision of the daily routine, for the large houses in the kingdom were mainly dependent upon their own efforts for the necessaries of life throughout the year. In towns there were shops where provisions could be readily bought, but no such institution as that of country shops had been dreamed of as yet. The lord of the manor killed his own meat, baked his own bread, grew his own wheat, and ground his own flour. He had his own brewery within the precinct of the great courtyard, where vast quantities of mead and ale were brewed, cider and other lighter drinks made, and even some sorts of simple home-grown wines. Chad boasted its own "vineyard," where grapes flourished in abundance, and ripened in the autumn as they will not do now.

Nothing, perhaps, shows more clearly the change that has passed upon our climate by slow degrees than a study of the parish records of ancient days. Vineyards were common enough in England some hundreds of years ago, and wine was made from the produce as regularly as the season came round. Then there were the simpler fruit wines from gooseberries, currants, and elderberries,

to say nothing of cowslip wine and other light beverages which it was the pride of the mistress to contrive and to excel in the making. Our forefathers, though they knew nothing of the luxuries of tea and coffee, were by no means addicted to the drinking of water. Considering the sanitary conditions in which they lived in those days, and the fearful contamination of water which frequently prevailed, and which doubtless had much to do with the spread of the Black Death and other like visitations, this was no doubt an advantage. Still there were drawbacks to the habit of constant quaffing of fermented drinks at all hours of the day, and it was often a difficult matter to keep in check the sin of drunkenness that prevailed amongst all classes of the people.

At Chad the gentle influence of the lady of the manor had done much to make this household an improvement on many of its neighbours. Although there was always abundance of good things and a liberal hospitality to strangers of all sorts, it was not often that any unseemly roistering disturbed the inmates of Chad. The servants and retainers looked up to their master and mistress with loyalty and devotion, curbed their animal passions and wilder moods out of love and reverence for them, and grew more civilized and cultivated almost without knowing it, until the wild orgies which often disgraced the followings of the country nobility were almost unknown here.

Possibly another humanizing and restraining influence that acted silently upon the household was the presence of a young monk, who had been brought not long since from a neighbouring monastery, to act in the capacity of chaplain to the household and tutor to the boys, now fast growing towards man's estate. There was a beautiful little chapel connected with Chad. It had fallen something into neglect and ruin during the days of the civil wars, and had been battered about in some of the struggles that had raged round Chad. But Sir Oliver had spent both money and loving care in restoring and beautifying the little place, and now the daily mass was said there by Brother Emmanuel, and the members of the household were encouraged to attend as often as their duties would permit. The brother, too, would go about amongst the people and talk with them as they pursued their tasks, and not one even of the rudest and roughest but would feel the better for the kindly and beneficent influence of the youthful ecclesiastic.

Brother Emmanuel had one of those keenly intelligent and versatile minds that are always craving a wider knowledge, and think no knowledge, even of the humblest, beneath notice. He would ask the poorest wood cutter to instruct him in the handling of his tool or in the simple mysteries of his craft as humbly as though he were asking instruction from one of the learned of the land. No information, no occupation came amiss to him. He saw in all toil a dignity and a power, and he strove to impress upon every worker, of whatever craft he might be, that to do his day's work with all his might and with the best powers at his command was in truth one excellent way of serving God, and more effectual than any number of *Paters* and *Aves* said whilst idling away the time that should be given to his master's service.

Such teaching might not be strictly orthodox from a monkish standpoint, but it commended itself to the understanding and the approval of simple folks; and the brother was none the less beloved and respected that his talk and his teaching did not follow the cut-and-dried rules of his order. Sir Oliver and his wife thought excellently of the young man, and to the boys he was friend as well as tutor.

On this hot midsummer day the mistress of Chad was making her usual morning round of the kitchens and adjoining offices--her simple though graceful morning robe, and the plain coif covering her hair, showing that she was not yet dressed for the duties which would engross her later in the day. She had a great bunch of keys dangling at her girdle, and her tablets were in her hands, where from time to time she jotted down some brief note to be entered later in those household books which she kept herself with scrupulous care, so that every season she knew exactly how many gallons or hogsheads of mead or wine had been brewed, what had been the yield of every crop in the garden or meadow,

what stores of conserves had been made from each fruit as its season came in, and whether that quantity had proved sufficient for the year's consumption.

The cherry crop was being gathered in today. Huge baskets of the delicious fruit were ranged along one wall of the still room, and busy hands were already preparing the bright berries for the preserving pan or the rows of jars that were likewise placed in readiness to receive them. The cherry trees of Chad were famous for their splendid crop, and the mistress had many wonderful recipes and preparations by which the fruit was preserved and made into all manner of dainty conserves that delighted all who partook of them.

"I will come anon, and help you with your task," said the lady to the busy wenches in the still room, who were hard at work preparing the fruit. "I will return as soon as I have made my round, and see that all is going well."

The girls smiled, and dropped their rustic courtesies. Some amongst them were not the regular serving maids of the place, but were the daughters of the humbler retainers living round and about, who were glad to come to assist at the great house when there was any press of work--a thing that frequently happened from April to November.

None who assisted at Chad at such times ever went away empty handed. Besides the small wage given for the work done, there was always a basket of fruit, or a piece of meat, or a flagon of wine, according to the nature of the task, set aside for each assistant who did not dwell beneath the roof of Chad. And if there was sickness in any cottage from which a worker came, there was certain to be some little delicacy put into a basket by the hands of the mistress, and sent with a kindly word of goodwill and sympathy to the sufferer.

It was small wonder, then, that the household and community of Chad was a happy and peaceable one, or that the knight and his lady were beloved of all around.

The morning's round was no sinecure, even though the mistress was today as quick as possible in her visit of inspection. Three fat bucks had been brought in from the forest yester-eve, when the knight and his sons had returned from hunting. The venison had to be prepared, and a part of it dried and salted down for winter use; whilst of course a great batch of pies and pasties must be put in hand, so that the most should be made of the meat whilst it was still fresh.

When that matter had been settled, there were the live creatures to visit--the calves in their stalls, the rows of milch kine, and the great piggery, where porkers of every kind and colour were tumbling about in great excitement awaiting their morning meal. The mistress of the house generally saw the pigs fed each day, to insure their having food proper to them, and not the offal and foul remnants that idle servants loved to give and they to eat were not some supervision exercised. The care of dogs and horses the lady left to her husband and sons, but the cows, the pigs, and the poultry she always looked after herself.

Her daily task accomplished, she returned to the still room, prepared for a long morning over her conserves. It was but half-past nine now; for the breakfast hour in baronial houses was seven all the year round, and today had been half-an-hour earlier on account of the press of work incident to the harvesting of the cherry crop. Several of the servants who were generally occupied about the house had risen today with the lark, to be able to help their lady, and soon a busy, silent party was working in pantry and still room under the careful eye of the mistress.

One old woman who had been accommodated with a chair, though her fingers were as brisk as any of the younger girls', from time to time addressed a question or a remark to her lady, which was always kindly answered. She was the old nurse of Chad, having been nurse to Sir Oliver in his infancy, and having since had charge of his three boys during their earliest years. She was growing infirm now, and seldom left her own little room in a sunny corner of the big house,

where her meals were taken her by one of the younger maids. But in the warm weather, when her stiff limbs gained a little more power, she loved on occasion to come forth and take a share in the life of the house, and work with the busy wenches under the mistress's eye at the piles of fruit from the successive summer and autumn crops as they came in rotation.

"And where be the dear children?" she asked once; "I have not set eyes on them the livelong day. Methought the very smell of the cherries would have brought them hither, as bees and wasps to a honey pot."

The lady smiled slightly.

"I doubt not they will be here anon; but doubtless they have paid many visits to the trees ere the store was garnered. I think they are in the tilt yard with Warbel. It is there they are generally to be found in the early hours of the day."

"They be fine, gamesome lads," said the old woman fondly--"chips of the old block, true Chads every one of them;" for the custom with the common people was to call the lord of the manor by the name of his house rather than by his own patronymic, and Sir Oliver was commonly spoken of as "Chad" by his retainers; a custom which lingered long in the south and west of the country.

"They are well-grown, hearty boys," answered the mother quietly, though there was a light of tender pride in her eyes. "Bertram is almost a man in looks, though he is scarce seventeen yet. Seventeen! How time flies! It seems but yesterday since he was a little boy standing at my knee to say his light tasks, and walking to and fro holding his father's hand. Well, Heaven be praised, the years have been peaceful and prosperous, else would not they have fled by so swiftly."

"Heaven be praised indeed!" echoed the old woman. "For now the master is so safely seated at Chad that he would be a bold man who tried to oust him. But in days gone by I have sorely feared yon proud Lord of Mortimer. Methought he would try to do him a mischief. His spleen and spite, as all men say, are very great."

The lady's face clouded slightly, but her reply was quiet and calm.

"I fear me they are that still; but he lacks all cause of offence. My good lord is careful in all things to avoid making ill blood with a jealous neighbour. That he has always cast covetous eyes upon Chad is known throughout the countryside; but I trow he would find it something difficult to make good any claim."

"Why, verily!" cried the nurse, with energy. "He could but come as a foul usurper, against whom would every honest hand be raised. But, good my mistress, what is the truth of the whisper I have heard that the Lord of Mortimer has wed his daughter to one who calls himself of the house of Chad? I cannot believe that any of the old race would mate with a Mortimer. Is it but the idle gossip of the ignorant? or what truth is there in it?"

"I scarce know myself the rights of the matter," answered Lady Chadgrove, still with a slight cloud upon her brow. "It is certainly true that Lord Mortimer has lately wed his only child, a daughter, to a knight who calls himself Sir Edward Chadwell, and makes claim to be descended from my lord's house. Men say that he makes great boasting that the Chadwells are an older branch than the Chadgroves, and that by right of inheritance Chad is his.

"Methinks he would find it very hard to make good any such claim. Belike it is but idle boasting. Yet it may be that there will be some trouble in store. He has taken up his abode at Mortimer's Keep, and maybe we shall hear ill news before long."

All eyes were fixed for a moment on the lady's face, and then the hands moved faster than before, whilst a subdued murmur went round the group. Not one heart was there that did not beat with indignation at the thought that any should dare

to try to disturb the peace of the rightful lord of Chad. If the loyalty and affection of all around would prove a safeguard, the knight need have no fear from the claims advanced by any adversary.

"There has been a muttering of coming tempest anent those vexed forest rights," continued the lady, in reply to some indignant words from the nurse. "I would that difficult question could be settled and laid at rest; but my good lord has yielded something too much already for the sake of peace and quietness, and at each concession Mortimer's word was passed that he would claim no further rights over the portion that remained to us. But his word is broken without scruple, and we cannot ever be giving way. Were no stand to be made, the whole forest track would soon be claimed by Mortimer, and we should have nothing but the bare park that is fenced about and cannot be filched bit by bit away. But all the world knows that Chad has forest rights equal to those of Mortimer. It is but to seek a quarrel that the baron continues to push his claims ever nearer and nearer our walls."

Another murmur of indignation went round; but there was no time for further talk, as at that moment the three boys entered from the tilt yard; hot, thirsty, and breathless, and the fair-haired lad with the dreamy blue eyes held a kerchief to his head that was stained with blood.

"Art hurt, Edred?" asked the mother, looking up.

"'Tis but a scratch," answered the boy. "I am not quite a match for Bertram yet; but I will be anon. I must learn to be quicker in my defence. Thanks, gentle mother; belike it will be better for it to be bound up. It bleeds rather too fast for comfort, but thy hands will soon stop that."

The other boys fell upon the fruit with right good will, whilst the mother led her second son to the small pump nigh at hand, and bathed and dressed the rather ugly wound in his head.

Neither mother nor son thought anything of the hurt. It was easy enough to give and receive hard blows in the tilt yard, and bruises and cuts were looked upon as part of the discipline of life.

As soon as the dressing was over, Edred joined his brothers, and did his share in diminishing the pile of luscious fruit. And as they ate they chattered away to the old woman of their prowess in tilt yard and forest, relating how Bertram had slain a fat buck with his own hands the previous day, and how they had between them given the *coup-de-grace* to another, which had been brought to bay at the water, father and huntsmen standing aloof to let the boys show their strength and skill.

Nine years had passed since that strange night when Bertram had been awakened by the advent of the mysterious stranger at his bedside. He had developed since then from a sturdy little boy into a fine-grown youth of seventeen, who had in his own eyes, and in the eyes of many others, well-nigh reached man's estate; and who would, if need should arise, go forth equipped for war to fight the king's battles. He was a handsome, dark-haired, dark-eyed youth, with plenty of determination and force of character, and with a love of Chad so deeply rooted in his nature, that to be the heir of that property seemed to him the finest position in all the world, and he would not have exchanged it for that of Prince of Wales.

The second son, Edred (Ethelred was his true name; he was called after his mother, Etheldred), was some half-head shorter than his brother, but a fine boy for all that. He was fifteen, and whilst sharing to a great extent in the love of sport and of warlike games so common in that day, he was also a greater lover of books than his brothers, and would sometimes absent himself from their pastimes to study with Brother Emmanuel and learn from him many things that were not written in books. The other lads gave more time to study than was usual at that period; for both Sir Oliver and his lady believed in the value of book lore and the

use of the pen, deploring the lack of learning that had prevailed during the confusion of the late wars, and greatly desiring its revival. But it was Edred who really inherited the scholarly tastes of his parents, and already the question of making a monk of him was under serious discussion. The boy thought that if he might have a few more years of liberty and enjoyment he should like the life of the cloister well.

Julian bore a strong resemblance to Bertram both in person and disposition. He was a very fine boy, nearly fourteen years old, and had been the companion of his brothers from infancy, so that he often appeared older than his age. All three brothers were bound together in bonds of more than wonted affection. They not only shared their sports and studies, but held almost all their belongings in common. Each lad had his own horse and his own weapons, whilst Edred had one or two books over which he claimed absolute possession; but for the rest, they enjoyed all properties in common, and it had hardly entered into their calculations that they could ever be separated, save when the idea of making Edred into a monk came under discussion; and as that would not be done for some years, it scarcely seemed worth troubling over now. Perhaps things would turn out differently in the end, and they would remain together at Chad for the whole of their natural lives.

Nurse never wearied of the tales told by her young masters, and listened with fond pride to the recital. So eagerly were Bertram and Julian talking, that they did not heed the sound of the horn at the gate way which bespoke the arrival of some messenger; but Edred slipped out to see who could be coming, and presently he returned with a frown upon his brow.

"There is a messenger at the gate who wears the livery of Mortimer," he said. "An insolent knave to boot, who flung his missive in the face of old Ralph, and spurred off with a mocking laugh. I would I had had my good steed between my knees, and I would have given the rascal a lesson in manners. I like not these messengers from Mortimer; they always betide ill will to my father."

Lady Chadgrove looked anxious for a moment, but her brow soon cleared as she made answer: "I shall be sorry if aught comes to grieve or vex your father; but so long as we are careful to give no just cause for offence, we need not trouble our heads overmuch as to the jealous anger of the Lord of Mortimer. I misdoubt me if he can really hurt us, be he never so vindictive. The king is just, and he values the services of your father. He will not permit him to be molested without cause. And methinks my Lord of Mortimer knows as much, else he would have wrought us more ill all these past years."

"He is a tyrant and an evil liver!" cried Bertram hotly; "and his servants be drunken, brawling knaves, every one--as insolent as their master. If I had been old Ralph, I would have hurled back his missive in his face, and bidden him deliver it rightly."

"Nay, nay, my son; that would but be to stir up strife. If others comport themselves ill, that is no reason why our servants should do the like. I would never give a foe a handle against me by the ill behaviour of even a serving man. Let them act never so surlily, I would that they were treated with all due courtesy."

Bertram and Julian hardly entered into their mother's feelings on this point; but Edred looked up eagerly, and it was plain that he understood the feelings which prompted the words, for he said in a low voice:

"Methinks thou art right, gentle mother; albeit I did sorely long to give the varlet a lesson to teach him better. But perchance it was well I was not nigh enough. Surely it must be nigh upon the hour for dinner. Our sport has whet the edge of appetite, and I would fain hear what the missive was which yon knave brought with him. Our father will doubtless tell us at the table."

It was indeed nearly noon, and mistress and maids alike relinquished their tasks to prepare for the meal which was the chiefest of the day, though the supper was nothing to be despised.

The long table in the great banqueting hall was a goodly sight to see when the dinner was spread, and the retainers of the better sort and some amongst the upper servants sat down with the master and his family to partake of the good cheer. At one end of the long board sat the knight and his lady side by side; to their right were the three boys, the young monk, and Warbel the armourer, who now held a post of some importance in the house. Opposite to these were other gentlemen-at-arms and their sons, who were resident at Chad; and at the lower end of the table, below the great silver salt cellars, sat the seneschal, the lowlier retainers, and certain trusted servants who held responsible positions at Chad. The cooks and scullions and underlings dined in the great kitchen immediately after their masters' meal had been served.

The table at Chad always groaned with good things, except at such seasons as the Church decreed a fast, and then the diet was scrupulously kept within the prescribed bounds. Sir Oliver and his wife were both devout and earnest people, and had every reverence for their spiritual superiors. The Benedictine Priory of Chadwater stood only a mile and a half distant, and the prior was on excellent terms with the owner of Chad. Brother Emmanuel had been an inmate of the priory before he was selected by Sir Oliver for the education of his sons. He was considered a youth of no small promise, and the knight was well pleased at the progress made by his boys since they had been studying with him.

Today there was a look of annoyance upon the handsome face of Sir Oliver Chadgrove. It was a striking countenance at all times, in which sternness of purpose and kindness of heart were blended in a fashion that was both attractive and unusual. He had the same regular features, rather square in the outline, which he had transmitted to his children; and his hair, which was now silvered with many streaks, had been raven black in its day. His carriage was upright and fearless, and he was very tall and powerfully proportioned. It was Bertram's keenest ambition to grow up in all points like his father, and he copied him, consciously and unconsciously, in a fashion that often raised a smile on his mother's face.

"I have been favoured with another insolent letter from my Lord of Mortimer," he said. "He had better take heed that he try not my patience too far, and that I go not to the king and lay a complaint before him. I will do so if I be much more troubled."

"What says he now, father?" asked Bertram eagerly, forgetting in his eagerness the generally observed maxim that the sons spoke not at table till they were directly addressed. But the knight did not himself heed this breach of decorum.

"It is the same old story; but every year he grows more grasping and more insolent. Today he complains, forsooth, that the last buck we killed was killed on his ground, and by rights belonged to him. He threatens that his foresters and huntsmen will wage war with us in future if we 'trespass' upon his rights, and wrest our spoil from us! Beshrew me if I submit to much more! Patience and forbearance are useless with such a man. I would I had not conceded all I have done in the interests of peace."

Bertram's face was crimson with anger, Edred's eyes had widened in astonishment, whilst Julian burst out in indignant remonstrance and argument.

"His ground! his rights! How can he dare say that? Why, the buck was killed at Juno's Pool; and all the world knows that that is within the confines of Chad, and that all forest rights there belong to the Lord of Chad! I would I could force his false words down his false throat! I would I could--" but the boy suddenly ceased, because he caught his mother's warning eye upon him, and saw that his father

had opened his lips to speak.

"Ay, and he knows it himself as well as we do; but he is growing bolder and bolder through that monstrous claim he is ever threatening to push--the claim of his son-in-law to be rightful Lord of Chad! Phew! he will find it hard to prove that claim, or to oust the present lord. But Mortimer has money and to spare, and Chad has long been to him what Naboth's vineyard was to King Ahab--

"Brother Emmanuel, that simile is thine, and a right good one, too.

"He will seize on any pretext to pick a quarrel; and if he dares, he will push that quarrel at the point of the sword. I do not fear him; I have the right on my side. But we may not blind ourselves to this: that he is a right bitter and treacherous foe, and that should we give any, even the smallest cause of suspicion or offence, he would seize upon that to ruin us."

Sir Oliver looked keenly round the table at all assembled there, and many knew better than his sons what was in his mind at the time and what had caused him to speak thus.

For a long while now the leaven of Lollardism had been working silently in the country, and there were very many even amongst orthodox sons of the Church who were more or less "bitten" by some of the new notions. It need hardly be said that wherever light is, it will penetrate in a mysterious and often inexplicable fashion; and although there was much extravagance and perversion in the teachings of the advanced Lollards, there was undoubtedly amongst them a far clearer and purer light than existed in the hearts of those of the common people who had been brought up beneath the sway of the priests, themselves so often ignorant and ill-living men.

And so the light gradually spread; and many who would have repudiated the name of Lollard with scorn and loathing were beginning to hold some of their tenets, and to wish for a simpler and purer form of faith, and for liberty to study the Scriptures for themselves; and no one knew better the leavening spirit of the age than did Sir Oliver Chadgrove, himself a man of liberal views and devout habit of mind, and his wife, who shared his every thought and opinion.

They had both heard the stirring and enlightened preaching of Dean Colet, and were great admirers of his; but they took the view that that divine himself held--namely, that the Church would gradually reform herself from within; that she was awakening to the need of some reformation and advance; and that her sons were safe within her fold, and must patiently await her own work there.

This was exactly the feeling of the knight and his lady. They rejoiced in the words they had heard, and in the wider knowledge of the Scriptures which had been thus unfolded; but that any such doctrine, when preached and taught by the Lollard heretics, could be right or true they would have utterly denied and repudiated. The Lollards had won for themselves a bad name, and were thought of with scorn and contempt. Nevertheless, in country places the leaven of their teaching permeated far and wide, and Sir Oliver had more than once occasion to fear that amongst his own retainers some were slightly tainted by heresy.

Of course if it could be proved against him that his followers were Lollards, his enemy might take terrible advantage and deal him a heavy blow. It was the one charge which if proved would strike him to the earth; even the king's favour would scarce serve him then. The king would not stand up in opposition to the Church; and if the Church condemned his house as being a harbouring place for heretics, then indeed he would be undone.

It was this thing which was in his mind as he glanced with keen eyes round his table on this bright midsummer day; and his wife, and the monk, and the bulk of those sitting there read the true meaning of his words and of his look, and recognized the truth of the grave word of warning.

Chapter III: Brother Emmanuel.

The hush of a Sabbath was upon the land. The sounds of life and industry were no longer heard around Chad. Within and without the house a calm stillness prevailed, and the hot summer sunshine lay broad upon the quiet fields and the garden upon which so much loving care had of late years been spent.

The white and red roses, no longer the symbols of party strife, were blooming in their midsummer glory. The air was sweet with their fragrance, and bees hummed drowsily from flower to flower. In the deep shadow cast by a huge cedar tree, that reared its stately head as high as the battlements of the turret, a small group had gathered this hot afternoon. The young monk was there in the black cassock, hood, and girdle that formed the usual dress of the Benedictine in this country, and around him were grouped his three pupils, to whom he was reading out of the great Latin Bible that was one of the treasures of Sir Oliver's library.

All the boys were Latin scholars, and had made much progress in their knowledge of that language since the advent of the young monk into the household. They had likewise greatly increased in their knowledge of the Scriptures; for Brother Emmanuel was a sound believer in the doctrine preached by the Dean of St. Paul's, and of the maxims laid down by him--that the Scriptures were not to be pulled to fragments, and each fragment explained without reference to the context, but to be studied and examined as a whole, and so explained, one portion illuminating and illustrating another. After such a fashion had Brother Emmanuel long been studying the Word of God, and after such a method did he explain it to his pupils.

All three boys were possessed of clear heads and quick intelligence, and their minds had expanded beneath the influence of the young monk's teaching. They all loved a quiet hour spent with him in reading and expounding the Bible narrative, and today a larger portion than usual had been read; for the heat made exertion unwelcome even to the active lads, and it was pleasanter here beneath the cedar tree than anywhere else besides.

"Now, I would fain know," began Julian, after a pause in the reading, "why it is that it is thought such a vile thing for men to possess copies of God's Word in their own tongue that they may read it to themselves. It seems to me that men would be better and not worse for knowing the will of God in all things; and here it is set down clearly for every man to understand. Yet, if I understand not amiss, it is made a cause of death for any to possess the Scriptures in his own tongue."

"Yea, that is what the heretic Lollards do--read and expound the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue and after their own fashion," said Bertram. "Have a care, Julian, how thou seemest to approve their methods; for there is a great determination in high places to put down at once and for all the vile doctrines which are corrupting all the land."

"I approve no heresy," cried Julian eagerly. "I do but ask why it be heresy to read the Word of God, and to have in possession a portion of it in the language of one's country."

"Marry, dost thou not know that one reason is the many errors the translators have fallen into, which deceive the unwary and lead the flock astray?" cried Edred eagerly. "Brother Emmanuel has told me some amongst these, and there are doubtless many others of which he may not have heard. A man may not drink with impunity of poisoned waters; neither is it safe to take as the Word of God a book which may have many perversions of His truth."

Edred looked up at Brother Emmanuel for confirmation of this explanation. It was the monk's habit to encourage the boys to discuss any question of interest freely amongst themselves, he listening in silence the while, and later on giving them the benefit of his opinion. All the three turned to him now to see what he would say upon a point that was already agitating the country, and was preparing

the way for a shaking that should lead to an altogether new state of existence both in Church and State. Even out here in the garden, in the sanctuary of their own home, with only their friend and spiritual pastor to hear them, the boys spoke with bated breath, as though fearful of uttering words which might have within them some germ of that dreaded sin of heresy.

As for Brother Emmanuel, he sat with his hands folded in his sleeves, the great book upon his knees, a slight and thoughtful smile playing around the corners of his finely-cut mouth. His whole face was intensely spiritual in expression. The features were delicately cut, and bore the impress of an ascetic life, as well as of gentle birth and noble blood. He was, in fact, a scion of an ancient and powerful house; but it was one of those houses that had suffered sorely in the recent strife, and whose members had been scattered and cut off. He had no powerful relatives and friends to turn to now for promotion to rich benefice or high ecclesiastical preferment, and he had certainly never lamented this fact. In heart and soul he was a follower of the rules of poverty laid down by the founder of his order, and would have thought himself untrue to his calling had he suffered himself to be endowed with worldly wealth. Even such moneys as he received from Sir Oliver for the instruction given to his sons were never kept by himself. All were given either to the poor by his hands direct, or placed at the disposal of the Prior of Chadwater, where he had been an inmate for a short time previous to his installation as chaplain at Chad. He had not sought this office; he would rather have remained beneath the priory walls. He thought that it was something contrary to the will of the founders for monks to become parochial priests, or to hold offices and benefices which took them from the shelter of their monastery walls. But such things were of daily occurrence now, and were causing bitter jealousy to arise betwixt the parochial clergy and the monks, sowing seeds of strife which played a considerable part in the struggle this same century was to see. But it was useless to try to stem the current single-handed, and the rule of obedience was as strong within him as that of poverty and chastity.

When sent forth by his prior (who secretly thought that this young monk was too strict and ascetic and too keen-witted to be a safe inmate of a house which had long fallen from its high estate, and was becoming luxurious and wealthy and lax), he had gone uncomplainingly to Chad, and since then had become so much interested in his pupils and in his round of daily duties there that he had not greatly missed the life of the cloister.

He had leisure for thought and for study. He had access to a library which, although not large, held many treasures of book making, and was sufficient for the requirements of the young monk. He could keep the hours of the Church in the little chantry attached to the house, and he was taken out of the atmosphere of jealousy and bickering which, to his own great astonishment and dismay, he had found to be the prevailing one at Chadwater.

On the whole, he had benefited by the change, and was very happy in his daily duties. He rejoiced to watch the unfolding minds of his three pupils, and especially to train Edred for the life of the cloister, to which already he had been partially dedicated, and towards which he seemed to incline.

And now, eagerly questioned by the boys upon that vexed point of the translated Scriptures and their possession by the common people, he looked thoughtfully out before him, and gave his answer in his own poetic fashion.

"The Word of God, my children, is as a fountain of life. Those who drink of it drink immortality and joy and peace passing all understanding. The Saviour of mankind--Himself the Word of God--has given Himself freely, that all men may come to Him, and, drinking of the living water, may find within their hearts a living fountain which shall cause that they never thirst again. But the question before us is not whether men shall drink of this fountain--we know that they must do so to live--but how they shall drink of it; how and in what manner the waters of life shall be dispensed to them."

The boys fixed their eyes eagerly upon him. Julian nodded his head, and Edred's eyes grew deep with the intensity of his wish to follow the workings of the mind of his instructor.

"For that we must look back to the days of our Lord, when He was here upon earth. HOW did He give forth the Word of Life? How did He rule that it was from that time forward to be given to men?"

"He preached to the people who came to Him," answered Edred, "and He directed His apostles and disciples to do likewise--to go forth into all lands and preach the gospel to every creature."

"Just so," answered Brother Emmanuel, with an other of his slight peculiar smiles. "In other words, he intrusted the Word--Himself, the news of Himself--to a living ministry, to men, that through the mouths of His apostles and those disciples who had received regular instruction from Him and from them the world might be enlightened with the truth."

The boys listened eagerly, with mute attention.

"Go on," said Edred breathlessly. "Prithee tell us more."

"Our blessed Lord and Master laid no charge upon His apostles to write of Him--to send forth into the world a written testimony. We know that the inspired Word is written from end to end by the will of God. It was necessary for the preservation of the truth in its purity that its doctrines should be thus set down--that there should be in existence some standard by which in generations to come the learned ones of the earth might be able to judge of the purity of the doctrines preached, and refute heresies and errors that might and would creep in; but it was to men, to a living ministry, that our Saviour intrusted the precious truths of His gospel, and to a living ministry men should look to have those truths unfolded."

"I see that point," cried Edred eagerly. "I had never thought of it quite in that way before. Does it so state the matter anywhere in the Holy Book? I love to gather the truth from its pages. Thou hast not told us that we are wrong in that."

"Nay, under guidance all men should seek to those holy truths; but will they find the priceless jewel if they seek it without those aids our blessed Lord Himself has appointed? Wouldst thou know more of His will in this matter? Then thou shalt."

The monk turned the leaves of the book awhile, and then paused at an open page.

"On earth, as we have seen, the blessed Saviour intrusted His truth to the care of chosen men. Now let us see how He acted when, ascended into the heavens, He looked down upon earth, and directed from thence the affairs of this world. Did He then ordain that a written testimony was to be prepared and sent forth into all lands? No. What we learn then is that when He ascended into the heavens and received and gave gifts to men, He gave to them apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers--a living ministry again, a fourfold living ministry--that by this living ministry, surely typified in the vision of St. John by the four living creatures with the fourfold head, the saints were to be perfected, the unity of the faith preserved, and the body of Christ edified and kept in its full growth and perfection till He come Himself to claim the Bride."

Edred's eyes were full of vivid intelligence. He followed in the Latin tongue the words as Brother Emmanuel spoke them, and looking up he asked wistfully:

"But where are they now, the apostles and prophets, the evangelists and pastors? Have we got them with us yet?"

"We have at least the semblance of them; doubtless but for our own sins and

shortcomings we should have a fuller ministry--a fuller outpouring of the water of life through those four God-given channels by which the Church is to be fed. We have the apostolic office ever in exercise in our spiritual head at Rome. St. Peter has left us a successor, and his throne shall never be empty so long as the world lasts. Now and again the prophetic fire bursts forth in some holy man who has fasted and prayed until the veil betwixt the seen and the unseen has grown thin. Would to God there was more light of prophecy in the earth! Perchance in His grace and mercy He will outpour His Spirit once again upon the earth, and gather about his Holiness a band of men lighted by fire from above. In our wandering friars, ever going forth to the people with the word of the gospel, we have the office of evangelist in exercise; and the priest who guides the flock and dwells in the midst of the people of the land, surely he is the pastor, the keeper of the sheep. And thus we see that our blessed Saviour's gifts to men have been preserved all through these long centuries, and are still amongst us in greater or less degree; and we can well understand that having given us these channels, by which His vineyard is to be watered, by which the living waters are to flow forth, it is not His will that every man should be his own evangelist or pastor, feeding himself at will, drinking, perhaps to surfeit, of the precious waters which should be conveyed to him through the appointed channel, but that he should be under dutiful obedience and submission, and that thus and thus only may unity and peace be preserved, and the body grow together into its perfect stature and fullness."

"I see all that exactly," cried Bertram, "and I will strive to keep it in mind. I dislike the very name of Lollard, and I well know that they be a mischievous and pernicious brood, whom it were well to see exterminated root and branch. Yet no man can fail to see that they love the Scriptures, and I felt they were in the right there. Now I well see that they may love the Word as much as they will, but that they must still seek to be taught and fed by those who are over them in the Church, and not seek to eat and drink (in the spiritual sense of the word) at their own will and pleasure. That is truly what the Church has ever taught, but I never heard it so clearly explained before.

"Come, Julian; the sun is losing much of its power now. Let us stroll along the margin of the stream, and see where best we may fish upon the morrow.

"Edred, wilt thou come? No; I thought not. Thou art half a monk already. We will leave thee with Brother Emmanuel to talk more on these hard matters. I have heard enough to satisfy me, I shall never want to turn Lollard now. The name was always enough, but now I see more and more clearly how wrong-headed and wilful they be."

Julian, too, had got an answer that completely satisfied him, and he readily rose to go with his brother. Those two found an hour or two of thought and study as much at a time as they cared for. They called their dogs and sallied forth over the fields towards the shady, well-fringed river banks, and Brother Emmanuel was left alone with his second pupil, Edred, whose eyes were still fixed upon the black lettering of the great Bible open at the last passage under discussion.

The monk bent an earnest glance upon the boy's face. He saw that an argument which had completely satisfied the other two had not satisfied this other keener mind. But he asked no questions, leaving the boy to speak or not as he chose. These were days in which too much questioning was a dangerous thing. Many men felt as though they were treading the crust of a volcano, and that a single unwary step might plunge them headlong into the burning gulf.

When even such a man as Bishop Peacock had been threatened with the stake, and sent into perpetual imprisonment, even after having "recanted" his errors, no wonder that all men holding broad or enlightened opinions trembled for themselves. And yet, as thought will not be bound, and the young are ever the most ardent in the pursuit of truth, and the most impatient under the yoke of fetters unwillingly worn, so neither this young monk nor his still more youthful companion could be content to drift on without looking into the stirring questions

of the day for themselves.

Edred's mind at this moment was working rapidly and following up a train of thought as fascinating as it was new. He suddenly turned back to the very beginning of the book, and began reading to himself some words he found there. Presently he looked up quickly into his instructor's face.

"Thy words about four channels put me in mind of the four streams we read of in the beginning, that watered the garden of the Lord. It seemed to me as if perchance there was some connection betwixt them--that the Lord's plan has ever been the same. Surely He led forth the children of Israel through the wilderness beneath four standards. And here the four streams are all given. But we hear no more of any of them later, do we, save the river Euphrates. Out of the four three seem to have been lost," and the boy raised his eyes with a perplexed expression and looked earnestly at his teacher.

Between those two existed one of those keen bonds of sympathy that often enable persons to communicate their thoughts without the medium of words. In a moment the monk had read what was in the boy's mind, and in a fashion he answered as though Edred had spoken.

"Thou thinkest that even as some of God's watering rivers ran dry, so some of His channels of grace, whereby He meant all men to be replenished with heavenly light and grace, may perchance have become choked and useless. Is not that thy thought, my son?"

"My father, is it sin thus to think?" asked Edred, almost beneath his breath. "I cannot shut mine eyes and mine ears. I have heard whispers of terrible corruption in high places even at Rome itself. I try not to hear or to think too much, but I cannot help my burning desire to know more of what passes in the world. It was but a short year ago that a godly man coming from foreign lands told us fearful tales of the corruption even of the papal court. O my father, I fear to whisper it even to thee; but I cannot but ask in my heart, can the popes be truly apostles? And if not, can we say that the channel of grace once given to men is open yet for us to drink from? Ah, pardon me if I err! I will do penance for my evil thoughts. But where may we find now those four life-giving streams by which Christ purposed to keep His body, the Church, nourished and sustained? Prophets there be none, save here and there a spark of the old fire. Those travelling friars are sometimes holy men; but, alas! they are bitter foes of the very Church from which they profess to be sent out, and are oft laid under the papal ban. We have our pastor priests; but do they feed the flock? O my father, how can I walk with closed eyes through this world of sin and strife? If the channels run dry, if the pastors refuse food to the hungry people, can it be sin if they strive to feed themselves, even though they be something too ignorant to do it wisely and well?"

A very grave, thoughtful, and austere look was stamped upon the face towards which Edred directed his gaze. It was long before he received any answer, and then it was but a sorrowful one.

"My son, I will not blame thee for these thoughts, albeit they be charged with peril in these days. It is human nature thus to question and thus to doubt. We may not blind our eyes, though we must ever strive to chasten our hearts, that we fall not into the condemnation of those who speak evil of dignities, and bring a railing accusation against those set over them. I, too, have had my period of storm-tossed doubts and fears; but I have learned to fix mine eyes upon the Holy One of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps--upon the crucified Saviour, who has suffered that death of agony and shame that He may draw all men unto Himself. How He will do it I know not. How He will open up again the closed channels, and make ready His Church to meet Him and receive Him, I can not even conjecture. But His word cannot fail; and in His own appointed time, and in His own appointed way, I verily believe that He will draw unto Himself all men who have ever called upon His name, and all those unto whom His name has never been proclaimed, and who, therefore, have never rejected Him. In that hope and that belief I try to rest; and

fixing my eyes and thoughts upon Him and Him alone, I strive to forget the chaos and the strife of earth, and to look upon all men as brothers in Christ, if they will but bow the knee at that thrice holy name."

Edred looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"Heretics call upon the name of Jesus. Thinkest thou that heretics will be saved? I thought they were doomed to hellfire forever!"

The boy spoke in a voice that was little more than a whisper. He was almost afraid to hear the answer, lest it should convey a germ of the dreaded heresy, and yet how eager he was to know what Brother Emmanuel really thought.

"It is not for me to say who will and who will not be saved," he said, slowly and thoughtfully; "and we are expressly told that there will be punishment for those who fall away from the faith. Yet we are not told that error will be punished with everlasting death. And there be places in Holy Scripture which tell us that 'whoso believeth and is baptized shall be saved;' and heretics believe that Christ died for the world. It says, again, that those who love the Lord are born of God; and shall they perish everlastingly? My son, the mercies of God are very great; from end to end of this book we are told that. Knowing so much, need we ask more? With Him rests the judgment of all mankind. He alone can read the heart. Let that thought be enough for us. Whether the sin of heresy is as vile in His eyes as in those of man, He alone knows; we do not. Let us strive for our own part to keep the unity of the faith in the bond of peace, and leave all else to Him."

As he spoke, Brother Emmanuel gently closed the book, as though to close the discussion likewise; and Edred, looking up and round about him, drawing a long breath meantime, suddenly gave a start, which attracted the attention of his preceptor.

A short distance away--how he had got there neither of the pair knew; they had been too much engrossed in their talk to take much heed of external impressions--was an elderly monk, clad in the same gown and hood as Brother Emmanuel, betokening that he too was of the Benedictine order; and his face, shrouded in its cowl, was turned towards the pair with a very peculiar expression upon it. A sinister smile was in the narrow beady eyes; the features, which were coarse and somewhat bloated from luxurious living, were set in a look of ill-concealed malice; and the salutation addressed to the pair when he saw himself perceived had in it something of an incongruous sound.

"*Pax vobiscum!*" said the newcomer, lifting his hand as if to impart a blessing.

Edred instinctively bent the knee, but Brother Emmanuel's face did not move a muscle.

"Hast thou come with a message for me from the reverend father?" he asked quietly.

"Nay, not for thee. My message was to Sir Oliver; but I will report to the father how excellently I found thee employed--training thy pupils in all godliness and honesty, and in that hatred of heresy which it behoves all true sons of the Church to cherish."

There was a spiteful gleam in the man's eyes as he spoke these words that made Edred shiver; but the calm regard of the younger monk did not waver.

"I have taught him nothing but what I have heard our good Dean of St. Paul's speak before princes and prelates in the pulpit," answered Brother Emmanuel, not pretending to misunderstand the innuendo conveyed. "Methinks it would profit many of our brothers in country places to hear what is being thought and taught in Oxford and London, in all the great centres of the country. The reverend father knows well what I hold and what I teach."

So clear and steadfast was the light in the young monk's eyes, that the regard of the other fell before it. He made a gesture, as if to repudiate the defence as a thing quite superfluous.

"The piety and orthodoxy of Brother Emmanuel are known far and wide," he answered, in a tone that was half cringing, half spiteful; "no truer son of the Church than he lives in all the land."

And then with another salutation he turned and glided away in the lengthening shadows, whilst Edred turned to Brother Emmanuel with rather a scared face, and asked:

"Dost think he heard what we were saying?"

"Belike he caught a phrase or two," was the answer, spoken gravely but quite calmly. "I would not speak words of which I am ashamed; at the same time, it is well in these perilous days to use all caution, for an enemy can well distort and magnify the words he hears, till they sound like rank heresy. For myself I have no fear. I prize not my life greatly, though to die as a heretic, cut off from the Church of Christ, is a fearful thing to think of. Yet even that might be better than denying the truth--if indeed one believes the truth to lie without, which assuredly I do not. But thou, my son, would do well to think something less of these matters. Thou art but a child in years, and--"

"I am quickly rising to man's estate," answered the boy, rather impetuously, "and my thoughts will not be chained. I must give them liberty to rove where they will. All men are talking and thinking of these things, and wherefore not I? But, Brother Emmanuel, tell me, who was yon black-browed brother? Methinks I have seen his face before; but beneath the cowl many faces look alike. Who was he? and wherefore looked he so askance at thee?"

"Brother Fabian loves me not," answered the monk with a slight smile. "I scarce know how it began; it seemed to commence from the day I entered the priory. I had looked to find things there somewhat different. Perchance I spoke more than I should, being young and ardent, and fresh from places where a different order reigned. Brother Fabian holds various offices in the priory. He liked not my words. Methinks he has never forgotten or forgiven. He has always sour looks for me, and oftentimes sneering words. But I heeded them not greatly; they do not touch me near."

Edred was looking straight out before him, with a gaze in which there was much of shrinking and surprise.

"Brothers in the same monastery at enmity one with the other!" he said slowly, grasping more than had been spoken, with that quick intuition which existed between tutor and pupil. "Some, leading lives of luxury, indignant with those who would protest against them. Brother Emmanuel, my father, my friend, when these things come before me, I turn with loathing from the thought of entering the life of the cloister; and yet how I long to give myself wholly to the cause of God! How can I judge? how can I choose aright?"

"Thou must not try to choose," answered the young monk, with a touch of austerity in his tone; "thou must await that leading and that guiding which never fail those who truly wait upon the blessed Son of God, and strive to do not their will but the will of Him who pleased not Himself. At the foot of His Cross--before the altar, where His precious body and blood are ever abiding in memorial of His one sacrifice for sin--there is the place to seek grace and guidance; there is the place where peace may be found. Because man is frail, shall we despise the ordinances of God? Because men are able to make (if such be their will) a hell upon earth even of holy places, is that any reason why we shall think scorn of those sanctuaries, provided by the merciful goodness of God, where men may flee for shelter from the world, and lead a life of devotion and fasting and prayer? My son, beware of the manifold snares of the devil. The young are ever ready to

condemn and to revolt. It is the nature of the unchastened will of man. Be patient, and watch unto prayer. The day will surely come when (if thou wilt but listen for it) the voice will speak in thine heart, and tell thee what thou art called upon to do, even as it spoke in mine, and called me from the snares and enticements of the world to the haven of the cloister. I know not yet what my work in this world will be; but it is enough that my Lord and Master knows. I am here, abiding in my place and awaiting my call. May He grant that whensoever and howsoever that call may come, I may hear it and be ready for it, and may follow the guiding voice even to the end."

A rapt look was in the dark eyes. Edred caught the enthusiasm of that look, and half unconsciously sank down upon his knee.

"Bless me, even me also, O my father!" he cried, scarce knowing what words he chose; and the thin, strong hand was laid upon his head.

"God be with thee and bless thee, my son," said the monk, in grave, steadfast tones; "and may He be thy guide and thy portion henceforth and forever. May He show thee the way in which He would have thee to go, and give thee grace and strength to follow it unto the end."

For a moment deep silence prevailed. Both were rapidly reviewing the words that day spoken, and the thoughts suggested by the bare discussion of such subjects; and Edred, rising and looking with a strange smile into the monk's face, said softly:

"Methinks it would not be hard to die in a righteous cause; but to be hunted to death through the spite and malice of a treacherous foe, that would be an evil fate. I would fight with the best member I possess against such an one, were he to be mine own enemy or thine."

A smile crossed Brother Emmanuel's face.

"Go to, boy! thou art more soldier than monk yet. Methinks thou wouldst fight bravely and well in a good cause. Perchance that would be the best and happiest lot for thee--

"There be thy brothers coming up from the water. Go join them, and think not too much for thy years. Be a youth as long as thou mayest. Manhood's cares will come all too fast."

With that he turned and went quietly towards the house, whilst Edred went forth to meet his brothers.

Chapter IV: The Travelling Preacher.

Perhaps it was the memory of those spiteful and malicious glances bent upon his preceptor by Brother Fabian that suggested to Edred upon the day following to pay a visit to the secret chamber that had once before so well sheltered a helpless fugitive.

The secret of that chamber still remained with the three boys and their faithful esquire, Warbel. To no other living soul in the house had any of these four ever named the matter. The boys might not have been able to give any reason for this reticence towards their parents, but the fact remained that they had never revealed the secret to them, and that although tradition still spoke of a cleverly-masked chamber somewhere at Chad, it was now popularly supposed to have been in that part of the house which had boon demolished during the Wars of the Roses. Children did not chatter to their parents in days of old as they do now. They might love them never so well, but they held them in reverence and even in awe. They were silent in their presence, as a rule, unless spoken to first, and the habit of conversational intimacy did not grow up until a much later period in their lives. Thus the adventures of Warbel, and his strange midnight visit to their

bedchamber, had never been told to Sir Oliver or his wife. All they knew was that the man had taken refuge from the anger of the Lord of Mortimer in one of their woodmen's huts. They were glad to give him shelter and employment at Chad, and had never regretted the hospitality extended to him; for he had proved the most faithful of servants, and his devotion to the boys was so great that they could be trusted anywhere in his keeping.

As for the anger of his proud neighbour, Sir Oliver had made light of that. The Lord of Mortimer could not make any thing out of so small a matter, and at that time had other more weighty affairs on hand. Warbel's stories to his fellows of the harshness and tyrannical rule at Mortimer made his own servants more loyal and stanch than ever. Chad was a peaceable and happy abode for all its inmates, and the need for secret hiding places had so far never arisen.

The boys in years gone by had almost regretted this fact. They had pictured so vividly how they would hide their father or some friend of his in this secret chamber, should peril menace them from any quarter, that it had seemed sometimes almost a pity that so secure a hiding place should be of so little use, when it might have done such excellent service had the need arisen.

However, as years sped by and the lads began to know more of life, they ceased to regret that the secret chamber remained without an occupant. From time to time they visited it, swept out the dust and cobwebs that had accumulated there, and bit by bit collected a few more odds and ends of furniture, so that the place now wore a look of greater comfort and habitation than it had done when they saw it first.

Once when Edred had been laid up by an accident to his foot, he had amused himself by making a number of feather pillows from the feathers of the birds his brothers shot and brought home to him. These feathers were dressed in the proper way by the boys themselves, and then made up into large pillows or cushions, which were then taken up to the secret chamber (at that time the favourite hobby of the boys), in order to make restful and comfortable the hard pallet bed, in case any fugitive were forced to take shelter there. In the same way had several rudely-made rugs, formed of the skins of wild bears taken in the woods, and tanned by the boys in a fashion of their own, found their way thither; and altogether the place had assumed an aspect of some comfort and even luxury, although it was now several years since any further additions had been made to its plenishings.

Edred looked round the strange apartment with a thoughtful air as he emerged into it from the long, dark, twisting passage he had threaded with the security of one to whom every winding and turn was known. It was dim and dark there, but sufficient light filtered in through cracks and cleverly-contrived apertures to render it easy to move about; and when the eye grew used to the dimness, everything could be seen with pretty fair distinctness.

"It would not be a bad hiding place," mused the boy, speaking half aloud. "Methinks over there one could even read without much trouble. Yes, without doubt one could; and that crack might be judiciously enlarged without any peril. It does but give upon the leads behind the main chimney stack, and the tiles would cover any aperture I made."

He took out his large hunting knife from his girdle as he spoke, and worked away awhile in silence. Very soon he had considerably added to the amount of light in the strange room. He eyed his handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

"That is better. It would be something gloomy to be shut up here without light enough to study by; but with books and food one might spend many a week here and not be overwhelmed with dullness. The place is something straight, to be sure, and there is bare room for a tall man to stand upright."

Edred drew himself to his full height, and found that his head did not quite

reach the beams which formed the ceiling.

"I trow Brother Emmanuel could just stand; he is not greatly taller than I. And he is marvellous contented with a very little, and has been used to passing days and weeks in the solitude of his cell. Sure this would not be to him an evil place. If he had but a book or two and the needful food, he would be vastly content.

"I wonder if he can be in any sort of peril. I liked not the looks or the words of you malicious monk. Our father and mother often say that these be times when men must walk warily, and oftentimes they tell of godly men even in high places who have fallen into disgrace and been accused of fearful sins. It is not safe in these days to have for enemies those who are within the pale of the Church--monks and priors, men who are held up as examples and models of true faith and piety.

"I know not whether they merit the praise men give to them. Methinks Brother Emmanuel could teach them many things both in precept and practice. But it is not for me to be the judge in such matters; yet if he were in any kind of peril, I would lay down my life to save him!"

The boy's eyes kindled at the thought. He cherished for his preceptor an ardent and enthusiastic love, and he had his share of that chivalrous devotion and self-sacrifice which has been the brightest ornament of days that have much of darkness and cruelty to disgrace them.

His face wore a very earnest look as he set about his homely task of cleaning and setting in order this secret chamber. He was more than two hours over his task, for he went through it with unwonted energy. The place looked almost tempting before he had done with it, and he looked about him with satisfied eyes at the close of his labours.

There was a convenient spout, meant to carry off the rain water from the complex level of the old roof, which made an excellent substitute for a dust shoot. It could be got at from this place without difficulty, and Edred shot down his rubbish without any trouble through a funnel-like piece of wood he and his brothers had contrived for the purpose many years before. Then he stood quite still at the aperture whence the soft breeze came blowing in, lost in thought.

"It doth get very hot here in the summer days," he remarked, "and in especial at this end of the room, where it abuts upon the leads. It is cooler yonder, but then it is also darker. The air and the light come in at this side, but so does the heat likewise. And how thirsty one gets, too! My throat is parched and dry. I mind me how poor Warbel suffered in like manner when he was here. Food could be brought in without trouble. I will amass even now by slow degrees some of those hard oaten cakes that keep good for weeks, and some salted venison that would last the winter through.

"But water--how could that be brought? Suppose that we too were watched; suppose we dared not go through the secret door? What would become of the prisoner?"

"I must talk to Bertram and Julian about that. Bertram has a wonderful gift for getting out of such difficulties; he has a marvellous quick wit. We never thought in old days how the water was to be conveyed; we thought a few bottles of wine would last a lifetime. But to die of thirst would be worse than to face one's foes. I shall not really rest till I have thought how such a danger might be guarded against."

Edred left the place with a thoughtful air. He gained their own long sleeping room without adventure. Nobody was ever there at this hour of the day, and he sat down on his bed to think and plan.

There his brothers found him later when they came rushing up tumultuously to find him.

"Ha! thou art there. We have been seeking thee everywhere. What hast thou been doing, brother?"

"I have been up to the room," answered the boy. "I have been making it all ready. I was something disturbed by what chanced yester-afternoon. I told thee of Brother Fabian and his evil looks?"

The other two nodded.

"Yes, verily; but they be brothers of one fraternity. Surely one Benedictine would not hurt another?"

"I know not that. I was talking this day with Warbel. He has been about in the world. He has seen priests and monks accused of heresy the one by the other; and none are so fearfully persecuted as those who wear the tonsure, if men do but suspect them of that sin.

"Brother Emmanuel a heretic!" cried Bertram, with flashing eyes. "I would force the word down the false throat of any who dared to say so! Brother Emmanuel is a right holy man. Art thou mad, Edred, to think such a thing?"

The boy shook his head doubtfully.

"I would I were," he replied; "but methinks Brother Emmanuel himself thinks that peril may menace him. I understand not rightly these matters; but I saw that yesterday upon his face which showed me that he felt he stood something in peril, albeit he has no fear. He is not of the stuff of which cowards are made."

Julian's eyes were wide with affright.

"They say the Lollards and heretics are to be sought out and burned, and that right soon," he said, in low, awe-struck tones. "Some of our people heard it today from those at Mortimer. The Lord of Mortimer has become very zealous to help the priests and monks to scent out all suspected of heresy and make a great example of them.

"Edred, thou dost not think they will take Brother Emmanuel--and--burn--him?"

The last words were little more than a whisper.

"I will die sooner than see it done!" cried the boy passionately. "But in these days no man may say who is safe. Therefore went I up to the chamber this very day to set it in order;" and then he told his brothers of the difficulty that had beset him there, and how he felt no security for any person in hiding there so long as the difficulty of conveying water to him remained so great.

Bertram grasped the situation in a moment. He well knew that if any person were suspected of lying hidden in the house, a close watch might well be kept upon every member of the household, and that it might be hard indeed to pay more than a very occasional visit to the prisoner. If, for instance, suspicion were to fall upon the boys in this matter, it would be probable they would be placed under some restraint; they might be carried off to the priory and forced to do some penance there. It would never do for the prisoner to be entirely dependent upon them for supplies of the precious commodity; and yet what else was to be done?

"I must think about it," cried Bertram. "I shall never rest till I have thought of some method. Would we had not left it so long! We have had all these years to make our plans, and we have never thought of this thing till trouble seems like to be at the very doors.

"Still it may but be our fantasy. Neither Brother Emmanuel nor any other may need the shelter of this room. We will trust it may be so.

"Yet I will cudgel my brains for a plan. It would be a fearful thing to know him

to be shut up here, and yet to be unable to visit him with the necessaries of life. How poor Warbel drank when he issued forth that night. Methinks I see him now. One would have thought he had never tasted water before."

"But we came not to talk of all this," interrupted Julian, who had been evincing a few signs of impatience latterly; "we came to tell of the fair held today and tomorrow at Chadwick. Our father says we may go thither tomorrow if we will. Warbel says they will bait a bull, and perhaps a bear; and that there will be fighting with the quarterstaff and shooting with cross and long bow, and many other like spectacles. He will attend us, and we may be off with the light of day, an we will. That is what we came to tell thee, Edred."

Edred was boy enough to be well pleased at this news. Any variety in the day's round was pleasing to the lads, who found life a little monotonous, albeit pleasant enough. It was a relief, too, to turn from grave thoughts and anxious forebodings to the anticipation of simpler pleasures, and the boys all ran to seek Warbel and ask him what these village fairs were like; for they had been much interrupted during the recent wars, and only now that peace had been for some years established did they begin to revive and gain their old characteristics.

At break of day on the morning following, the little party started forth on foot to walk the five miles which separated them from the village of Chadwick. It was a pleasant enough walk through the green forest paths before the heat of the day had come. The three boys and Warbel headed the party, and were followed by some eight or ten men of various degree, some bent on a day's pleasure for themselves, others there with a view of attending upon their master's sons.

Bertram felt that he could have dispensed with any attendance save that of Warbel; but Sir Oliver had given his own orders. With so powerful and jealous a neighbour within easy reach of the village, he felt bound to be careful of his children. They were but striplings after all, and doubtless his unscrupulous neighbour would be delighted to hold one or more as a hostage should excuse arise for opening hostilities of any kind. He knew well the unscrupulous character of the man with whom he had to deal, and he acted with prudence and foresight accordingly.

The little village when reached proved to be all *en fete*. Rude arches of greenery crossed every pathway to the place, and all the people had turned out in their holiday dresses upon the green to join in the dances and see the sights. There was a miracle play going on in one place, repeated throughout the day to varying groups of spectators. In another corner some rude gipsy juggling was to be seen, at which the rustic yokels gazed with wondering eyes. There were all the usual country games in full swing; and the baiting of a great bull, which was being led to the centre of the green, attracted the attention of the bulk of the spectators, and drew them away from other sports. The actors in the miracle play threw off their dresses to come and witness this delightful pastime, and hardly any of those present seemed to regard for a moment the sufferings of the poor brute, or the savage nature of the whole performance.

Edred, however, belonged to that very small minority, and whilst his two brothers pressed into the ring, he wandered away elsewhere to see what was to be seen. His attention was attracted by a little knot of persons gathered together under the shade of a great oak tree, rather far away from the green that was the centre of attraction. The shade looked inviting, now that the heat was growing greater, and the boy felt some curiosity to know what was the attraction which kept this little group so compact and quiet. On the green were shouting and yelling and noise of every description; but Edred could hear no sound of any kind proceeding from this little group till he approached quite near, and then he was aware of the sound of a single voice speaking in low tones and very earnestly.

When he got nearer still he saw that the speaker was a little hunchback, and that he had in his hand a small book from which he was reading aloud to the people about him. And this fact surprised the boy not a little, for it was very

unusual for any person in the lower ranks of life to be able to read; and yet this man was evidently in poor circumstances, for his clothes were shabby and his hands were hardened by manual toil.

Drawing nearer in great curiosity, Edred became aware that what the hunchback was reading was nothing more or less than a part of the gospel narrative in the English tongue, to which the people about him were listening in amazement, and with keen curiosity and attention.

Edred was familiar enough with the Latin version of the Scriptures, and had studied them under the guidance of Brother Emmanuel with great care and attention; but he had never yet heard the words read out in their entirety in his native tongue, and he was instantly struck and fascinated by the freshness and suggestiveness of the familiar language when used for this purpose. He was conscious that it gave to the words a new life and meaning; that it seemed, as it were, to drive them home to the heart in a new fashion, and to make them the property of the listener as they could never be when a dead language was used as the medium of expression. He felt a strange thrill run through him as the story of Calvary was thus read in the low, impassioned tones of the hunchback; and he was not surprised to see that tears were running down many faces, and that several women could hardly restrain their sobs.

Now and again the hunchback paused and added a few explanatory words of his own; now and again he broke forth into a rhapsody not lacking in a certain rude eloquence, in which he besought his hearers to come to their Saviour with their load of sin--their Saviour, who was the one and only Mediator between God and man. Were not His own words enough--"Father, forgive them"? What need, then, of the priest; the confessional; the absolution of man? To God and to Him alone was the remission of sins. Let those who loved their Lord seek to Him, and see what bliss and happiness resulted from this personal bond between the erring soul and the loving Saviour.

Edred shivered slightly as he stood, yet something in the impassioned gestures of the hunchback, and the strange enthusiastic light which shone in his eyes, attracted him in spite of himself. That this was rank heresy he well knew. He knew that one of the Lollard tenets had always been that confession was a snare devised of man and not appointed by God. Edred himself could have quoted many passages from Holy Writ which spoke of some need of confession through the medium of man, and of sins remitted by God-appointed ministers. He had been well instructed in such matters by Brother Emmanuel, who, whatever his enemies might allege against him, was a staunch son of the Church, even though he might be gifted with a wide tolerance and a mind open to conviction; and his pupil was not to be easily convinced against his will. Nor was Edred convinced of the justice and truth of many things that this ignorant man spoke; but what did strike him very greatly was his intense earnestness, his fiery and impassioned gestures, the absolute confidence he possessed in the righteousness of his own cause, and his utter freedom from any kind of doubt or fear--the eloquence of one of nature's orators that carries away the heart far more than the studied oratory which is the result of practice and artifice.

Whilst the man spoke, Edred felt himself carried away in spite of his inner consciousness that there was a flaw in the argument of the preacher. He was intensely interested by the whole scene. He could not help watching the faces of the group of which he made one, watching the play of emotion upon them as they followed with breathless attention their instructor's words, and drank in his fiery eloquence as though it were life-giving water.

And was it wonderful this should be so? the youth asked of himself. Were not these poor people fairly starving for want of spiritual food? and what food did they receive from the hands of their parish priest? Edred knew the old man well. He was a kind-hearted sexagenarian, and in those days that was accounted an immense age. He mumbled through the mass on Sundays; he baptized the children and buried the dead when need arose; and if sent for by some person in

extremity, would go and administer the last rites of the Church. But beyond that his duties did not go, and no living soul in the place remembered hearing him speak a word of instruction or admonition on his own account. He had a passion for gardening, and spent all his spare time with his flowers; and his people went their way as he did his, and their lives never touched on any point.

Such being the case, was it wonderful that the people should come with eagerness to hear of the Saviour from whomsoever would tell them of Him? Edred well remembered Brother Emmanuel's words about the four God-given channels of grace--the living ministry by which He had meant His Church to be perfected. But how when the streams grew choked? how when the ministry had become a dead letter? Was the Church, were the people, to die of inanition? Might not God pardon them for listening to any messenger who came with His name upon his lips? Surely He who lived in the heavens would pardon them even if it were sin, seeing that it was the instinctive love of His own wandering sheep which brought them crowding round any shepherd who would teach them of Him, even though he did not come in the God-directed order.

Some such thoughts in a more chaotic form surged through Edred's head as he stood listening, almost causing him to lose the words of the preacher, though the tenor of his discourse was plain. He almost wished he might enter into a discussion with this enthusiast, and point out to him where he thought him extravagant and wrong; but young as he was, Edred yet knew something of the futility of argument with those whose minds are made up, and caution withheld him from entering into any argument with one who was plainly a Lollard preacher. So, after listening with sympathy and interest for a long while, he quietly stole away again.

The bull baiting was over by this time. The games and other sports were recommencing with greater energy after this brief interruption. The miracle play was again represented, and Edred stood a few minutes to watch, thinking within his heart that this representation, half comical, half blasphemous (though the people who regarded it seemed in no way aware of this), was a strange way of bringing home the realities of the Scriptures, when it could be done so far more faithfully and eloquently by simply reading the gospel words in the tongue of the common people.

His eye roved from the actors, with their mincing words and artificial gestures, to the group still collected beneath the tree, and he could not but contrast the two methods in his own mind, and wonder for a moment whether the Lollards could be altogether so desperately wicked as their enemies would make out.

He was half afraid of allowing himself to think too much on such themes, and went in search of his brothers. He found Warbel looking out for him in some anxiety. He had missed the boy for some little while from his charge, and as the field was filling fast with followers and servants wearing the Mortimer livery, he was glad to have the three boys all together beneath his care.

He would have been glad to get them to leave the place, but Bertram would not hear of it. He wished to try his own skill at some of the sports; and Julian, of course, must needs follow his example.

The skill and address of the Chadgrove brothers won the hearty admiration of the rustics, but it also brought them more than once into rivalry and collision with some of Mortimer's gentlemen-at-arms, who were not best pleased to be overmatched by mere striplings. It was also galling and irritating to them to note the popularity of these lads with the rustics. Any success of theirs was rewarded by loud shouting and applause, whilst no demonstration of satisfaction followed any feat performed by those wearing the livery of Mortimer. And if the lads scored a triumph over any of these latter, the undisguised delight of the beholders could not pass unnoticed by the vanquished.

Altogether there were so much jealousy and ill will aroused that little scuffles

between the followers of Chad and Mortimer had already taken place in more than one part of the field. Warbel was getting very uneasy, and had persuaded Edred to use his influence with his brothers to return home before any real collision should have occurred, when a great tumult and shouting suddenly arose to interrupt the whispered colloquy, and Edred saw a great rush being made in the direction of the oak tree, where the hunchback preacher had been keeping his station the whole day long, always surrounded by a little knot of listeners.

Shouts and yells were filling the air, the voices being those of Mortimer's following.

"A Lollard, a Lollard! A heretic! Down with him! Away with him! To the fire with him! A Lollard, a Lollard!"

A deep flush overspread Edred's face. He made a spring forward; but Warbel laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"It is no case for us to interfere in," he said, with clouded brow. "If they have a heretic to deal with we must not meddle. It is not England's way for a score to attack one; but we must not interpose betwixt Mortimer and a heretic. That would be too much peril."

But almost before the man had done speaking Edred broke away, crying out excitedly: "My brothers, my brothers! they are there in the thick of it!" and with a groan of terror and dismay Warbel recognized the voice of Bertram raised in angry scorn.

"Stand back, you cowards! Who ever heard of fifty men against one, and he a cripple? The first who touches him I strike dead. A heretic! Pooh! nonsense. He is but a poor travelling peddler with his pack. See, here is the pack to speak for itself. For shame to mar a merry holiday in this unmannerly fashion! No; I will not give him up! Ye are no better than a pack of howling, ravening wolves. I am the Lord of Chad, and I will see that no violence is done this day. Back to your sports, ye unmannerly knaves. Are ye fit for nothing but to set upon one helpless man and worry him as dogs worry their helpless prey?"

Howls, execrations, oaths followed freely; but the village people were to a man with their young lord, and the scions of Mortimer felt it by instinct.

"Who is he? Whence came he?" was being asked on all sides; but none could give an answer. He was a stranger to the village, but all those who had been drinking in his words rallied round him, and declared he was but a simple peddler whose wares they had been buying; and Bertram, who really thought so, stood beside the tree, opened the bundle, and showed the innocent nature of the wares.

His brothers had forced their way to his side by this time, and helped to make a ring round the poor hunchback; and Edred kept a very sharp eye upon the emptying of the pack, resolved if there should be any book at the bottom to contrive that it should not reach the eyes of any of the vindictive followers of Mortimer.

But there was nothing of the sort to be seen. The man was both too poor and too wary to carry such dangerous things with him. His own thin volume had been slipped into some secret receptacle about his person, and his calmness of bearing helped to convince all who were open to conviction that he was innocent of the charge brought against him.

With dark, lowering faces, and many muttered threats, the Mortimer retainers drew off, seeing that with public feeling dead against them they could not prevail to work their will upon the intended victim. But Warbel was made very anxious by the words he heard openly spoken on all sides, and he would have given much to have hindered this act of Bertram's, generous and manly though he knew it to have been.

"It is ill work drawing down the charge of heresy," he remarked, as he got the boys at last in full march homeward. "Any other charge one can laugh to scorn; but no man may tell where orthodoxy ends and heresy begins. Godly bishops have been sent to prison, and priests to the stake. How may others hope to escape?"

"Tush!" answered Bertram lightly; "there was never a heretic at Chad yet, and never will be one, I trow. Was I to see a poor cripple like that done to death without striking a blow in his defence--he in Chadwick, of which my father is lord of the manor? Was I to see Mortimer's men turning a gay holiday into a scene of horror and affright? Never! I were unworthy of my name had I not interposed. The man was no heretic, and if he had been--"

"Have a care, sir, how thou speakest; have a care, I entreat thee! Thou knowest not what ears may be listening!" cried Warbel, in a real fright.

Bertram laughed half scornfully.

"I have no need to be ashamed of what I think. I am a true son of the Church, and fear not what the vile Mortimer scum may say. But to pleasure thee, good Warbel, I will say no more. We will make our way home with all speed, and tell the tale to our father. I doubt not he will say it was well done. The Lord of Chad would ever have the defenceless protected, and stand between them and the false and treacherous bloodhounds of Mortimer. I have no fear that he will blame me. He would have done the same in my place."

"I trow he would," answered Warbel in a low voice; "but that does not make the deed done without peril of some sort following to the doer."

Chapter V: A Warning.

Sir Oliver and his wife listened with some anxiety to the boys' story of the rescue of the peddler. Bertram observed the cloud upon his father's brow, and eagerly asked if he had done wrong.

"I say not so, my son," replied the knight. "I would ever have a child of mine merciful and just--the protector of the oppressed, and the champion of the defenceless; nevertheless--"

"And it was those bloodhounds of Mortimer's who were setting upon him," broke in Julian vehemently. "What right had they to molest him? Could we of Chad, upon our own soil, stand by and see it done? I trow, father, that thou wouldst have done the same hadst thou been there."

A smile flitted over the face of the knight. He loved to see the generous fire burning in his boys' eyes; but for all that his face was something anxious as he made reply:

"Belike I should, my son, albeit perhaps in a something less vehement fashion. My authority would have served to keep down riot, and the charge against the peddler could have been forthwith examined, and if found false the man could then have been sent on his way in safety. But it is dangerous work just now to appear to side with those against whom the foul charge of heresy is brought. Knowest thou--know any of ye--what gave rise to the sudden suspicion?"

Edred, who knew much more of the real nature of the peddler's occupation that day, kept his lips close sealed. He would not for worlds have told what he had seen and heard. His brothers were plainly ignorant of the peddler's exhortation, reading, and preaching. It was not for him to add to the anxieties of his parents.

Julian was the first to answer the question.

"It was but the idle spite of the people of Mortimer," he answered. "They had baited the bull and the bear, and they had the mind to bait or burn a heretic

whilst their blood was up, as a fit end to their day's pleasuring. I saw them prowling round the tree where the fellow was talking to the women and showing his wares; and suddenly they raised the shout. I called out to Bertram that Mortimer's people were bent on a mischief, and he sprang to the peddler's side before any had touched him, and we disappointed the hell hounds of their prey. He had nothing in his pack but such wares as all peddlers have; and the people vowed he had done naught all the day but sell to all who came. It would have been sin and shame for us of Chad to have stood by to see him hounded perhaps to death. We could not choose but balk those evil men of their will. None of our blood could have stood by to see such ill done!"

"I cannot blame ye, my sons," said the knight. "Ye have the blood of your forefathers in your veins, and it goes against all of us at Chad to see injustice and unrighteousness committed. I do but wish the cry raised against yon man had been anything else than that of heresy. The priests and magistrates are very busy now searching out all those suspected of that vile sin, and those who shelter them are accounted as guilty as those who are proved tainted. Our foe of Mortimer is very zealous in the good cause, and will not scruple to employ against us every weapon in his power. It would be an excellent thing in his eyes to show how mine own children had stood up to defend a Lollard heretic. I would we knew something more anent this man and his views.

"Warbel, didst thou know him? Is he anyone known in and about Chad?"

"I never saw his face before, sir," answered Warbel. "I know not so much as his name. I had thought of making some inquiries of the village folks. All I noted was that he seemed always to have plenty of persons around and about him, and his wares were nothing very attractive. Still, it is often the tales peddlers tell and the way they have with them that keeps a crowd always about them. Some of the folks of the place must know who and what he is."

"Yes, verily; and it would be well for thee to ride over tomorrow and make all needful inquiry. It would set my mind at rest to know that there was no cause of complaint against him. We cannot be blind to the fact that heretical doctrines are widely spread by those purporting to be hawkers and peddlers. Yet there must be many honest men who would scorn to be so occupied, and who know not even the name of these pestilent heresies."

And with that charge the knight tried to dismiss the subject from his mind; whilst Edred went to bed feeling terribly uneasy, and dreamed all night of the secret chamber, and how the time came when they were all forced to take refuge in it from the hatred of the Lord of Mortimer and his bloodthirsty followers.

But not even to his brothers did he tell all that he had heard and all that he knew. The words of the gospel in the familiar language of his country haunted him persistently. He felt a strange wish to hear more, although he believed the wish to be sin, and strove against it might and main. Some of the passages clung tenaciously to his memory, and he fell asleep repeating them. When he woke the words were yet in his mind, and they seemed to get between him and the words of his task that day when the boys went to their tutor for daily instruction.

Brother Emmanuel had never found Edred so inattentive and absent before. He divined that the boy must have something on his mind, and let him alone. He was not surprised that he lingered when the others had gone, and then in a low voice asked his preceptor if he would meet him in the chantry, as he felt he could not be happy till he had made confession of a certain matter, done penance, and received absolution.

A request of that sort never met a denial from the monk. He sent Edred to the chantry to pray for an hour, and met him there at the end of that time to listen to all he had to say.

Edred's story was soon told--nothing held back, not even the innermost

thoughts of his heart--and the expression of the face beneath the enshrouding cowl was something strange to see.

It was long before the monk spoke, and meantime Edred lay prostrate at his feet, thankful to transfer the burden weighing him down to the keeping of another, but little guessing what the burden was to him to whom he made this confession.

Well did Brother Emmanuel know and recognize the peril of entertaining such thoughts, longings, and aspirations as were now assailing the heart of this unconscious boy. That there was sin in all these feelings he did not doubt; that heavy penance must be done for them he would not for a moment have wished to deny. But yet when he came to place reason in the place of the formulas of the Church in which he had been reared, he knew not how to condemn that longing after the Word of God which was generally the first step towards the dreaded sin of heresy.

No one more sincerely abhorred the name and the sin of heresy. When men denied the presence of the living God in the sacraments of the Church, or attacked its time-honoured practices in which the heart of the young monk was bound up, then the whole soul of the enthusiast rose up in revolt, and he felt that such blasphemers well deserved the fiery doom they brought upon themselves. But when their sin was possessing a copy of the living Word; when all that could be alleged against them was that they met together to read that Word which was denied to them by their lawful pastors and teachers, and which they had no opportunity of hearing otherwise--then indeed did it seem a hard thing that they should be so mercilessly condemned and persecuted.

Yet he could not deny that this reading and expounding of the Scriptures by the ignorant and unlearned led almost invariably to those other sins of blasphemy and irreverence which curdled the very blood in his veins. Again and again had his heart burned within him to go forth amongst the people himself; to take upon himself and put in practice the office of evangelist, which he knew to be a God-appointed ministry, and yet which was so seldom worthily fulfilled, and himself to proclaim aloud the gospel, that all might have news of the Son of God, yet might be taught to reverence the holy sacraments more rather than less for the sake of Him who established them upon earth, and to respect the priesthood, even though it might in its members show itself unworthy, because it was a thing given by Christ for the edification of the body, and because He Himself, the High Priest passed into the heavens, must needs have His subordinate priests working with Him and by Him on earth.

Again and again had longings such as these filled his soul, and he had implored leave to go forth preaching and teaching. But he had never won permission to do this. The request had been treated with contempt, and he himself had been suspected of ambition and other unworthy motives. He had submitted to the will of his superiors, as his vow of obedience obliged him to do; but none the less did his heart burn within him as he saw more and more plainly how men were thirsting for living waters, and realized with ever-increasing intensity of pain and certainty that if the Church herself would not give her children to drink out of pure fountains, they would not be hindered from drinking of poisoned springs, and thus draw down upon themselves all manner of evils and diseases.

He had never doubted for a moment the pureness of the source from which he himself drank. He was not blind to the imperfections many and great of individuals in high places, and the corruptions which had crept within the pale of the Church, but these appeared to him incidental and capable of amendment. He never guessed at any deeper poison at work far below, tainting the very waters at their source. He was in all essential points an orthodox son of Rome; but he had imbibed much of the spirit of the Oxford Reformers, of whom Colet was at this time the foremost, and his more enlightened outlook seemed to the blind and bigoted of his own order to savour something dangerously of heresy.

He did not know himself seriously suspected. His conscience was too clear, his devotion to the Church too pure, to permit of his easily fearing unworthy suspicions. He knew himself no favourite with the stately but self-indulgent Prior of Chadwater; knew that Brother Fabian, whom he had once sternly rebuked for an act of open sin, was his bitter enemy. But he had not greatly heeded this, strong in his own innocence, and he had been far happier at Chad in the more truly pure atmosphere of that secular house than in the so-called sanctity of the cloister.

And now he found his own thoughts, aspirations, and yearnings repeated in the mind of his favourite pupil, and he was confronted by a problem more difficult to solve than any that had met him before. In his own case he felt he had a compass to steer by--the restraint and guidance of his vows and his habit to help him. But how would it be with this ardent and imaginative boy? His mind was struggling to free itself from artificial trammels. To what goal might not that wish lead?

Earnestly he looked upon the bowed form at his feet, and in his eyes there was a great compassion. But his lips pronounced, with sternness and decision, the words of the heavy penance imposed, and at the end of the prescribed formulas he raised the boy and looked searchingly into his face.

"My son," he said, very gently yet very impressively, "remember that the first sin that entered into the world was the sin of disobedience. Remember that Satan's most powerful weapon is the one which he employed towards our first mother when he bid her eat of the tree of knowledge, because that knowledge is good--a God-given thing--when he persuaded her that God was wrong in keeping anything hidden from her that in itself was good. The same sin by which death entered the world has abounded there ever since. God and the Son of God and the Church have always taught that there be certain things hidden, only to be revealed to man by God or through the ordinances of the Church, not to be sought after through curiosity by unlettered men themselves. Yet for as much as Satan is never at rest, and can transform himself on occasion into an angel of light, he is ever present with men urging them on to pry into these hidden mysteries and to make light of the ordinances of God. He puts into their mouth words similar to those by which he tempted the woman to her fall, and men listen greedily as our first mother did, and are led into destruction when they think they are walking forth into the light of day.

"My son, beware of this sin; beware of this temptation. Remember the many solemn warnings against disobedience contained in the Word of God; remember how obedience is insisted on throughout that holy volume. Thou mayest not always see the reason--thou mayest not always recognize the authority; but remember that there is a blessing upon those who obey, and be not in haste to break the bond under which thou wast born, remembering who has placed thee where thou art, and who has bidden us give all dutiful obedience to the powers that be."

Edred made a deep reverence, crossed himself silently in token of submission, and prostrated himself upon the step of the altar, to lie there fasting till set of sun as one part of his penance. With a murmured prayer and blessing the monk left him, hoping that he had spoken a word of seasonable warning to one whose heart was enkindled with ardent devotion, whilst his active mind and vivid imagination were in danger of leading him into perilous paths.

No questions were asked of Edred respecting this penance, which took him away from his ordinary occupations during the chief part of the two following days. He and Brother Emmanuel alone knew the reason for it, and it was against the traditions of the house that any open notice should be taken by others.

The episode of the peddler and the outbreak with the followers of Mortimer had begun to fade somewhat from the minds of those at Chad. No complaint had reached that house from Mortimer's Keep, as had been expected, and it was

hoped that the thing would never be heard of again.

Yet it was with something of a sinking heart that Sir Oliver heard the third day that the Prior of Chadwater desired speech of him; and as he mounted his horse and summoned his servants about him, he wondered, not without considerable uneasiness, what this summons might mean.

He had always been on good terms with the handsome prior of the Benedictine monastery. The choicest of the game, the fattest of the bucks slain in the forest, the chiefest specimens of his wife's culinary triumphs, always found their way to the prior's table, and an excellent understanding had always been maintained between the two houses. But the knight had observed of late that the prior had become more slack in those visits of friendly courtesy which once had been common enough between them; and when he had presented himself at the monastery, he had not been quite certain that his welcome was as cordial as heretofore. It was not until latterly that this had caused him any uneasiness--it had taken him some while to feel sure that it was anything but his own fantasy; but he had just begun to feel that something was amiss, and now this summons seemed to him to have an evil import.

However, there was nothing for it but to go; and a clear conscience keeps a man bold even in face of greater peril than was likely to assail him now. He thought it probable that some rumour of the stir on the fair day had reached the ecclesiastic, and that he wanted an account of it in detail. Sir Oliver was quite prepared to give him that, and entered the presence of the prior with a bold front and an air of cordial courtesy such as he was wont to wear in the presence of this dignitary.

There was nothing alarming in the prior's manner. He received his guest graciously, bid him be seated in the best chair reserved for the use of guests, and asked him of the welfare of his household with benevolence and friendly interest. But after all that had been said, his face took another look, and he brought up the subject of the travelling peddler or preacher, and asked the knight what his sons meant by standing champions to a notable and pernicious Lollard heretic.

The knight started at the words, and disclaimed any such knowledge both on behalf of himself and his sons. He told the tale as Bertram and Julian had told it him; and there was such sincerity in his manner, and his character both for orthodoxy and for scrupulous truthfulness in word and deed was so widely known and respected, that the prior's brow unbent somewhat, and he looked less stern and severe.

"I believe your story, Sir Knight," he said. "I believe that your sons sinned in ignorance. But none the less is it true that they have stood champions for a pestilent heretic; and that is an offence not likely to escape the vengeful notice of the Lord of Mortimer, who is always on the lookout for a cause of complaint against person or persons at Chad."

"That is very true," replied Sir Oliver, thoughtfully and gravely. "I was greatly vexed when I heard of the affair, and chided my boys for their hot-headed rashness. Howbeit there be many there to testify that the man was at that time but hawking his wares, and my sons could not know that he was a secret heretic and Lollard."

"Nay, but when that cry was raised they should not have stood at his side as his champions without more knowledge of the truth. The man is now known to have been preaching well nigh the whole day long, reading portions of those accursed translations of Wycliffe's which are damnation to all who possess them or listen to them, and expounding thereupon in the fashion that sends persons raving mad with the poison of heresy. The man is in hiding somewhere in the woods about; but he will soon be caught and handed over to the secular power to be doomed to death. And I like not the story of your sons' part in all this; it hath an ugly look."

Sir Oliver hid his anxiety beneath a cloak of dignified submission. He well knew the best way of putting things straight with the prior.

"I greatly grieve over the hotheadedness of the lads, but I will gladly make such amends as lies in my power. They sinned in ignorance, as you, reverend father, believe, and for such sins the indulgence of the Church may be won by the payment of such sum as shall be thought right. If you will tell me what I ought to give to purchase this indulgence, I will do my utmost to meet the just claim; and Holy Church shall be richer and not poorer for the trespass unwittingly made by the sons of Chad."

The prior looked pleased at this ready suggestion, and named a sum which, though sufficiently heavy, was within Sir Oliver's means, and which he promised should be immediately paid. He knew that the prior, though a man fond of money, and somewhat greedy in gaining possession of all he could, was not treacherous or unjust; and that if he had accepted this sum as the price of the pardon of the boys' escapade, he would stand their friend, and not allow them to be persecuted by Mortimer for the same offence, should the matter ever be brought up against them again.

Indeed, now that the arrangement had been so amicably entered into, Sir Oliver was rather glad that the subject had been broached. The prior was the most powerful man in the county, and to have him for a friend was everything. It was his game to hold the balance very nicely betwixt the owners of Mortimer and Chad, keeping his neutral position, and not permitting either party to overstep the limits beyond a certain extent. After what had just passed, he felt assured that the prior would not permit his boys to be harried or accused of countenancing heresy by their enemy, and he was well pleased at the interview and its result.

He rose now as if to go, but the prior motioned him to resume his seat.

"There is yet another matter upon which I would speak to you," he said. "You have beneath your roof one of our younger brethren, Brother Emmanuel. How have you found him comport himself since he has been free from the restraints of the cloister?"

The knight looked surprised at the question.

"He is in all ways a very godly and saintly youth," he replied. "He instructs my sons after an excellent fashion, keeps the hours of the Church with a scrupulous precision I have never seen equalled, and instructs all who come to him for advice or assistance in a manner that makes him beloved of all. Whenever I have talked with him or gone to him for spiritual counsel, I have been greatly struck by his spiritual insight, his purity of thought, his earnestness of mind, and his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures."

The prior shifted a little in his seat, and coughed behind his hand somewhat dubiously.

"He was ever prone to observe the hours well. He lived blamelessly here in all outward observances; but as for his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, it may be that it goes something too far. It is whispered abroad that some of his words savour strongly of those very Lollard heresies which are about to be put down with fire and sword. Hast thou heard and seen naught of that?"

A thrill of indignation ran through Sir Oliver's frame. It was only by an effort that he restrained a hasty exclamation. He well knew that the wave of enlightened feeling rising within the Church herself had found no echo in the remoter parts of the kingdom, where bigotry and darkness and intolerance still reigned supreme. He was perfectly aware that the most enlightened sons of the Church who had dared to bid the people study the Word of God, and especially to study it as a whole, would have been denounced as heretics had they lifted up their voices in many parts of the kingdom. This very enlightened understanding, which was so

marked a feature in Brother Emmanuel, had been one of the strongest bonds between him and his patron, and it seemed little short of monstrous to the knight to hear such an accusation brought against one who had lived a godly and blameless life, had observed far more rigorously all the laws of the Church than the prior or the fraternity thought of doing, and was a far truer and better son than they ever attempted to be.

But he restrained his indignation, and only answered very calmly:

"I have seen naught of it; indeed, I have seen so much to the contrary, that methinks it is but an idle tale, not worth your reverence's attention. In every matter, word or deed, Brother Emmanuel is faithful to his vows and to his calling. He is an able instructor of youth; and were your reverence to examine him as strictly as possible, I do not believe that any cause of offence, however trivial, could be found against him."

"I am well pleased to hear such good testimony," returned the prior, who was regarding his visitor with a scrutiny not altogether agreeable to the knight. "At the same time, it is not always well for a monk to remain too long away from the cloister, and a change of instructor is oftentimes better for the young. I have been thinking that it might be well to recall Brother Emmanuel, and send in his place Brother Fabian, in whom I repose the greatest confidence. How would such a change meet your good pleasure? If Brother Emmanuel is in need of penance, it can better be imposed here than elsewhere--and by all I hear it seems to me that he stands something in need of the discipline of the monastery; and Brother Fabian would make an excellent substitute as an instructor for the lads."

Whilst the prior was speaking, thought had been rapid with Sir Oliver, and something in the prior's look--a subtlety and almost cruelty about the lines of the mouth--warned him that there was in this proposition that which boded evil to someone.

It flashed across him that Brother Emmanuel was perhaps to be made a victim of ecclesiastical tyranny and cruelty. He knew that the ascetic young monk had been no favourite with his brethren at Chadwater; and if they could bring against him some charge of heresy, however trifling, it was like enough that he might be silently done to death, as others of his calling had been for less fearful offences. Monastic buildings held their dark secrets, as the world was just beginning to know; and only a short while back he had heard a whisper that it was not wise for a monk to be too strict in his hours and in his living. Then again, Brother Fabian was a coarse, illiterate man, utterly unfit to be the guide and instructor of youth. Sir Oliver had not dined at the prior's table and spent hours in his company for nothing, and he knew many of the monks tolerably well. Brother Fabian was the one he liked the least; indeed he had a strong dislike and distrust of the man, and was well aware that the ecclesiastical habit was the only thing about him that savoured of sanctity or the monastic life. He would not have allowed the contaminating presence of such a man near his sons, even had he been inducted with the needful learning for the task of instructor. As it was, he knew that the monk could barely spell through his breviary, and it was plain that the prior must have another reason for wishing to induct him into the house.

Nor was the reason difficult to divine. It was not as an instructor but as a spy that Brother Fabian was to come. The whispers abroad--doubtless spread industriously by his vengeful foe--had not been without effect, and men had begun to suspect that his household was tainted with heresy. Brother Emmanuel was suspected, his sons were probably suspected as being his pupils, and possibly some other members of his household too. Brother Fabian was to be sent to act as spy, and if bribed (as was most probable) by the Lord of Mortimer, would doubtless find some cause of offence which could be twisted into an accusation of heresy against someone there.

It was difficult for Sir Oliver to see his way all in a moment. To oppose this scheme or to submit to it appeared alike dangerous. His independence and honest

English pride revolted against any attempt to coerce him in his domestic arrangements, or to submit to interference there, even from the ministers of the Church.

But it was needful to walk warily, and the prior was watching him as a cat does a mouse.

"Will you give me a few days to consider this matter?" he asked, in as easy a tone as he could. "Your reverence knows that changes are not of themselves welcome to me; and my sons have made such progress with Brother Emmanuel that I am something loath to part with him. Also, they are at this moment going through a course of study which none other could conclude with the same advantage. Brother Fabian is doubtless an excellent brother of his order, but he has scarce the same learning as Brother Emmanuel. Nevertheless, I will well consider the change proposed, and give it all dutiful heed. But I should like to speak with my wife anent the matter, and learn her will. It is not a matter of pressing haste, by what I have gathered from your words?"

"No, not one of pressing haste. Yet I would not long delay," answered the prior. "I may not speak too openly, but there be reasons why I would have Brother Emmanuel beneath this roof once more. I will leave thee one week to consider and to get the course of study completed. At the week's end, methinks, I shall be constrained to bid Brother Emmanuel return home. But if all be well after a short time has sped by, he may return again to thee."

Sir Oliver was looking full at the handsome but crafty face of the prior, and as the last words passed his lips he saw a flicker in the eyes which made him say within his heart:

"If Brother Emmanuel once re-enters these walls, he will never sally forth again. Mischief is meant him; of that I am convinced. What must I do? Must I give him up to his death? And how can I save him, even if I would?"

These thoughts were surging in his heart as he rode home. The peril he had feared against those of his own name and race had been averted. The payment of what was practically a heavy fine would secure to the boys immunity from the results of their rashness; but with the monk it was far different. What had aroused the animosity of the fraternity, and why mischief was planned against him, Sir Oliver could not divine; but that something had occurred to arouse it he could not doubt.

No sooner had he reached home than he sought Brother Emmanuel in his own bare room, and laid before him the account of what had passed.

A strange look crossed the young monk's face.

"Then it is known!" he said simply.

"What is known?"

"That I am the author of a certain pamphlet, written some while ago, and taken to Germany to be printed, giving an account of some of the corruptions and abuses that have stolen into the Church, and in especial into the monasteries and religious houses of this land. I could not choose but write it. If the Church is to be saved, it can only be by her repudiation of such corruptions, and by a process of self cleansing that none can do for her. I always knew that if suspected my life would pay the forfeit; but I know not how the authorship has been discovered. Yet the great ones of the land have ways we know not of; and if the truth is not known, it is suspected. I am to go back to the priory; but once there, I shall never go forth again. Yet what matter? I always knew if the thing were known my life would pay the forfeit. I wrote as the Spirit bid me; I know that God was with me then. I am ready to lay down my life in a good cause; I am not afraid what man can do unto me."

Sir Oliver looked into that young face, which the martyr spirit illuminated and glorified, and an answering spark kindled in his own eyes.

"If that is thine offence, and not the alleged one of heresy, I will stand thy friend," he said; "and thou shalt not go forth from Chad to thy death so long as I have a roof to shelter thee. I will stand thy friend and protector so long as I have a house to call mine own."

Chapter VI: Watched!

"I am glad thou hast so resolved, my husband; but hast thou considered what it may mean to thee?"

Lady Chadgrove spoke gently, laying her hand upon her husband's arm with a gesture unwontedly tender; for neither was demonstrative of the deep affection which existed between them, and he knew that only strong emotion evoked such action from her.

"I know that if I refuse to give up Brother Emmanuel I may draw down upon myself stern admonition, and perchance something worse, but I mean not that it come to open defiance of any injunction from the Church. Brother Emmanuel must leave Chad secretly, and be far away ere the week of grace expires. We are but twenty miles from the coast. This very day I shall ride thither and see what small trading vessels are in the bay about to fare forth to foreign shores. I shall negotiate with some skipper making for some Dutch port to carry thither the person whom I shall describe to him, and who will show him this ring"--and Sir Oliver displayed an emerald upon his own finger--"in token that he is the person to be taken aboard. Those trading skippers are used to such jobs, and if they be paid they know how to hold their peace and ask no questions. In Holland the brother will be safer than in any other land. The spite of the Prior of Chadwater is not like to pursue him there. But here his life is not safe from hour to hour."

"And how if it comes to be known that thou hast planned this escape?" asked the lady, a little anxiously.

"I have thought of that too, dame," replied the knight, smiling. "Let but the good brother be safely out of the country, and whilst the hue and cry is still going on here after him I will to the king and tell him all the story. Our pious Dean Colet, who knows Brother Emmanuel, and knows, too, that it is meet the corrupt practices that have crept within the pale of Holy Church should be made known, that they may be swept away and reformed, will stand my friend, and together we can so persuade his Majesty that even if the prior and Mortimer both combine to accuse me before him he will not allow their spite to touch me. The king knows right well that there is need of amendment within the Church herself. We have heard words spoken in the Cathedral of London which would be accounted rank heresy here. There is light abroad which must one day reach to the ends of the earth, and truly it sometimes seemeth to me that if the priests, the abbots, and the monks set their faces steadfastly against this light, they will fall into some terrible pitfall, but they will never quench the light with their united strength."

The lady gave one quick glance round, as though afraid that even the walls might have ears, and such sentiments were not those that it was safe to blazon abroad. But Sir Oliver, strong in the consciousness of his own deep and abiding love for the Church and for all the doctrines which she upheld, was bold to speak his mind in private when the subject broached was the one of corruptions and abuses which some of the sturdiest and noblest sons of the Church were now engaged in examining and denouncing, none dreaming of charging them with heresy on that account.

But the mother had noted the presence of Edred, who had come in quietly whilst the discussion was going on, and was now standing listening to his father's words with kindling eyes; and she made a sign to her husband which caused him

to turn round, and then the boy spoke.

"The horses are ready at the door, father, and Bertram prays that he may accompany thee. He is donning his riding dress already."

"With all my heart," answered the knight readily, "an he can ride the forty miles betwixt this and tomorrow at the same hour; for I do not purpose to be long absent."

"Bertram would ride all day and all night and feel it not," answered Edred with a proud smile; "and he loves the sight and the smell of the salt sea, and would be loath to miss the chance of seeing it. Father, art thou going to aid Brother Emmanuel to fly? Is there peril for him abroad?"

The knight bent a quick, keen glance upon his son.

"I fear so, my boy; and Brother Emmanuel himself thinks that ill is meant him. And it is better to seek safety in flight at the first hint of danger than to dally and delay, and perhaps find at last that it is too late to fly. Thou, my son, wilt for this one day and night be left in charge of thy mother and thy home and all within it; for I must needs take with me Warbel and a score of our stoutest fellows, for the lonely road to the coast is none too safe for travellers of the better sort. Be thou watchful and vigilant, and keep thine eyes and thine ears alike open. Heed well that the gates be closed early, and that all be made safe, and let not Brother Emmanuel adventure himself without the walls. Use all discretion and heed, and fare thee well. I shall reach the coast tonight, and do my business with all speed, and be in the saddle again with the light of dawn, so thou mayest look to see us again before noon."

And with a tender farewell to his wife, the knight mounted and rode away with his gallant little train; and the lady looked after him from the window, and said to Edred, who quickly came to her to learn more, if he could, of the words he had recently heard:

"Now may the blessed saints and our Lord Himself be with him! for no braver and truer gentleman lives in the length and breadth of this land. There be few, indeed, who would imperil their own safety rather than yield up one who is after all little more than a stranger. Heaven send that he repent not this deed! May God be with him in all his ways!"

"My mother," said Edred cautiously, "is it that Brother Emmanuel is in sore peril? He is so devout and faithful a son of the Church that it is hard to credit it."

"In sooth, my son, these be matters hard to be understood; but thy father truly holds that he were safer out of this country and out of reach of the Prior of Chadwater and the Lord of Mortimer. Men's words can be turned and twisted till the best may be accused of heresy; and again, if a monk has fallen beneath the wrath of his superior, no man may tell what would befall were he to return to the power of his spiritual father. Sure those holy men who founded the orders of godly recluses little dreamed what those places might become in time, and with the ever-increasing love of ease and wealth which seems implanted in the heart of man.

"Heaven pardon me if I speak or think amiss! but it is strange to hear and see what passes in the world. But one must use all caution even in thought, and I would not have thee speak aught of this save in a whisper in thy brother's ear, that he too may use all caution and discretion till we can find occasion to send Brother Emmanuel forth in safety.

"We have a week before us ere he will be summoned hence. Strive that none shall suspect aught of difference or coming change. Keep well the hours of study. Give none occasion for remark. For all we know, a spy may be in our midst; and at least any servant of ours might well be questioned by any of the monks of Chadwater, to whom he might go to confess, as to what was passing in the house,

and see no hurt in answering questions. Wherefore be very wise and discreet, and give none occasion for remark.

"Thou dost understand me, my son? I may trust thee? Remember that thine own father's welfare may be imperilled by the veriest trifle should men suspect him of striving to outwit the prior."

Edred's eyes expressed a great comprehension and sympathy. He took his mother's hand and kissed it, slightly bending the knee.

"Thou mayest trust me, sweet mother," he answered. "Methinks I know well all thou wouldst say. I will be cautious, and I will teach caution to Julian. No harm shall come to any beneath this roof from word or deed of ours."

And then the lady went to her delayed household duties, whilst Edred went in search of his brother, to take him to the room where their studies were usually prosecuted, that the household wheels might revolve after the accustomed manner.

But Julian was nowhere to be seen. Edred sought him and called him lustily, till at length the old seneschal at the gate heard him, and informed him that his brother had gone a short distance on foot with the travellers, but that he would doubtless be back ere long.

Julian was light and fleet of foot as a deer, and often ran for many miles beside his father's charger, the nature of the wooded country round Chad giving him many advantages. Edred wandered forth a little way to meet him on his return, and was presently aware of a cowed figure standing close against a great beech tree, and so motionless and rigid was the attitude that the boy had to look somewhat closely to be certain that it was not a part of the tree trunk itself.

He paused and examined the figure with an intense curiosity not unmixed with suspicion. His own light footfall did not appear to have been heard, and the motionless figure, partly concealed behind the tree, remained in the same rigid attitude, as though intently watching some approaching object.

For a moment a superstitious thrill ran through the boy's frame. He had heard stories of ghostly visitants to these woods, some of which wore the garb of the monks of the neighbouring priory; but he had never seen any such apparition, and would not have thought of it now had it not been for the peculiar and unnatural quietude of this figure. As it was, he paused, gazing intently at it, wondering if indeed it were a being of flesh and blood.

He was just summoning up courage to go forward and salute it, when it moved forward in a gliding and cautious fashion. Edred felt ashamed of his momentary thrill of fear, for he recognized at once the awkward gait and rolling step of Brother Fabian, and knew that his preceptor's bitterest foe was lingering in the precincts of his home.

Resolved not to be seen himself, the boy sprang up a neighbouring tree as lightly as a squirrel, and from that vantage ground he saw that his brother Julian was approaching, and that the monk had stepped out to greet the lad. He heard the sound of the nasal tones, so different from the refined accents of Brother Emmanuel.

"Peace be with thee, my son."

Julian stopped short, and slightly bent the knee. He looked up into Brother Fabian's face with a look which Edred well knew, and which implied no love for his interlocutor. A stranger, however, would be probably pleased at the frank directness of the gaze, not noting the underlying hardihood and defiance.

"Alone, my son?" questioned the brother. "Methought I saw thee not long since with thy father and brother and the servants. How comes it thou art now alone?"

"I saw thee not," answered Julian, without attempting to reply to the question.

"Belike no. I was telling my beads out here in the forest. Thou didst pass me by all unknowing; but I was nigh thy path the while nevertheless. Whither--"

"That is something strange," remarked the boy, affecting not to hear the commencement of another question; "for I could be sworn that not a squirrel or field mouse crosses my path but that I mark him down. But I may not linger thus; the hour of our studies is already here. I wish you good e'en; I must away home."

The boy would have been gone with a bound the next instant had not the monk laid a detaining hand upon his arm. Edred saw by the reluctance of his brother's mien that he resented being thus stayed.

"One moment, good my son," said Brother Fabian. "Tell me whither thy father and brother have gone. It is something too late in the day for a hunting party; yet I knew not that the good knight purposed any journey."

Edred saw the sudden flash that came into Julian's eyes. He was in an agony lest the boy should betray his father's destination, which to the astute mind of the monk might betray much more than his brother himself knew; but as he heard Julian's words he drew his breath more freely.

"Marry, hast thou not heard that my Lord of Beaumaris and Rochefort goes a-hunting tomorrow with great muster? My father has gone to join the goodly company assembling there. Wilt thou not go thither too, Master Monk, and join the revelry that will make the hall ring tonight? I trow there is welcome for all who come. I would my father had taken me."

"Go to, saucy boy, go to!" replied the brother, half piqued, half amused by the lad's boldness in thus implying that his place was at a riotous revel such as generally took place when some great baron invited his friends for a day's sport in the forest.

It was like enough that this hunting party had been arranged for the morrow, and this road certainly led to Beaumaris and Rochefort. The reply seemed to satisfy the monk, and he relaxed his grasp of the boy's arm.

"I must not keep thee from thy studies longer," he said. "Say, what does Brother Emmanuel teach you?"

"The Latin tongue and the use of the pen. Edred is a fine scribe already. And he hath taught us our letters in Greek likewise; for men are saying, he tells us, that it is shame that that language has been neglected so long, since the Holy Scriptures were written in it first."

"And he doubtless teaches you from the Holy Scriptures--"

"Ay; and from the writings of the fathers, and the mass book," added the boy. "We can all read Latin right well now. But I must be going, an it please thee--"

"Yea, verily thou wilt make a fine scholar one of these days. I am glad thou hast so good an instructor. And that reminds me--I would have speech with Brother Emmanuel some day soon. I have a missal that I think he would greatly like sight of. I misdoubt me if the prior would like it carried forth from the library; but if he would meet me one day here in the forest, I will strive to secrete it and let him have sight of it. It hath wonderful pictures and lettering such as he loves. Wilt tell him of it, boy, and ask if he will have sight of it?"

"I will tell him," answered Julian. "But I trow he will have naught to do with it an it has been filched away from the library without the reverend prior's permission. Brother Emmanuel teaches us more of the doctrine of obedience than of any other. I trow he will not budge an inch!"

A scowling look passed over the features of the monk, which had hitherto been smiling and bland. He took Julian by the arm again, and said in a low voice:

"I have something of import to speak to Brother Emmanuel. He will do well to heed me, and to hear what I have to say. Bid him be at this spot two days hence just as the sun goes down. Tell him if he come not he may live to repent it bitterly."

"Wilt thou not come back with me?" asked the boy, with a quick, distrustful look into the bloated face beneath the cowl. "Thou canst speak at ease with him at home. It were better than out here in the forest. I will lead thee to him straight, and thou canst say all that is in thine heart."

But the monk dropped his arm and turned quickly away; his voice bespoke ill-concealed irritation.

"I may not linger longer here. The vesper bell will be ringing by now. Give Brother Emmanuel my message. I would see him here in the forest. And now farewell, boy; go home as fast as thou wilt, and put a bridle on thy forward tongue, lest haply it lead thee one day into trouble."

The monk strode away in the direction of the priory. Julian took the path towards Chad, with many backward glances at the retreating figure, and hardly was it lost in the thick underwood of the forest than he found his brother standing at his side.

"Thou here, Edred? Whence camest thou?"

Edred pointed to his leafy hiding place, and laid a finger on his lips in token of caution. Julian pursued his way awhile in silence, and only when they had increased the distance betwixt themselves and the monk by many hundred yards, the elder brother said, in low tones and very cautiously:

"Have a care, Julian; methinks he is not going home. He is here as a spy, I do not doubt. I saw him watching and spying like a veritable messenger sent for such a purpose.

"O Julian, I was right glad at the answer thou gavest him about our father. I trembled lest thou shouldst say he was bound for the coast."

Both brothers had been too well trained in the creed which allows and encourages the practice of speaking falsehood and even doing evil in a good cause, to feel that any kind of shame attached to a falsehood spoken to conceal from a crafty enemy a thing it would be perilous to others for him to know. And indeed diplomatic falsehood has never been eradicated from the world even since purer light has shone in upon it. It is very hard to meet craft, falsehood, and treachery by absolute frankness and truthful honesty. In the long run it does sometimes prove to be the strongest weapon a man can wield; but the temptation to meet craft by craft, deceit by deceit, is strong in human nature, and until a much later date was openly advocated as the only policy sane men could adopt when they dealt with foes always eager to outwit them. And certainly these lads would have felt themselves justified in going to far greater lengths to save their father from suspicion, or their preceptor and friend from peril.

"Then thou heardest all? I scarce know why I spoke as I did, for our father has always been the friend of the brethren of Chadwater. But the look in the man's eye made me cautious, and I minded a few parting words spoken by Bertram. Tell me, Edred, what it is that is stirring; I would know more."

"Verily it is that Brother Emmanuel stands in some peril from those of his own community. He has written something they dislike, and they mean to have him back to answer for it. Both he and our father think that if once he enters Chadwater again he will never come forth alive. Wherefore our father will not give him up to his enemies, but will contrive for him to escape. That is what he

has gone to the coast for today; and when he knows that a vessel is ready and about to sail, Brother Emmanuel must be spirited away in the dead of the night; and when the prior comes to search for him--as doubtless he will do when we can find him not--it will puzzle him to lay hands upon him, for he will be away on the high seas."

"Good!" cried Julian, delighted. "Edred, I mislike those cruel, crafty monks. Methinks they are little like the saintly men of old who fled to the cloister to rid themselves of the trammels of the world. I--"

But Edred laid a hand upon his brother's arm and checked him suddenly, pointing to another stationary figure a short distance away amongst the trees--a figure wearing the dress of a lay brother of the priory, and engaged in keeping a close and careful watch upon the main entrance to the house.

"Hist!" whispered Edred; "we must not let him hear such words. Julian, mark my word, this house is watched. The prior has set his spies upon it. He fears lest Brother Emmanuel shall escape; or else the watch is set so that any going forth of his may be known, and he will be set upon and swiftly bound, and carried away to the priory, whence, I fear me, no man will ever see him re-issue."

Both the boys had stopped short, and now they looked into each other's faces with dismay.

Their light footfalls had not been heard, nor even the sound of their voices; for a strong breeze had sprung up, and was rustling the leaves overhead, and several birds were singing lustily. The brothers had time to take in the situation without being seen themselves, and they then drew hack into a leafy covert and spoke in whispers.

"Edred, do thou go back to the house instantly and openly, and warn Brother Emmanuel that he go not forth. Belike he might come out in search of us, since the hour is long past when we should have been with him. That must not be. Go and tell him all we have seen; whilst I will creep like a wildcat round the house, and see if there be other spies keeping watch like those we have seen."

"Ay, do so," replied Edred earnestly. "I fear me we shall find that every door is watched. But if thou art seen, go forward boldly. Let none guess that you suspect aught. Doubtless each watcher is well primed with some excellent reason for being found there. Speak them friendly, and do not show distrust."

"I will be as wise as a serpent," answered the boy, with one of his keen looks which bespoke him older in mind than in years.

Edred felt that his junior was better fitted to cope with a spy than he himself; and gladly taking the other office upon himself, he walked gaily forward, whistling a roundelay as he moved, and affecting not to see the dark figure by the oak, which pressed closer and closer out of sight as the lad strode by.

"Verily he means to remain unseen," thought Edred to himself. "If he had not been a spy he would have greeted me as I passed. He is after no good. Thank Heaven we have seen and heard what we have! We can so manage now that Brother Emmanuel set not foot beyond the courtyard for long enough to come--not till he may sally forth to make his way to the coast."

And then a sudden fear smote the boy that per chance this night journey to the coast might not be so easy to accomplish as had been hoped. If the cunning prior had set a watch upon Chad with the very object of preventing the escape of his intended victim, might it not well be that his father's forethought would be of no avail?

But it would not do to lose heart--time might show a way of escape; and Edred hurried within, and found Brother Emmanuel awaiting his tardy pupils, the great Bible open before him, the sunset light illuminating his face till, to the boy's

ardent imagination, it seemed to be encircled by a nimbus.

His story was soon excitedly told, and as Brother Emmanuel heard of Sir Oliver's sudden journey, a look almost as of pain crossed his face.

"I have told thy father that I cannot and will not suffer harm to befall him and his through his kindness to me. Boy, boy, these be evil days in which to offend the powers that be; and it were better, far better, I should give myself up to death than that hurt should fall upon those I love and those who have befriended me with such generosity and love."

But Edred passionately disclaimed and explained.

"Brother, holy father, speak not so! thou wilt break our hearts! We love thee! thou knowest that we love thee! And we think, we are assured, that we can yet save thee, and ourselves too. Do not break our hearts by giving thyself up ere we have tried our utmost. It may be--nay, I am assured of it--that our blessed Saviour has a great work for thee to do for Him somewhere. Has He not Himself charged His servants if they be persecuted in one city to flee to another? He has not bid them give themselves up to their foes, to be hindered from doing the work He has put it into their hearts to do.

"Pardon my forwardness if I seem to teach my preceptor. I do but repeat words thou hast taught me. Stay with us--stay at Chad. There be ways and means both for hiding and for flight of which few know or dream. Let us have this alms to do for our Lord, that we hide and save one of His servants. Thou canst little know what grief and sorrow thou wouldst cause to us, or thou couldst not talk of giving thyself up."

The boy's earnestness was so deep that it could not but produce an impression. Although full of heroic courage and capabilities of self sacrifice, it was against human nature that Brother Emmanuel should desire to cast away his life, and that not by raising a protest for any point of conscience, but simply to be quietly put out of the way, that he might no longer expose the luxury and vice prevailing in the monastic retreat of which he was a member.

He had seen a row of underground niches, some of which had been walled up; and tradition asserted that living monks had been thus buried alive for being untrue to their vows. He quite believed the prior capable of accusing him of the same sin and ordering him to a like fate. In the eyes of the haughty ecclesiastic such a betrayal of cloister secrets would be looked upon as treachery to his vows, whilst in reality it was his very love for his vows, and his horror at their violation, which had inspired the pen that had poured forth burning words of denunciation and scorn. To die openly for the cause would have been one thing--a martyr has oftentimes spoken more eloquently by his death than by his life--but to be thus buried in a living grave would benefit none; and who would not shrink from such a fate?

The pause which succeeded Edred's impassioned appeal was broken by the entrance of Julian, flushed and heated.

"It is as we thought. The house is watched. There be six or seven spies posted around it--most of them lay brothers, but some monks themselves. Every entrance is watched closely. None can go in or out unmarked by one or another. Doubtless they have some signal which may at any time bring all of them together to one spot.

"Brother Emmanuel, thou must not adventure thyself beyond the courtyard till this watch ceases. Were they spies of my Lord of Mortimer's, we might go forth and drive them hence. But none may lay a finger on a monk. They are all ready with a story that they are on the watch for some heretic in hiding in the woods. I spoke to one to see what he would say, and he began about the hunchback of the fair, whom they have not caught yet, and professed to be watching for him.

Doubtless they would all say the same did any question them; but they strive to keep out of sight as far as may be, and some have found hollow trees where they might pass days and nights and none be the wiser."

There could be no study for the boys that day; they were too deeply moved and excited. Moreover, Edred had his father's charge to keep, and as sundown was nigh at hand, the two brothers visited every gate and portal and saw the house made fast within and without.

An air of excitement and mystery seemed to permeate the place. The servants had caught some of the infection, and whispers of loyalty and affection were murmured many times in the boys' ears as they pursued their round. At last, all being safely ordered, they went by common consent to their own room, and stood looking at the secret door which led to the hiding place none knew of but themselves and Warbel.

"I trow we shall need it now," said Edred. "But all is in readiness for the fugitive; all has been done save to bring in the victuals. Brother, shall we do that this very night? I would there were a supply there for a month, and a couple of gallon jars of good mead and some bottles of wine. We must put water there, too, but not till the last minute. They say men must have water, else they die; but sure they could live for long on good mead and ale. Hath Bertram any plan for getting water to the chamber save what we can carry ourselves? He said he would not rest till we had done somewhat; but--"

A light sparkled in Julian's eyes.

"Come, and thou shalt see, thou brother of books," he said. "Whilst thou hast been doing thy penance for what sin we know not, and been reading amain with Brother Emmanuel, we have not been idle. Come, and I will show thee what we have contrived. I trow none need perish of thirst in the secret chamber now who knows aught of our contrivance."

With eager steps Julian led the way, and Edred no less eagerly followed. It was very dark in the secret chamber; but the means of kindling a light were now there, and soon a small dim lantern was lighted.

"Come hither," said Julian, taking the light and leading the way into a corner that lay beneath the leads of the house; and when there Edred saw a metal trough or receiver, rudely made but effectual for the purpose of holding any liquid, something similar to what the animals in the yard were fed and watered from. Above this trough was a piece of iron pipe with a bung at the end.

"That trough and pipe Bertram and I fashioned in the blacksmith's forge with our own hands," said the boy proudly, "and I trow both are good enow and strong. Dost know what does the other end of the pipe? Why, we have inserted it into the great rainwater tank yonder above our heads, which our grandsire contrived, and which is fed from the roofs and battlements of all the towers. Thou hast heard our father tell how he read of such things in days of old, when men built wondrous palaces, and had hanging gardens, and I know not what beside. He set the tank up there, and, as thou knowest, it is not now greatly used, albeit there is always water there, and at times men draw it forth. It may not be the best or purest, but it will serve for washing, and for drinking too were a man in a great strait. It is all pure and sweet now; for in the thunderstorm three nights since Bertram got up and let off all the stagnant water by the pipe which can be opened below, and the rain soon filled it again, it poured down with such goodwill. We need not fear that any captive will die of thirst. He has but to draw this bung and water will pour forth into this trough till he stops it again. He can pour away the surplus down the pipe with the dust and such like.

"I trow whoever lives up here awhile will have no such bad housing. And if we but get the place victualled this night, it will be ready for Brother Emmanuel whensoever he may need it."

Chapter VII: An Imposing Spectacle.

"To appear at the priory with all our household! Surely, my husband, that command is something strange?"

Lady Chadgrove raised her eyes anxiously to her lord's face, to see thereon an answering look of perplexity not untinged by anxiety. He was perusing a paper held in his hands.

"Such is the missive," he remarked. "It was brought by a lay brother but now. Methinks the fellow is yet in the kitchen. Our mead is not to be lightly disdained. I will send young Julian to talk with him, and learn if may be the cause of this strange summons. I would not willingly give cause of offence to the lord prior; and the money has been paid that was promised, so methinks he means no hurt to me or mine. But it is not safe to adventure oneself into the lion's mouth. I would gladly know what is behind all this. I am something ill at ease."

"All the household would mean Brother Emmanuel likewise," said the lady. "Perchance it is but a means of drawing him within the toils."

"It is like enough. It will be the day on which the week of grace expires. Would to God I could see my way more clearly! I am in a great strait betwixt mine own conscience and the authority of the Church. How can I deliver up a faithful and devoted son of the Church to certain death, when my house is his only refuge and protection? Yet how may I refuse obedience to my spiritual fathers and superiors, to whom I owe submission in all things, in right of their office, albeit as men I know them to be--faulty?"

He paused, as if reluctant to put his thoughts into words even to his wife. He was going through that mental and spiritual struggle which was speedily to do so great a work in the world--that struggle which led to the final fall of the religious houses in this land. Viewed as a God-appointed ordinance, or at least as a bulwark and rampart of the Church, it seemed a fearful thing to hold them in aught but awe and reverence, and to look upon their sons as saints and godly men, in whom the Spirit of the Lord was working. But when the corrupt practices within those walls were known, when men were convinced, sorely against their will, that the inmates were licentious, depraved, covetous, and tyrannical, then indeed it became hard to recognize their God-appointed mission.

Sir Oliver was no heretic; he had not even the faint sympathy with and comprehension of the tenets of the heretics which were creeping into some enlightened minds. He had imbibed some new and enlightened views from stanch sons of the Church, who were themselves preaching the doctrine of internal reform, but he went no further in these matters than his teachers. The very name of heresy was odious to him, but none the less did it go sorely against the grain to be a slave to the haughty Prior of Chadwater, and at his bidding to violate (as it seemed to him) the sacred laws of hospitality.

Whilst Julian was gone upon his errand, he paced the floor restlessly and moodily.

"I would we had got him off before this coil began. But who could have thought it would come--and Brother Emmanuel so true and faithful a son of the Church? Knowest thou, wife, that he keeps vigil three nights in the week in the chantry, watching sleeplessly, lest the Lord coming suddenly should find the whole house sleeping? Edred keeps watch one night, and good old Margaret another. I did but lately know this thing. Brother Emmanuel holds that the Church should ever be watching and waiting for her Lord, lest He come as a thief in the night. He would have prayers ceaselessly ascending before Him. It is his grief and pain that within the cloister walls, whence he has come, no true vigil is kept, but that sloth and ease have taken the place of watching and vigil and prayer. And such a man as that they would have me deliver to his death!"

"Art sure they mean him ill, my husband? It seems scarce possible."

"I am very sure that it is so," answered the knight, with a stern glance bent upon the sunny landscape beyond the open window. "It is strange, but it is true; and I sometimes think that some fearful and unlooked-for judgment must some day fall upon men who--"

But Sir Oliver paused, for his wife had made a gesture, as if to check the impetuous words that sprang to his lips. He smiled a little darkly.

"Thou art right, good dame. Such words are better left unspoke. If it be dangerous to think some things, it be more dangerous to speak one's thoughts. Let it be enough for us that the Lord reigneth, be the earth never so unquiet. He sitteth a judge and a king. In His hands are the final issues of all things."

The lady bent her head with due reverence, and then asked eagerly:

"And when does the fishing smack sail?"

Sir Oliver shook his head impatiently.

"Not for full fourteen days: it had but just come into port, and there be much merchandise to unlade and lade again. The skipper was an honest fellow, and a true-hearted man to boot. He would not take my gold, but said his passenger should bring it with him when he came; for he knew there was a chance he might not contrive to come, and he would not receive aught for services he might never have power to render. But he knows his business, and once safe on board the sloop our fugitive will be safe enow. But not till it be almost ready for sea--not till the skipper could weigh anchor at a moment's notice. He himself said he must not come aboard till the last moment. Were any hue and cry to be made after him, any vessel in port would be certain to be searched. How to keep him safe for these fourteen--nay, it is but twelve days now--is the thing that is perplexing me. Until the close of the appointed week naught will be done; but there will be one long week after that which will tax our resources to the utmost. And this summons from the prior makes the whole question the more difficult."

"And the boys say that the house is being watched. Hast not heard as much? There be spies from the priory posted round and about. All the gates are watched. Edred thinks it is to strive to seize Brother Emmanuel should he venture forth from the shelter of the walls.

"I like not the thought of all those prying eyes. My husband, these be strange times in which we dwell."

Sir Oliver's face was dark and thoughtful.

"Ay, verily they be. How can men wonder that the ignorant and unlearned turn with loathing and scorn from such crooked and cowardly ways?--"

"How now, Julian? Hast learned the cause of this ado? What says the lay brother? Hast thou sounded him with care and with all due caution?"

Julian and Edred came in together. Julian looked flushed and excited, Edred pale and thoughtful, and his eyes were glowing with a strange fire.

"Ay, verily, we have found it all out," cried the younger boy, with eager excitement of manner. "Methinks it will be a fine sight. Father, hast heard of the thing which men call the 'Great Abjuration'--was not that the name, Edred?"

The elder boy made a sign of assent.

"It is for the heretics and Lollards," pursued Julian eagerly. "It hath been done before in many places, and here it is to be done two days from hence. All those persons who are suspected of heresy, or have been found guilty, are to be called before the lord prior and the Lord of Mortimer, and they will be bidden to abjure

all their false doctrines publicly. The whole village will be assembled to hear them recant; high and low, rich and poor, all are to meet together in the great quadrangle of the priory to hear and see. The lay brother says it will be a fine sight. If they will not recant, the prior will give them over to the Lord of Mortimer, who will see that they suffer as heretics are wont to do. If they abjure their errors, the prior will set them their penances; and these be no light thing, by what the brother says. Some will be branded in the cheek, that they carry the mark of their shame all their days; some will have a green badge affixed to their arm, to wear until they have leave to cast it off, that all men may know they have been touched by the pollution; whilst others will be set to menial toil in the monasteries, and will perchance spend the rest of their lives there, sundered from their friends and their homes and all those whom they love.

"In truth, I marvel how any man can meddle with heresy in these days. The bishops have resolved to stamp it out once and for all, and methinks they will do so right well if they take such steps as these."

Sir Oliver's face looked a little relieved as he heard his son's words.

"Then everybody within the district is to be summoned to meet at the priory upon this same day?"

"Ay, verily; all are to be there, from the highest to the lowest. The lay brothers are going round the country, bidding all to the spectacle. It is thought that after all have seen what will take place upon that day, there will be no longer any fear of heresy round Chad and Mortimer."

The boy ran off to try to learn more details. Edred stood looking at his father with troubled eyes.

"Father," he said, in a low voice, "must Brother Emmanuel go with us that day?"

Sir Oliver looked down at the paper in his hands.

"It bids me to attend with my family and all my household, save such as must be left to take due care of the house in my absence," said he. Then he paused awhile in silent thought, and looking up he said suddenly, "Go fetch Brother Emmanuel hither."

Edred vanished silently and swiftly, and soon afterwards returned with the monk at his side.

The past few days had left their mark on the thin, spiritual face of the young ecclesiastic. The knowledge of the peril in which he stood had not daunted his courage, though it had drawn lines in his face and deepened the fire which burned within those dark, resolute eyes. His face looked as though he had slept but little, as though his nights had been passed in watching and prayer, as was indeed the case. He had an air of calm, resolute courage and hopefulness, though it was plain that he knew the danger of his position, and was fully alive to the peril which menaced him.

Sir Oliver placed the paper in his hand, and watched him silently whilst he perused it. When he had finished he handed it back, and stood for a moment looking out of the window with an expression of thoughtful concentration on his face. At the end of a few moments he looked up quickly, and said:

"You and yours will attend, Sir Oliver?"

"Yes; we must needs do that. But you?"

Brother Emmanuel lifted his head and threw it back with a gesture of resolution and independence.

"Sir Oliver," he said, "upon the day when your household is bidden to the priory, I cease, by the command of my superior, to be a member of this household. Upon that day your command over me (if I may use the word)--your responsibility over me--ceases. Whatever I may do or not do is no concern of yours. I am no longer the instructor of your sons, nor the priest within your walls. What I do I do of mine own self. None can rightly call you to task for it. Let that be your safeguard; let that be your answer to all questions. The prior has ordained that from that day I cease to remain here. From the dawning of that day you have no part nor lot in my life. I take its control into mine own hands, and it were better you should not even know whither I go nor what I do."

Sir Oliver bent a searching look upon him.

"So be it," he answered, after a moment's thought. "But this one word I say to thee: Thou hast been true and faithful to me and mine; wherefore my roof and my walls shall be thy shelter until thou goest forth of thine own freewill. Be not afraid to remain here with me. I will defend thee with every power I have until such time as thou mayest safely escape beyond the seas."

He held out his hand. The monk took it and pressed it between both of his.

"The Lord deal with thee and thine as thou hast dealt with me," was the reply, spoken in deep, earnest accents.

The knight bent his head in response to the benediction; and Brother Emmanuel moved silently away, closely followed by Edred, who looked pale and troubled.

"Thou dost not think he will present himself at the priory with the rest of the world?" asked Lady Chadgrove, with anxiety in face and voice; and her husband thoughtfully shook his head as he made reply:

"I trow not. I have spoken to him of that before, and he was very well resolved to fly the country and strive to finish the work he has begun, to join the band who are toiling might and main to bring a purer and holier spirit within the pale of the Church and her servants. It is a work to which he has long felt called, and he believes that it will be faithfully carried out somewhere, if not here. For a while he will be safer beyond the seas; but he may return and join with those in Oxford and London who are toiling in the same cause. He knows of the sloop--where it lies and when it sails; and I trow he is laying plans of his own. It were better not to ask of these. I would rather walk in ignorance. A man cannot betray, however inadvertently, what he knows not, and the subtle skill in questioning possessed by our reverend prior might win the secret from any unskilled person ere he knew he had revealed it. I know not what he means to do, nor shall I seek to know. But he has courage, spirit, and a consciousness of integrity which may carry him through much. Methinks he has judged wisely and well both for us and himself.

"When this day comes," touching the paper in his hand, "it is very true that I am no longer accountable for him as a member of my house hold. He has received his recall from his superior. It is for him to answer to it or not as he thinks best."

A sense of excitement and uneasiness pervaded the whole of the house during the two following days. In all men's mouths was talk of this solemn abjuration which was about to be forced upon all those suspected of heresy; and many persons who had tampered slightly and privately with doubtful matters went about looking uneasy and troubled, fearful lest they might find themselves accused of illicit practices, and be summoned forth to do penance in a more or less severe form before they could hope to receive absolution.

Sir Oliver Chadgrove's household was strictly orthodox in all outward matters; but the leaven of Lollardism was wonderfully penetrating, and he himself had suspected and feared that some of his servants might be tainted therewith. He awaited the day with almost as much anxiety as any of his dependants, for he well

knew that the Lord of Mortimer would lose no opportunity of dealing him a heavy blow; and if he could be proved guilty of harbouring heretics or even suspected persons in his house, it would give his enemy a handle against him that he would not be slow to use.

As for the boys, it was plain that something of unwonted excitement was agitating their minds; but in the general anxiety pervading the whole household little account was taken of this.

The day came at last, dawning fair and clear. Sir Oliver assembled his household early in the courtyard, and every retainer was clad in his best and mounted upon his best charger. It was well to make a goodly display of strength and wealth on an occasion like the present. Doubtless the Lord of Mortimer would be there with all his train, and Chad must not cut a much poorer figure in the eyes of the beholders.

None knew better than Sir Oliver how far a goodly seeming went in condoning offences and allaying suspicion, especially in the eyes of such a worldly-wise man as the Prior of Chadwater. A proud bearing, a goodly following, a gorgeous retinue, would be a far better proof of orthodoxy in his eyes than any saintliness of life and conduct. Mortimer would know that right well, though, as he had been elected as the secular agent to assist the prior in his work today, plainly no stigma of any kind was thought to rest upon his household. Sir Oliver knew that Mortimer was a larger property than Chad, and that the baron was a greater man than the knight. It was reasonable enough that he had been selected for this office, and such choice need imply no distrust of himself on the prior's part; but still there was an uneasy, underlying consciousness that he was suspected and watched, and the espionage which had been kept up all this while on his house was a plain proof that he was not entirely trusted.

The priory and its adjacent buildings formed a very fine specimen of medieval architecture. The abbey was in itself a masterpiece of beauty, and the great block formed by refectories and dormitories stood at right angles to it. The prior's house, with its ample accommodation and its guest chambers, formed an other side to the great quadrangle; whilst the granaries, storehouses, and such-like buildings formed the fourth--the whole enclosing a very large space, which formed the exercising ground of the monks when they were kept by their rules within the precincts of their home.

The smoothest of green grass, carefully kept and tended, formed the carpet of this enclosure; and today the whole quadrangle formed an animated and picturesque spectacle on account of the shifting, many-coloured groups of people gathered together there with looks of expectation and wonder.

A holiday appearance was presented by the crowd; for however ill at ease any person might feel, it was his aim and object to look as jovial and well assured as possible. Every knee was bent whenever any monk appeared. The professions of reverence and orthodoxy were almost comic in their display.

The whole of the rural population had gathered in this open space when the master of Chad and his retainers rode in, followed by the humbler servants and many women and children on foot. But the Lord of Mortimer had not yet put in an appearance, though some of his retainers and men-at-arms might be seen mingling with the crowd; and Sir Oliver and his wife and sons looked curiously about them as they reined back their horses against the wall, wondering whether they should dismount altogether, and what the order of the day's proceedings was to be.

There were two great raised platforms at one end of the open enclosure, and upon these platforms, both of which were draped with cloth, many seats had been arranged. One of these was canopied, and was plainly for the prior; but beyond this Sir Oliver could be sure of nothing.

When, however, it became known that the party from Chad had arrived, a lay brother came out and bid them dismount and send away their steeds to the meadow beyond, where one or two of the servants could see to them; and as soon as this had been done, Sir Oliver was told that he and his lady would occupy certain seats upon one of the platforms, but that there would not be room for more than his eldest son to have a place there beside him. The younger boys must remain in the crowd.

Edred and Julian were well pleased at this, and gave each other a quick pressure of the hand. Edred was intensely excited; and gradually edged his way to a good position not far from the platform, that he might hear and see everything; and Julian stood beside him, as intent upon the proceedings as anyone.

With a great show of ecclesiastical pomp, forth came the prior with his monks in attendance, and closely following them the haughty Lord of Mortimer; with his son-in-law, Sir Edward Chadwell, by his side, and his daughter following her husband. With these came many knights and persons of standing in the county; and whilst the prior and the monks grouped themselves upon one platform, the barons, knights, and nobles took their appointed places on the other, the owners of Mortimer and Chad being for once in their lives elbow to elbow, and constrained to exchange words and looks of greeting.

A deep hush fell upon the crowd, and the people surged back against the walls, leaving the centre space vacant. At the same time certain men wearing the garb and the air of jailers or executioners came forth and stood in the midst of the open space--one of them bearing the glowing brazier and the branding iron, which he placed on a slab of stone in the very centre of the enclosure.

When all preparations were complete, the prior arose, and in a loud and solemn voice commanded that the prisoners should be brought forth--those persons who had not been merely suspected of heresy, but had been found with heretical books in their possession, or were known to be in the habit of meeting together to read such books and hear the pestilent doctrines which vile and wicked persons were propagating in the land.

At that command a number of monks appeared, leading bound, and in scant and miserable clothing, about a score of men and women, foremost amongst whom was the hunchback, whose face and voice were alike well known to Edred. Most of the prisoners were trembling and cowering; but he held his head erect, and looked calmly round upon the assembled potentates. There was no fear or shrinking in his pinched face. He eyed the prior with a look as unbending as his own.

Then began a long harangue from the great man, in which the wiles of the devil in the pestilent doctrines of the heretics, so-called Lollards, were forcibly and not illogically pointed out. When no man might give answer, when none might show where misrepresentation came in, where there was nothing given but the one side of the question, it was not difficult to make an excellent case against the accused. The early heretics, mostly unlettered people, always marred the purity of the cause by falling into exaggeration and foolishness, by denouncing what was good as well as what was corrupt in a system against which they were revolting--thus laying themselves open to attack and confutation, and alienating from them many who would have striven to stand their friend and to have gently set them right had they been less headstrong and less prone to tear away and condemn every practice the meaning of which they were, through ignorance and want of comprehension, unable to enter into.

In the hands of the skilful prior their doctrines were indeed made to look vile and blasphemous and foolish in the extreme. Many persons shuddered at hearing what words had been used by them with regard to the holy sacraments; and most of the persons brought to their trial were weeping and terrified at their own conduct before the prior's speech was half through. Only the hunchback retained his bold front, and looked back with scorn into the face of the prelate as he made

point after point in his scathing denunciation.

When the harangue ended, the prior made a sign to his servants, and immediately one of the most timorous and craven of the prisoners was brought up before him. He was far too cunning a judge to try first to bend the spirit of the hunchback. He knew that with that man he could do nothing, and he knew too what marvels were sometimes accomplished by the example of self devotion. So commencing with a weak and trembling woman, who was ready to sink into the ground with fear and shame merely at being thus had up before the eyes of the whole place, he easily obtained a solemn recantation and abjuration of every form of heresy; and in a tone of wonderful mildness, though of solemn warning, too, told her that since she was a woman and young, and had doubtless been led away by others, she should be pardoned after she had paid a visit barefoot to a shrine forty miles off--a shrine much derided by the heretic teachers--and had returned in like fashion, having tasted nothing but bread and water the whole time of the journey.

Then came, one after another, the weakest and most timorous of the craven crowd. The infection of fear had seized upon them. Ignorant, superstitious, scarcely understanding the new teachings that had attracted them, and fearfully terrified of falling under the ban of the Church under whose shelter they had always lived, was it wonderful that one after another should abjure their heretical opinions, and swear to listen to the enticer no more? Some strove to ask questions upon the points which troubled them; but scarce any sort of disputing was allowed. The prior was subtle in fence, and by a few scathing words could generally quell the questioner and make him wish his objection unspoken.

And those who showed a tendency towards disputation were far more harshly dealt with than those who abjured at once. The red-hot iron, the badge of shame, the servitude which might be lifelong were imposed upon them. So a sense of despair fell upon the little band, and they yielded one by one; only three refusing to take the words of the oath--the hunchback and two more, one being a lad of about sixteen summers; and after using every threat and argument to overcome their obstinacy, the prior called upon the Lord of Mortimer as the representative of the secular arm, and delivered the prisoners over to him to be dealt with after the manner of the law.

A shuddering groan went up, as if involuntarily, from many throats as the prisoners were led away by the guards of Mortimer. The prior looked sternly round to check the demonstration, reminding the people that the burning of the body was as nothing, it was the eternal burning of the soul in hell that men should fear; and that if in the midst of the flames the guilty persons recanted their sins, it was just possible that even then the merciful God would hear and receive their prayer, and that they might be saved from the eternal death of the soul.

Then somewhat changing his tone, though still speaking with gravity and even with sadness, he told the people of the pain with which he had heard stories of the sympathy evinced by some even amongst those standing about him for the wicked and pestilent disturbers of the public peace and the safety of the Church. One or two persons he called upon by name, and rebuked with some severity for words reported to have been dropped by them which savoured, if not of heresy itself, yet of carelessness and irreverence for sacred things which bordered dangerously on heresy. One after another these persons came forward trembling, asked pardon, and were dismissed not unkindly, but with many an admonition for the future. It was made plain and patent to all that the bishops had absolutely resolved to stamp out heresy once and for all; and for once the prior and abbots, the monks and the friars, were in accord and working hand in hand. It was useless for any to hope to stem such a tide as that--such was the tenor of the prior's speech--heresy was to be exterminated. On that point there was no manner of doubt; and if, knowing this, persons chose deliberately to put themselves under the ban of the law, well, their blood must be upon their own head. Neither God nor man would have mercy upon them.

Several of the retainers and a few of the actual household of Chad had received admonitions of this sort. Sir Oliver looked on uneasily, catching a subdued look of triumph in the eyes of his rival and foe. He did not believe his household seriously tainted with heresy. He knew that certain of them who had been with him in London had imbibed the teaching of Dean Colet and his pupils, and he did not know, any more than the dean himself, that the Lollards secretly encouraged each other to go and hear a man who spoke so much of the truth they themselves held.

The line where orthodoxy ends and heresy begins has been at all times hard to define, and perhaps the upholders of the "Church" knew as little as anybody how hard this definition was becoming.

Several persons had stood forth (invited by the prior to do so) and confessed to dangerous sentiments which they now saw to be utterly wrong, and vowed to abjure forever; or had accused other persons of words which required explanation, or of deeds which suggested a leaning towards secret meetings where heresy might be discussed.

But the day's proceedings seemed drawing to a close, and nothing of any great peril to the Lord of Chad had occurred, when just at the close of the afternoon Brother Fabian suddenly came forward and whispered a few words in the prior's ear; and he, after a moment of apparent hesitation, spoke aloud.

"It is with great grief that I learn that one of our own brethren has been heard to utter words which sound strangely like those of heresy; but since it is our bounden duty that strict justice be done to all, whether high or low, rich or poor, nay, whether it be our own son or brother, I here call upon Brother Emmanuel to stand forth publicly, as others have done, and answer the charge brought against him."

The prior looked round as he spoke these words in a loud voice; but there was no movement either in the crowd or amongst the cowed monks, and he spoke the name again without eliciting any response.

The Lord of Mortimer leaned forward and spoke to his neighbour.

"Methinks this brother was a member of your household, Sir Oliver," he said, with a gleam of malice in his eye. "Surely you received a mandate bidding you come with all your household. Where is this preceptor of your sons?"

"His duties ceased last night," replied Sir Oliver calmly, in a tone loud enough to reach the prior's ears. "He had command to return today to the priory, and last evening he said farewell to me and mine. I have not seen him today."

"Did he know of the summons to all to attend the gathering here today?"

Sir Oliver bent his head.

"He did. I showed him the paper myself."

"Then wherefore is he not here?"

"That know I not. I did not know he was not here. I do not know it even now. I have never known Brother Emmanuel fail in obedience yet."

The name was being whispered all round. The monks were professing to be searching for the missing brother. The prior looked at Sir Oliver with some sternness.

"Where is this monk?" he asked,

"I do not know," was the firm response. "I have not seen him since his farewell yesternight."

"You thought he was coming hither?"

"I knew naught. He told me naught of his purposes."

The prior's eyes flashed ominously.

"Have a care, Sir Oliver, have a care. Brother Emmanuel is yet within the walls of Chad. I have reason to know he has not left them the whole of this past week. He has been disobedient to his vow of submission. He has not come at my bidding."

"I know naught of it," replied the knight calmly.

The Lord of Mortimer leaned forward once more with an evil smile in his eyes.

"Let not mistaken generosity get the better of prudence, my brother," he said, with derisiveness in his tone. "You know well that the penalty of hiding and harbouring a heretic is little short of that of heresy itself. Have a care you do not lose all just for the caprice of the moment, which in time to come you will have leisure bitterly to repent."

The prior, too, was eying him sternly.

"Lord Mortimer gives good counsel, Sir Oliver," he said. "Thou knowest I am no enemy of thine. What has this day passed must have shown thee that. Thou knowest that there be some here who might have been called before me today to answer for their deeds who have been spared for their youth and gentle birth. Thou hast had proof that I am no enemy of thine. But the walls of Chad must not harbour a heretic. Brother Emmanuel is there; he hath been there, and hath not sallied forth this many days, showing that a guilty conscience keeps him within. He cannot go forth without my knowledge; and if thou wilt not give him up to me, I must obtain authority and have the house searched and the man dragged forth. And I tell thee freely, if it be found that thou hast lent thine aid in harbouring a heretic and disobedient monk, thy lands will be forfeit, if not thy life, and the Lord of Mortimer will be likewise Lord of Chad."

At that moment, had any person had eyes to heed it, it might have been observed that Edred and Julian slipped like veritable shadows through the packed crowd. The next moment they had reached the gateway, had passed under it without exciting any observation, and as soon as they reached the cover of the forest, they set off to run towards Chad as fast as their legs could carry them--far faster than their horses could have borne them through the narrow paths of the tangled wood.

Chapter VIII: Hidden Away.

Fleetly, silently, untiringly ran the two brothers, without exchanging a single word of their purpose even to each other. The distance from the priory to the house was a matter of some two miles, but to the trained and hardy limbs of the country-bred lads a two miles' run was a trifle, and they were only slightly flushed and winded when they paused, by mutual consent, a short distance from Chad, at a point where the tall turrets and battlements became visible over the treetops.

Julian, who was a few paces in advance, pulled up short, and caught his brother by the arm.

"Hist!" he whispered cautiously. "I trow the prior's spies be still on the watch. We must not be seen coming in this guise. Let us wait a few moments till our breath be returned; then we will go forward boldly and openly."

"Edred, have a care how thou answerest me when I shall speak to thee anon. We have a part to play, and Brother Emmanuel's life may hang upon how we play it."

Edred nodded assent. He was more weary, because more deeply excited, than his brother, and no sleep had visited his eyes the previous night. It had been spent with Brother Emmanuel in vigil in the chantry. The strain of watching and deeply-seated anxiety was telling upon the boy. He was glad that Julian had all his wits about him, for his own head seemed swimming and his mind unhinged.

They stood silent awhile, until both had regained their breath; then putting on their caps, which for convenience they had carried in their hands hitherto, they started forth again at a leisurely pace, and with an air of openness and fearlessness, in the direction of the main entrance, talking to each other as they went in no softened tones.

"It was a fine sight!" cried Julian. "I would not have missed it for worlds. That villainous hunchback! So he was a damnable heretic after all! I grieve we ever stood his friend. May he perish like the vile creature he is! I will ask Brother Emmanuel to set me a penance for having touched him that day when we thought him an innocent trader.

"Edred, thinkest thou that it can be true that Brother Emmanuel is himself a heretic? If it be, we must drive him forth with blows and curses. To sit down at board with a heretic, to hear teaching from his lips! Beshrew me, but one might as well have a friend from the pit for an instructor! It cannot be; surely it cannot be."

The boy spoke hotly and angrily. He had stopped short as if in the heat of argument, and Edred saw by the flash in his eye that he had caught sight of some lurking spy close at hand.

"Belike no," answered Edred cautiously, but taking his cue instantly from the other. "I did not well hear what Brother Fabian said; surely it could be naught so bad as that?"

"I scarcely heard myself. I was something aweary by that time of the spectacle, and methought all the heretics had been dealt with. I saw that thou, like myself, wouldst fain stretch thy limbs once again, and I had shifted too far away to be certain what was said. But I did hear the name of Brother Emmanuel spoken, and there was a call for him, and he came not.

"Edred, can it be that he feared to come? Hath he a guilty conscience? If that be so, shall we strive to find him and keep watch upon him ourselves, that if the good prior comes to search for him at Chad we may be able to give him up, though he have hidden himself never so cunningly?"

"Marry, a good thought. It is certainly something strange that he did not come at the prior's summons-and he a brother of the order too. Sure, it looks somewhat as though he were afraid. But if that be so, we shall scarce find him at Chad. He will have benefited by the absence of the household to make good his escape.

"Beshrew me, but he is a crafty knave. Who would have thought it of him?"

"When men turn heretic they seem to be indued with all the cunning of the devil!" cried Julian hotly. "But let us not dally here; let us run within and strive to seek and to find him. It may be he will think he may hide himself the better in some nook or corner of the house, since he be well known all around; and the good prior said somewhat of having kept a watch upon him. But I trow he cannot hide so well but what we shall find him. I would fain earn my forgiveness for having shielded one heretic by helping to give up another.

"Come, Edred, let us be going. Those priests are as crafty as foxes when the heretic leaven gets into them."

The brothers dashed away again towards the house; and when once within the shelter of the walls, Julian nipped his brother's hand, saying in a whisper:

"There was a spy overhead who drank in every word. He had no notion mine eyes had seen him, for he was marvellous well concealed, and I never should have found his hiding place had I not chanced one day to see him climbing into it. Nobody will suspect now that we have had a hand in the hiding of the good brother. But let us make all haste, for no man knows when the bloodhounds may be upon us to strive to take him away."

Edred's face was very pale, but steady and resolved. He understood, better perhaps than his younger brother, the peril of the enterprise upon which they had embarked. But he did not shrink from that one whit, only he did hope and trust that his father would never be implicated by their conduct; for if, after all, the priest were to be found hidden within the precincts of Chad, it was easy to prophesy a great reverse of fortune to all who dwelt therein.

However, even that consideration did not move him at this moment. Brother Emmanuel, their preceptor and friend and comrade (for he had been all three to his pupils during his residence beneath their roof), stood in deadly peril of his life, and to save him from the malice of his foes must be the first consideration now. The existence of the secret chamber was not known even to their father. Not a soul in the house or in the world knew of it save the three brothers and Warbel. Warbel was absolutely to be trusted. He owed too much himself to that retreat to wish to betray its existence to others, and he loathed and hated the whole household of Mortimer; and it was very plain to all concerned that Mortimer was working hand in hand with the prior in this matter--the one to obtain possession of the person of the offending monk, the other to find cause of accusation against the owner of Chad for harbouring and concealing a suspected person, in defiance of the laws of the land and of the Church.

That there was conspiracy afoot against Chad and its master Edred did not for a moment doubt; but the first consideration must now be the safe hiding of Brother Emmanuel, and the boys dashed eagerly through the empty house, to find him in the little chantry, where so many of his hours were spent.

He was reading the office of vespers without any congregation to assist. Instinctive reverence caused the boys to kneel in silence till the brief service concluded, and then, after prostrating themselves before the altar, they beckoned vehemently to the monk to follow them, and conducted him up a narrow winding stair, but little used, to the large sleeping chamber which the three brothers had shared ever since their early childhood.

Once there Julian carefully locked the door, whilst Edred in brief and graphic words told the story of that day's spectacle. Brother Emmanuel listened calmly, with his features set into an expression which the boys were beginning to know well, although they did not read its meaning aright. Sternness and resolve were strangely blended with an infinite compassion and a look of almost divine tenderness; his words were few, and carried little of their meaning home to the hearts of the boys.

"And thus they strive, thus they think to check the growth of the evil weed by fire and by the sword! Yet even nature may teach them that the burned field only yields the richer crop, and that the plough tearing its way along is a fertilizer of the earth. Would to heaven they would send forth evangelists from the Church, not with fire and sword, but with the sword of the Spirit--the Word of God--with the lamp of life in their hands; not to deny the people that life-giving fount, but to give them to drink through the channels God Himself has appointed! Then, indeed, methinks heresy would soon cease to exist. But theirs is not the way; God who dwelleth in the heavens will soon show them that. Theirs is not the way!"

But time there was none now for one of those conversations in which Edred's heart delighted. Julian burst in then with the story of the latest scene in that solemn spectacle--of the whispered words of Brother Fabian; of the call for Brother Emmanuel; of the appeal made to Sir Oliver, and his reply; and finally of the certainty that the house would speedily be searched, and the necessity of

getting into safe hiding before that happened.

"Safe hiding!" said Brother Emmanuel with a slight smile; "my kind pupils, there can be no safe hiding from the messengers sent forth from the Church. Wherever I am they will find and drag me forth. I am grateful for all the goodness shown to me at Chad by all within its walls; but none shall suffer on my account. It hath not pleased God to open to me a way of escape, wherefore I must now yield myself to the will of my enemies; and it were better to go forth and be taken by the spies without than to remain here a source of peril to those within these walls."

"But there is yet another way!" cried Edred with flashing eyes. "Thou shalt not go forth, and yet thou shalt not be a source of peril to any living soul. Brother Emmanuel, methinks it was God's doing, or that of the holy saints, that this hap befell us which revealed to us a safe hiding place of which none knows but ourselves, not even our father and mother, and the secret of which we have preserved unto this day, resisting the temptation to divulge it to any living soul. Time presses. When we are there I will tell thee all the tale--how this secret place came to our knowledge. But now let us tarry no longer, but come quickly and see for thyself. Once within that friendly shelter thou wilt have naught to fear save the loneliness to which thou art well used.

"See, there is Julian already opening the door. Come, my father, come!"

Julian had kindled the little lamp the boys had constructed for themselves, and which was much upon the principle of a modern bull's-eye, and could be safely carried through draughty passages without flickering or going out; and now the wondering monk allowed Edred to take him by the hand and lead him step by step along the narrow, tortuous passage. Julian closed the door behind them, showing how the cleverly-contrived spring acted; then they proceeded step by step in cautious silence--for this passage skirted a great portion of the house, and was very long--towards their destination, till at last they stood within the secret chamber itself; and Julian extinguished the light, to let the evening sunshine filter in and show how much of illumination it could give.

"Now, Brother Emmanuel, let us show you all," said Edred eagerly; "for methinks it must be very few visits we must pay thee, and those at dead of night. For I much mistake me if we be not closely watched by some spy of the prior's these next days, and it will not do for any to think we have hidden haunts of our own."

"Nay, nay, my children; ye must not run into peril for me. Far rather would I--"

"I know--I know!" cried Edred. "But in truth thou needst not fear to rest here. This is the lost chamber, the secret of which had perished for well nigh a generation, till kindly fortune made it known to us. All men think that the chamber lay in the portion of Chad that was destroyed in the late wars. None dream it still exists. But here it is, and Bertram has made out little by little exactly where it lies, and I will tell it thee.

"This portion at the lower and darker end is jammed in betwixt the ceiled roof of the great gun room and that attic chamber where the dry roots are stored away in the winter months before the frost binds them into the ground. None enter that attic in the summertide save rats and mice, and though there may be many passing to and fro in the gun room, no sound from here can penetrate there; for we have tried times and again, when there has been none by to hear, if we can make each other hear sounds from either place. From the gun room noise will, if very great, penetrate hither; but nothing thou canst do will make them below hear thee.

"Then this wider and lighter and loftier portion, where the light comes in, is but a space filched away from the roofs and leads, and jammed in in such a fashion that it would defy a magician to find it from without. We tried days and

days and could not do it, and never did, albeit we can climb like cats and had an inkling where it was--until we put Julian within to shout aloud and guide us by his voice. It is so placed that none can get really nigh to those places where the cracks are made to let in the light and air. Thou needst not fear, though all the monks in the priory come to search, that this hiding place will ever be found."

The monk looked around the narrow chamber and drew an involuntary breath of relief. If indeed this thing were so, if indeed he might lie hidden from discovery and defy the most stringent search, might it not be a God-appointed means of salvation for him? Might he not be doing wrong in insisting upon falling into the hands of men? Would it indeed be possible for him to secrete himself without bringing down upon others the wrath he himself would escape?

Whilst he stood thus debating with himself, the boys pulled him by the sleeve and spoke eagerly, though involuntarily in low tones.

"And see further. Here is food laid up against this day. It will all keep for many weeks. It is but poor fare, but not poorer than thou art well used to--salted meat, and dried fish, and oaten cake; which keeps moist far longer than any other. Here are a few confections, and here is wine, and a jar of good mead. As for water, it may be had at this trough here, and a goodly supply; only it comes with somewhat of a rush, and the bung is not easily rammed back in its place. It is best to raise the tube--so--in the hand; but we could not make shift to do better. There is the lantern, and oil in this vessel, and none can see the light at night from any place when it is burned. I have placed three books in you corner--I dared not take more from the library; but I knew thou wouldst have thy breviary with thee, and thou art never dull. If it may be done safely, one of us will visit thee from time to time; and if there is any way of escape open to thee, thou shalt surely hear thereof.

"But be not dismayed if days go by and thou hearest naught. It may be safer that thou shouldst be left quite alone. Thou wilt not think thyself forgotten?"

Brother Emmanuel's eyes were fixed with a tender gaze upon the faces of the bold, generous boys. He took their hands in his, and they bent the knee to receive his blessing. His words were few and brief, but each lad as he rose resolved deep down in his heart that he would suffer the penalty of death itself sooner than betray the secret hiding place and give the brother up to his foes.

Then with a few more last words respecting the hiding place and the arrangements made for the comfort of its occupant, the pair stole away, and soon found themselves safely within the walls of their own room, the door of which was still safely locked. They looked each other in the face with a proud, glad smile.

"It is done!" cried Edred, drawing a long breath.

"Nay, not altogether," answered Julian, with eyes that flashed with excitement; and drawing a step nearer his brother, he said in changed tones, "Now must that rascally priest have fled, and it behoves us to search the precincts of the place with all diligence. We must not leave a nook or a cranny unvisited, and must make a mighty coil. Thou takest me, brother, dost thou not?"

Edred made a quick, eager sign of assent.

"Ay, Julian, I do; and when we have done all that, let us back to the priory again. We must whisper in our father's ear that Brother Emmanuel is safe. Then will he act with a freer hand. And it were better, perchance, that we were all there to ride back with him when he takes his leave."

Julian assented at once to this proposition; and forth went the boys, at first calling aloud the name of their tutor, and then halting, always within earshot of one of the spies, to debate where he could have concealed himself, darting hither and thither, as if suddenly remembering some new place, and ever returning disappointed and vexed.

"He is a veritable fox!" cried Julian, flinging his cap on the ground in a well-assumed tempest of chagrin. "He must have left Chad altogether, for not a trace of him is here; and I looked to have the pleasure of bringing him ourselves before the reverend prior, to atone for having helped that other pestilent fellow to avoid for a while the hand of the law. A plague upon him and his cunning ways! Unless he have found the secret chamber our father knows of, and which he once took us to see, there be no other place in all Chad where he can be lurking, unless he has been moving from spot to spot at our approach. A pest upon the crafty rogue!"

"We shall do no good loitering here, since he be really gone," remarked Edred, in a tone of vexation very like his brother's; "perchance he may have fallen into the hands of the prior through the watch of which he spoke. I trust it may be so. But for us, I trow we had better go back to see the end of the day's spectacle. We can do no more at Chad. If he is hiding he will not dare come forth now, with all the folks returning so soon; and if he has got clean away, nothing we can do will bring him back."

Julian grumbled in the finest phrases he could think of as the two pursued their way back towards the priory, increasing their speed as they left Chad behind, and very quickly gaining the meadow, where the servants were already beginning to collect the horses and get them ready for their masters.

The day's proceedings were over. Refreshments were being served in the refectory to all of the better sort. Sir Oliver's two younger sons had never been missed; but Edred contrived to slip into the hall, and in passing beside his father's chair to whisper in his ear the four simple words:

"Brother Emmanuel is safe!"

None heard the whisper, not even Bertram, who was sitting next his father, though he read it in his brother's eye the next moment. Edred had affected to catch the clasp of his belt against his father's chair as he passed by, and in pausing to free it had bent his head and spoken the brief message.

No change passed over Sir Oliver's face. Not a creature present observed the trifling by-play. Wine had circulated freely, and much laughing and talking were going on. The prior had unbent from his judicial severity, and even the Lord of Mortimer was smiling and bland, although there was something in his aspect that suggested the fierce feline play of a man-eating creature biding its time and toying with its victim.

Just before the close of the feast Sir Oliver rose to his feet.

"My lord prior, and you knights and gentlemen," he said suddenly, addressing all those who sat at the board in one comprehensive glance round the table. "I have been not a little disturbed and astonished today by hearing that there is ill known of one who has been long a member of my household--Brother Emmanuel--whom the reverend prior himself sent forth to be the instructor of my sons, and who has always comported himself right reverently and seemly in my house. But inasmuch as there is cause of offence in him, and that he has this day refused obedience to his lawful superior, and has not come at the bidding of the prior, I cannot but own him in fault, and decline to have further dealings with him. I do not know whether he is yet at Chad. I have not seen him since his farewell last evening. But if he be yet there, let the Lord of Mortimer, or you, holy father, send a company of servants to bring him thence.

"I have heard it whispered around that he is hiding within the walls of Chad, and that we of that household know where he lurks. My reply to that whisper is a denial (which I will take upon oath if need be) that I know aught whatever about him; and furthermore, I will throw open my house, upon any day and at any time, to whatever persons shall be sent to seek him, and will aid them in every possible way in the finding of the offender."

A murmur of approval went round the company. The prior looked pleased, and a smile crossed his face.

The only person who did not seem gratified by this openness was the Lord of Mortimer, whose face contracted sourly, and who gave a keen glance at his rival, as though he would have read his very soul. But the calm gaze with which Sir Oliver returned this look did not appear to restore his equanimity, and he flashed a glance at his son-in-law which plainly betokened surprise and chagrin.

"Well spoken, Sir Oliver," said the prior; "and since I have excellent reason to know that the brother has not left Chad, and cannot do it without my knowledge, it is plain to me that he is hiding in some place there, albeit all unknown to you and yours. Wherefore, on the morrow, I myself, together with my good friend the Lord of Mortimer, will present ourselves at Chad, and make full search, and we shall no doubt find the heretic monk cowering away in some undreamed-of hiding place, and will drag him thence to the fate he so well merits.

"Chad has its secrets, has it not? I have heard of them in days gone by."

"It has several cunning nooks and crannies, but all of these will I myself display to you upon the morrow," replied the knight calmly; and the Lord of Mortimer arose with a crafty smile upon his face, and addressed the prior in these words:

"Reverend father, I do not willingly speak ill of my neighbours, least of all of one who is now near akin to me through the marriage of my daughter with Sir Edward, who comes of the old stock of Chad. Yet I cannot but state here, in this place, that I hold Sir Oliver to have drawn down suspicion upon himself by failing to give up Brother Emmanuel a week ago when it was demanded of him. There be something to my mind strange and unworthy in such an act; and I here call upon all men to witness that I verily believe we shall find this traitor monk sheltering within the walls of Chad, and that if this be so I shall openly accuse Sir Oliver before all the world--before the king himself--of harbouring traitors and heretics, and shall make petition that Chad and all that pertains to it be forfeit, as the penalty for such evil courses, and be given to the rightful lord by inheritance--Sir Edward Chadwell."

The partisans of Mortimer raised a cheer; those of Chad received the challenge with groans and curses. Sir Oliver spoke not a word, but sat with his head proudly erect, and his eyes gleaming somewhat dangerously; whilst the prior commanded silence by a gesture of his hand, and spoke to quell the tumult.

"My Lord of Mortimer, I have far more trust than you in the integrity of good Sir Oliver. I trow he will be able to clear himself of whatever suspicions lie upon him; and if the monk be found within his house, he shall have every opportunity of explaining his presence there. At the same time, I will not deny that it will look ill for him if he be found there; and that the tongues of all suspicious persons may be silenced, so that none shall say there has been opportunity for him to get the monk secretly away from the place, I will double the watch that has already been set around Chad, and I will send thither with Sir Oliver and his family two of my trustiest sons, Brother Fabian and Brother Nathaniel, to keep strict watch within doors, that there be no cause for any enemy to say that any there have aided an unlawful escape, or have striven to hide a miscreant from those who justly demand him."

Sir Oliver bent his head.

"Any brother coming from Chadwater will be an honoured guest at Chad," he said. "I was about to ask if Brother Fabian was to be sent thither to instruct my sons."

"Ay, and to find out what germs of heresy yon false monk may not have implanted!" cried Lord Mortimer, losing control of himself as he saw the calmness

of his enemy, and felt that the prey he had so confidently looked to be his might even now slip from his grasp. "It was those lads from Chad who strove to protect yon miserable hunchback who will be burned to ashes for his sins ere three more days have gone by. How explain you such conduct as that, Sir Oliver? Are you and your dame rearing up a heretic brood, to cumber the land in days to come?"

But the prior here interposed somewhat sternly. He had no intention of allowing his table to be made the scene of a disturbance that might lead to bloodshed. He turned somewhat sternly upon the haughty baron, and his words were few and plain.

"My Lord of Mortimer, Sir Oliver has answered to me for that offence. You take something too much upon yourself in thus striving to sit in judgment, and that in mine own presence.

"And now, gentlemen, the sun will be shortly setting, and some of you have many miles to ride. We have done the day's work in a thorough and righteous fashion; and I will now give you my blessing, and dismiss you to your homes. I trust this may be the last time that I have to assemble you together to drive from amongst us those who are tainted by the curse of heresy."

Half an hour later the party for Chad were riding quietly homeward through the forest with two cowed monks in their company. The last charge to these from the prior had been:

"Thou, Brother Fabian, keep a sharp eye by night and by day upon the boys; and thou, Brother Nathaniel, upon the knight and his lady. If any of those are in the secret, be it your mission to find out and bring it home to them."

Chapter IX: The Search.

"If Brother Emmanuel is found, Chad will be forfeit."

Such was the burden of Edred's thoughts as he rode homeward at his brothers' side, just behind their father and mother, at the close of that eventful day's proceedings.

It was a thought that could not but be fraught with some terror to the boy, who knew that he had been instrumental in hiding the threatened monk, and that if by some gruesome chance the secret were to be discovered, their bitter enemy would make it an excuse for prosecuting his malicious and covetous purpose towards Chad with redoubled ardour, and with every prospect of success. At present the prior was standing neutral betwixt the two foes; at present the king was well disposed towards Sir Oliver. But should it be proved beyond dispute that he had set the Church at defiance, and had harboured a suspected heretic within his walls, then the prior would at once turn against him, and representations would be made to the king which would almost force him to turn away his favour. The Lord of Chad would be a disgraced and suspected person, whilst in all probability the wiles of the ambitious Mortimer would prove successful, and the claim of Sir Edward Chadwell would be admitted, and the estate pass into his hands.

The thought was maddening. The bare idea of being forced to leave the old home sent the hot blood coursing through the boy's body. If such a thing as that were to befall them, it would break their father's heart. And how should he ever hold up his head again, knowing that in some sort he had been the author of the mischief?

All the brothers had been heart and soul together in their desire to hide the brother from the wrath and unjust tyranny of the prior; but Edred felt as though the greatest responsibility had been his, though he could scarcely have said why.

Julian had certainly taken the lead in the final act of the drama; but Julian was

yet a boy, and did not thoroughly realize the perils which might follow such a course. Edred did, and his face was grave and thoughtful; and when from time to time he stole a glance at Bertram, he saw that his elder brother's face was overcast and anxious, too.

They did not dare to exchange a single word upon the subject nearest to their hearts as they rode decorously behind their parents and the two monks. The whole train had to restrain their horses to the ambling pace of the steed bestridden by the monks, who were by no means skilled riders; and dusk had fallen ere they all rode into the courtyard of Chad, where the bustle of dismounting afforded the brothers the chance of escaping for a few minutes to their upper chamber together.

"We must not stay a minute; the spies will be after us!" whispered Bertram. "But one question I must ask. Is he there?"

"Yea, verily; and none need visit him for many days. It were better not.

"But, brothers both, lend me your strong arms here. I would move this great chest across the fireplace. Ask no question; I will show you why anon."

Edred was the speaker, and he indicated an enormous carved oak chest quite twelve feet in length, which was kept in this room to hold the clothing of the three lads. They did from time to time change its position in the room, so that no remark would be excited by the fact that it had been moved. As Edred wished to place it now, it would stand right across the fireplace, blocking entirely the secret door; but Bertram looked a little doubtfully at it when it was in place, saying tentatively:

"Thou dost not think it would draw attention to the carved pillars of the fireplace? We shall have cunning and crafty men to deal with on the morrow."

Edred smiled slightly.

"Wait till the morrow comes, and thou shalt see," he answered; and then the brothers hastened down again, knowing that any sudden disappearance on their part might be marked and held as suspicious.

They had not, however, been gone long enough to be missed, and the two monks who had been told off to keep watch within this house had but just made their way into the hall, where hot spiced wine was being dispensed, and the table set out for supper.

Notwithstanding the feast recently partaken of at the priory, the brothers appeared by no means loath to sit down once again, and Edred could not but observe how differently they comported themselves from Brother Emmanuel, and how thoroughly they appreciated the dainty viands which were brought out in their honour.

He did not mean to sit in judgment--he scarcely knew that he was doing so; yet as he watched their deep potations, and marked how they chose the best portions, and stinted themselves in no good thing, his stern young mind could not but rise up in revolt, the more so that these very men were actually here on purpose to strive to capture a brother of their own order, and deliver him over to death. And so far as the youth understood the matter, the offence for which it was resolved he should suffer was that he was too faithful to the vows he had taken upon himself, and too ardent in striving to enforce upon others the rules he held binding upon himself.

But at least if these brothers ate and drank merrily, they were not therefore the better watchers. They had smiled a little scornfully as he contrasted their good feeding and deep drinking and subsequent visible sleepiness with the spare and frugal meal always taken by Brother Emmanuel, to be followed as often as not by a long night vigil in the chantry. There was small look of watchfulness about

these men. Any vigil kept by them would be but a mockery of the term. It was all they could do to stumble through the office of compline when the meal was ended and the household about to retire, and there was no suggestion on their part of wishing to remain to keep vigil.

But Edred resolved that he would watch again that night. He had done so the previous night with Brother Emmanuel, both thinking that it might be the last watch they would ever hold together. Now the boy felt that he could not sleep, at least for many hours; and since their mother had whispered to them that Brother Fabian was to share their room, since he said it was his duty to keep watch upon the boys till next morning, it seemed well to leave his bed for the drowsy monk, and keep vigil himself in the silent chantry.

The brother looked puzzled when he heard what one of his young charges proposed to do. Edred looked him full in the face as he answered:

"Brother Emmanuel taught us that it were not well that all within the house should be sleeping. We know not when the Lord may appear--at midnight, at cock crowing, or in the morning; and methinks whenever He may come, He would gladly find one soul holding vigil and waiting for His appearing. Lock the door of the chantry upon me, my father. Thou canst see that there is but the one door by which we may come or go. If thou fearest to leave me here, lock the door upon me until such time as it pleases thee to release me."

The brother regarded the boy with perplexed looks, and slowly shook his head, as though such an attitude of mind were wholly incomprehensible. But he did not oppose his resolve. It would not do to appear astonished at the idea of keeping vigil. He passed out of the chantry muttering to himself, and Edred prostrated himself before the altar, above which the solitary lamp burned clear and bright, and offered up most earnest prayers for the safety of Brother Emmanuel, for the failure and discomfiture of his foes, and for his safe escape when the time was ripe into some country where his enemies were not like to find him.

How the hours of the night passed he scarcely knew. He might perhaps have slept at his post awhile, or have remained in a dreamy and passive state; for it did not seem long before the morning sun came glinting in at the eastern window, and the boy saw that the day had come which was to be a momentous one to Chad.

Before very long, sounds of life about, and later on within the house, warned him that he was not the only watcher now; and feeling very drowsy and weary, he resolved to creep upstairs and share Julian's couch for the remaining hours before the working day should commence.

He had not been locked into the chantry. Perhaps Brother Fabian felt a little shame in his suspicions, or perhaps he forgot to take the precaution. The door yielded to his touch, and he found himself at liberty to go where he would.

But before turning his steps to his room upstairs, he made an expedition to an outhouse on what appeared to be a curious errand. It was a dirty, neglected place, and was full of dust and flue and cobweb. The boy began deliberately collecting masses of this flue and web, and presently he swept up carefully a good-sized heap of dust, which he as deliberately placed in a wooden box, and proceeded to make in one end a number of small holes.

Carefully carrying away this strange load, and bearing it with great secrecy, the boy mounted the stairs very softly, and put down the handkerchief in which the flue was placed in the small unused room beside their sleeping chamber. With the box still in his hands he stole on tiptoe into the room and looked carefully round him.

His brothers were sleeping lightly, looking as though they would be easily and speedily aroused. But the monk was snoring deeply, and the bloated face which

was turned towards him displayed that abandonment of repose which bespeaks a very sound and even sottish slumber.

The boy looked with repulsion at the flushed face, the open mouth, and dropped jaw. Something in the expression of that sleeping face filled him with scorn and loathing. No danger of this man's awakening; his half-drunken sleep was far too heavy and sodden.

Edred stepped lightly across the room towards the chest which he had had moved the previous evening, and lying at full length along the floor, he proceeded to shake his box after the manner of a pepper pot until he had made beneath the chest a soft layer of dust which looked like the accumulation of weeks. It was deftly and skilfully done, and although he looked critically at the after effect, to make sure there was nothing artificial about the aspect, he could not detect anything amiss.

The next step was to carry away his box, empty it out of a window, and break in pieces the perforated part, that there might be no tracing his action in this matter. Then gaining possession of his handkerchief full of flue, he stole softly back again, and laid great flakes between the legs of the chest and the wall, stuffed light fragments into the interstices of the carving, and laid them upon any projecting ledge that was likely to have caught such light dirt as it filtered through the air.

A soft movement in the room told him that his brothers were awake and watching him, though the monk still snored on in his stertorous fashion. One after the other the pair stole from their beds and looked for a moment at this skilful travesty of nature's handiwork, and both nodded in token of approval and congratulation.

Edred had an artist's eye for effect, and did not spoil his handiwork by overdoing it. The result produced was exactly as if the chest had stood for some time in its present position, so that the dust had gathered beneath it and the flue had clung to the wall behind it. No one looking at its position there could doubt that it had been there for a period of some weeks.

Satisfied with the result of his manoeuvre, the boy flung away the rest of his spoil, and throwing himself upon one of his brothers' beds was soon lost in healthy sleep.

When he awoke the sun was high in the sky, and he found himself alone with Father Fabian, who appeared likewise only just to have awakened.

Brother Emmanuel would long ago have held early mass in the chantry, but this new inmate appeared by no means disposed to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors. He rubbed his eyes, and seemed scarce to know where he was; but he accepted Edred's offers of assistance, and was soon ready to leave the room in search of the meal to which he was accustomed.

All Chad was in a stir of expectation. It was known throughout the house that a great search was to be instituted after the missing priest, who had, as it were, disappeared into thin air.

Everybody knew that he had been within the precincts of Chad upon the previous day. Some amongst the few servants who had been left behind to take care of the house had seen him moving quietly about from the chantry to the courtyard and back. It was now well known that spies were lurking in the forest round Chad with a view of intercepting any attempt at flight, and it was plain they had seen nothing of him. Therefore, unless he had escaped their vigilance by cunning and artifice, he must still be somewhere within the precincts of the house; and on the whole this appeared the most probable theory. In a place like Chad, where there were all manner of outbuildings, sheds, and lofts; to say nothing of all the corners and hiding places within the house itself, it would be

very tempting to take refuge in one of these nooks and crannies, and to trust to the chance of concealment rather than run the gauntlet of meeting foes in the open.

Brothers from the monasteries, to say nothing of hunted heretics, had the reputation of being marvellous cunning in their methods. It was like enough that Brother Emmanuel had long been planning some such concealment for himself, and had made his plans cleverly and astutely. Such was the prevailing opinion at Chad, and scarcely a member of the household but hoped and trusted his hiding place would not be detected, even though they did not know how seriously the fortunes of their master might be affected were the monk to be found hidden in his house.

They all loved Brother Emmanuel for his own sake, and hated the Lord of Mortimer. And it was well known that that haughty baron was making common cause with the prior of Chadwater in this matter, doubtless in the hope of disgracing Sir Oliver in the eyes of the ecclesiastical powers.

So a general feeling of excitement and uncertainty prevailed during the early hours of the morning. Sir Oliver and his wife strove to appear calm and tranquil, but inwardly they were consumed by anxiety. They felt something very much approaching certainty that their own sons knew what had befallen the monk--probably his very hiding-place; and they were by no means certain that it might not be within the very precincts of Chad itself. The knight's generosity and love of justice were sufficiently stirred to make him willing to run some risk in the cause; he had resolved to ask no question, and to let matters take their own course. But he could not help feeling a tremor run through him as he heard the winding of the horn which bespoke the presence of the visitors at his gate, and he went forth to meet them with a sinking heart, albeit his mien was calm and untroubled and his bearing dignified and assured.

The prior and the Lord of Mortimer headed the train, and behind followed a goodly retinue of men wearing the livery of the baron, to say nothing of the lay brothers and the cowled monks, who were skilful in matters pertaining to search, and who had come to assist in the examination of the whole of the great house.

Upon the face of Lord Mortimer and upon that of his son-in-law there was an ill-disguised look of vindictive triumph. It was easy to see that they were fully assured of the presence of the fugitive within these walls, and that they did not mean to leave until he had been dragged forth from his hiding place.

The guests of the better quality were respectfully conducted into the great hall, and refreshments were placed before them. Sir Oliver put his whole house and possessions into the hands of the prior, who was invited to make any kind of investigation and examination that he thought necessary. The knight repeated what he had said the previous day as to his entire ignorance where the monk was hiding, and whether he was hiding at all. But no obstacle of any kind would be placed by him against the most stringent search, and he would either accompany the searchers or remain passive where he was, exactly as the reverend father judged best.

This statement was well received by the prior, who turned to the Lord of Mortimer and suggested that in the first place his armed troopers, who were well used to this kind of work, should make a strict search through all the outbuildings of whatever kind, posting his men wherever he thought needful, and taking any steps such as the smoking of chimneys and kindred methods that might in any wise be likely to dislodge the fugitive. Meantime the rest of the party would remain where they were, and the house should only be searched if it was made clear that the monk was not hiding without.

Lord Mortimer retired to give his orders, and the rest of the company remained in the hall. The boys would better have liked the house searched first, that their anxiety might be the sooner relieved. It was keeping them on

tenterhooks all this time, as they knew well that no result could accrue from any search of the outer yards or buildings, and it was hard to wait all that time in uncertainty and suspense.

But they heard the order given without making any sign. It was well for them at this crisis that they had been trained in habits of self control and reserve. No one, to look at the three boys, would have guessed them to be greatly interested in the proceedings. They remained standing in the background, with an air of quiet respect and submission appropriate to the young in presence of their spiritual superiors. The prior, as his keen eye travelled over the faces in the hall, never suspected for a moment that those three quiet lads knew aught of this matter. But, pleased by their air and bearing, he called them to him and asked them some questions, to assure himself that they had been properly taught by the recalcitrant monk whom now he had resolved to find and to punish for his rebellion and temerity.

The boys replied with such ready intelligence and so much actual learning that he could not but be pleased with them. Edred, in particular, showed such readiness and aptitude that the prior was surprised, and laying a kindly hand upon the boy's head, asked him how soon they would be welcoming him at Chadwater.

The youth looked up with grave, thoughtful eyes.

"I know not that, my father. I have had thoughts of the religious life; but--"

"Well, boy, what is the 'but'?" asked the prior with a smile, but a keen flash of the eye which did not pass unheeded.

Edred saw the flash, and was put at once upon his guard. This was not Brother Emmanuel, to whom he could open his whole soul and ask counsel and advice.

"I misdoubt me at times if I be fit for the life," he answered. "There is too much of the world in my heart, I fear me. I used to think I was fit to be a monk, but I am the less sure now."

"Well, well, I would fain have a promising lad like thee beneath my care; but there is time to talk of that later.

"Well, my Lord of Mortimer, how goes the search? Is all in train for it?"

"Ay, reverend father; and I trow if the miscreant be in hiding anywhere without the house, he will shortly be brought before us. I am no novice in this manner of work, and I have laid my plans that he will scarce escape us. If that fail, we must try the house itself. It will go hard if we find him not somewhere. We have full information that he has not left the place;" and here he flashed an insolent look of triumph at Sir Oliver, who took not the smallest notice either of the speech or the look.

Edred retired to his former place beside his brothers, and the party awaited the result of the search with what patience they might. Now and then shouts and calls broke the stillness, and faces would flush with excitement at the sound; but the shouts always died away again into silence, and at last there came a trooper into the hall to salute the company and report that there was no one hidden in any of the places without. Not a rat or a mouse could have failed to be turned out after the stringent search to which the premises had been subjected.

The Lord of Mortimer then rose and said:

"Keep the men posted as I have given orders. Let none stir from his vantage ground. And be thou there to see that the closest watch is kept. We go in person to search the house, and if any living thing seeks to make escape by door or window, it will be thine office and that of thy men to seize and hold him."

"We will not fail, my lord," said the man, who again saluted and withdrew.

Then the prior rose and called his monks about him, whilst the Lord of Mortimer did the like with his followers.

"Sir Oliver," said the prior, "I would have spared you this unwelcome formality had it been possible, but my duty must be done. I will ask you to be our conductor throughout the house, and will crave permission to post my servants hither and thither about the passages as seems to me best, and to take such steps as shall appear needful for proving to the satisfaction of all that this traitor monk is not hidden within your walls."

Sir Oliver bent his head.

"Take what steps you will, reverend father; I and mine are at your disposal. Whatever means you desire to use, do so without hesitation. Shall my people arm themselves with tools to remove panelling or flooring? You have but to command them; they shall instantly obey."

The Lord of Mortimer again looked taken aback for a moment. There was a confidence in Sir Oliver's manner that did not appear to be assumed. He would have preferred another aspect in his foe.

"We have brought all things needful for a rigorous search," answered the prior. "We hope and trust nothing will be needed. Is it true that there are secret hiding places in the house, my son? It would be well, perhaps, to visit any such first."

"There be two," answered Sir Oliver quietly, though his heart beat rather fast. What if Brother Emmanuel had learned the secret of either of those places, and had sought refuge in one? True, it would have been worse than useless to deny their existence. Many in the household knew of them and how they might be entered.

Probably the prior or some of his monks had the trick of those chambers by heart. Chad had been through many vicissitudes, and the monks had often been its guests. Secrets once known to them were never allowed to be lost. It would have been idle to seek to put the searchers off the scent. He led the way to the places where the masked doors lay--one was much after the pattern of that in the boys' chamber--and in each case himself opened the door, letting his guests go in to examine for themselves.

Those were terrible moments for him; but the hearts of the boys did not palpitate. Each time the search party came forth with looks of baffled disappointment. Each time the Lord of Mortimer's face was dark and gloomy. He had reckoned somewhat confidently on finding the fugitive in one of these known hiding places. He had hoped Sir Oliver would profess an ignorance of at least one of the two. His face was fierce and vindictive as the second was "drawn blank."

But the excitement of the boys was slowly augmenting as the party moved higher and higher in the house, leaving scouts posted in various places, and, as it were, spreading a cleverly-constructed net all through Chad, which it would be impossible for any person being hunted from spot to spot finally to escape.

The prior's idea now was that the monk might be gliding before them from place to place, confident that his knowledge of the intricacies of the house would give him the chance of evading them at the last. It was a desperate game, to be sure, but one that had been successfully tried by others on more than one occasion. He therefore posted his men with great skill and acumen; and knowing the house accurately, was able to feel secure that if this were the game being played, the prey would sooner or later be his.

Lord Mortimer, on the other hand, gave his attention to the panelled walls, the carved chimney pieces, the flooring of the old rooms; and many were the blows

struck here and there by his orders, and great was the damage done to certain panelled rooms, in the hopes of coming upon some masked door or passage.

It was this energy on his part that caused such anxiety to the boys. Suppose he were to attack the carving which really concealed the masked door in their room? Might not his eagle eye light upon that, too, and might not all be discovered? The boys felt almost sick with apprehension as they approached the door of their room, and Edred's whole heart went up in a voiceless prayer that no discovery might be made.

Nothing in the aspect of the room attracted comment. All looked matter of fact and innocent enough, and the prior was growing something weary with the unavailing search. The usual thumping on the walls was commenced; but even the carved mantel pillars were so solid that no hollow sound was given forth when they were struck. The prior turned away.

"There is naught here, methinks, my Lord of Mortimer."

"Wait one moment," replied the baron. "This carving be something deep and ponderous. I always suspect traps when I see such pains bestowed upon it. Let me examine a while further. These grapes look to me as if they had been fingered something often. Let me examine further."

Edred's heart was in his mouth. It was all he could do to restrain himself from seeking to attract the prior's attention in another direction; but his sound sense told him that this sudden interruption would be suspicious. Julian nipped him by the arm, as those strong fingers went travelling over the carved work with dire intent. Both started when the Lord of Mortimer exclaimed:

"Take away yon chest; it encumbers me."

The servants did his bidding in a moment; and then a sudden change came over his face. The eager look died away. He remained awhile looking down at the floor, which was covered with dust and flue, as was also the carving which had been concealed behind the chest. The prior looked down too, and shrugged his shoulders.

"That tells a tale, my lord. Naught has been disturbed here for many a long day. Let us pursue our search elsewhere. No fugitive could have passed by that spot since yesterday, when Brother Emmanuel was last seen."

The baron could not but assent. He looked once again at the carving, but he had had no real reason to suspect aught, and he turned away to go elsewhere. Another grip of the arm showed Edred how Julian's feelings had been stirred; but the lads did not even look at each other as they moved on behind the company, and they now hardly heard or heeded what passed during the remaining hour of that long search.

For them the crisis had passed when they turned from the room where the secret lay. If not discovered at that awful moment when Lord Mortimer's hand was actually upon the bunch of grapes beneath which lay the spring, they surely need not fear any other manoeuvre on his part.

And at last the long search ended. Even the Lord of Mortimer had to own himself beaten. Reluctantly and with scowling brow he followed the prior back to the long banqueting hall, where the tables had already been laid with savoury viands. He had been worsted where he had been most confident of success, and he was as furious as a bear robbed of her whelps.

The prior was taking Sir Oliver by the hand and speaking words of goodwill, professing great satisfaction at the result of this stringent search; his only vexation being that the monk had contrived to give them the slip. In the back of his head the prior had a lurking feeling that Sir Oliver had been in some sort concerned in Brother Emmanuel's escape, and was rejoicing at it; but inasmuch

as he had entirely failed to bring home any charge against him, and as in all other respects he was a good neighbour and true son of the Church, he was willing enough to restore him to favour and confidence, and was not sorry on the whole that the haughty Lord of Mortimer was not going to have it all his own way.

The astute ecclesiastic knew very well that he himself did better for holding a neutral position between two adversaries both desiring his friendship and good opinion, than he would do were Chad and Mortimer to be in the same hands. He was disappointed at not finding the monk, but not sorry Sir Oliver stood vindicated. He set himself down to the board with a hearty goodwill; but the baron refused the proffered hospitality of his rival, and summoned his attendants about him.

"I will say farewell this time, Sir Oliver," he said haughtily. "But remember I still hold that we have only been foiled by your cunning; not that you are innocent in this matter. If ever I can prove this thing against you, I shall do so; and I recommend the reverend prior to keep his watch still upon this house, as I fully believe yon traitor monk is in hiding here."

"And I, my lord baron," said Sir Oliver proudly, "will give you fair warning that I will speedily to the king, to lay before him the history of this day and the insults to which I have been subjected through you and your groundless suspicions of me. I have not resisted what you have chosen to do, knowing well the use you would have made of such resistance. But I have not forgotten the many acts of aggression and hostility of which you have been guilty; and this last day's work, in which your servants have made themselves, as it were, masters of Chad, shall be answered for at some future day. You have thought good to threaten me. I too will threaten you. I threaten you with the displeasure of the king when this thing comes to his ears; and I shall seek him now without delay, and tell him all I have suffered at your hands."

Chapter X: From Peril To Safety.

"My son, what hast thou done to thyself?"

Edred was stumbling across the courtyard, supported by Julian, his face streaming with blood and muffled in a great kerchief. He was unable to speak himself, but Julian spoke eagerly for him.

"I trow the fault is half mine. It was done in tilting. I was careless, and saw not that Edred's guard was down. I fear me I have something hurt him. I trust it is not the eye. Look to it quickly, sweet mother. It was a nasty blow."

"It is not of serious nature," muttered Edred through his wrappings; "it will be well right quickly."

The mother hurried the two boys into a small room of her own where she kept medicaments of various kinds, and where all wounds of a trifling character were washed and dressed. Julian hurried to fetch her all she needed; and just at that moment Sir Oliver came hastily in looking for his wife.

"How now, Edred?" he exclaimed. "Hast thou been in the wars again?" for Edred was something famed for getting hard knocks and ugly scratches in his mimic encounters with his more skilled and dexterous brothers. "Why, boy, but this is a worse business than usual. I am sorry for it, for I had something purposed to take thee with me to Windsor on the next morrow, as well as Bertram, and show thee to the king, and give thee a glimpse of the world of court. But if thou be in such plight as this, thou wilt scarce be fit to go."

"I must await another time," muttered Edred, in the same indistinct way, and Julian added with an air of chagrin:

"It was a villainous mischance. I would I had been more careful. I am always

having the ill luck to hurt Edred."

"Nay, the fault is mine!" exclaimed the other boy.

"And now thou wilt be hindered from seeing the king and his fine court."

"Perchance thou wilt go in my stead."

"Nay, that will I not. An thou stayest at home for fault of mine, I will stay to keep thee company."

"Now, gentle mother, prithee see if he be much hurt. I cannot rest till I know."

The lady was ready now to make her examination, and gently removed the rude wrappings the boys had made for themselves. Edred's face presented an ugly appearance as these were taken away. He had a great gash across his brow, which passed dangerously near to the eye, and had laid open the cheek almost as far as the mouth, and knocked out one back tooth. The knight looked concerned at the magnitude of the damage, and spoke rather sharply to Julian.

"Thou must have a care with these weapons of thine, or thou wilt do thy brother a fatal mischief one of these days. See, boy, had that blow of thine swerved but the half of an inch, thy brother would have lost the sight of an eye forever--nay, he might have lost his life; for an injury to the eye oft penetrates to the brain, and then the skill of the leech is of no avail."

"Good wife, is thy skill sufficient for these hurts? or shall we send to seek a surgeon's aid?"

"Methinks I can do all that is needful. They are ugly scratches and painful, but not over deep. The lad will not be scarred, methinks, when the wound is well healed. See, it looks better already after the bathing."

"Run, Julian, for the roll of lint and the strapping in yon cupboard."

"The boy will be a sorry spectacle for a few short days, but after that I trow he will feel none the worse."

"It is but a scratch," said Edred, speaking more freely now, though with a mumbling accent, as though his lips were swollen, which, indeed, one of them was. "I scarce feel it, now it is bathed. Do not look so grave anent the matter, my father."

Sir Oliver, relieved to find matters no worse, went on his way; and Lady Chadgrove proceeded to bind up and plaster the bruised face with the skill and dexterity of which she was mistress. She had no attention to spare for Julian, or she might have been surprised to note that he secreted for himself a certain amount of the dressing she had used, and looked on very intently whilst she applied the remainder to his brother's face.

When her ministrations were accomplished, Edred was greatly disguised. His face was almost entirely swathed in linen, and one eye was completely bandaged up. Julian laughed aloud as he saw the object presented by his brother; and Edred would have joined in the laugh if he had had free play with his facial muscles.

The mother looked gently scandalized.

"Sure, it is no laughing matter, Julian. I am not wont to make much of these boyish mischiefs. Lads must learn to give and to take hard blows as they grow to manhood. Yet I would that thou wert something more careful. Thou mightest have killed thy brother, or have caused him life-long injury, today."

Julian looked grave enough then; but Edred caressed his mother gently, saying:

"Nay, chide him not. He is the best of brothers. It was as much my fault as his."

And then the pair went away together, and did not pause until they had reached their own room, when they suddenly seized each other by the hand and commenced cutting extraordinary capers, indicative of a secret understanding and triumph.

"It could not have turned out better," said Edred, speaking stiffly with his bandaged face and swollen lips.

"I fear me thou dost suffer somewhat."

"It is naught. I scarce feel it, now mother has bound it up. And thy stroke was wondrous skilful, Julian--brow and eye and mouth all scratched."

"The praise should be thine for standing thus rigid to let me thus mark thee. Hadst thou flinched, as many another would have done--as I should have done, I trow--it could not have been done a tithe as well. Wrapped and bandaged as thou must be these next days to come, not a creature could know thee. Everything can be carried out according to the plan. Not even our father will suspect aught. The only fear is lest thou shouldst take a fever or somewhat of that sort, so that they say thou must not ride forth a few miles with our father when he fares forth to Windsor at the dawning of the next morrow after tomorrow's dawn."

"No fear of that," answered Edred boldly. "I am not wont to trouble a sickbed. I have had knocks and blows as hard as this before. Art sure thou hast enough of the linen and the strapping to serve the purpose? And dost think thou canst apply it rightly? It will be thy hands, not mine, that must do all that. I shall be far away when the moment comes. Art sure that thou canst do all as it should be done? Thou and Bertram will have all the last arrangements to carry through. How my heart will be in my mouth until I see thee and my double approaching in the gray light of the morning!"

"I trow we shall not disappoint thee!" cried the boy excitedly; adding after a moment's pause, "Methinks in the matter of artifice both Bertram and I can beat thee, albeit thou art the best of us in other matters. What a boon that that fat, slothful, ignorant monk no longer shares this room! That might have been a rare trouble. But since he loves well the soft bed of the guest chamber in lieu of these hard pallets, he is not like to trouble us again. They put their trust in the spies around the house. Let their spies do their worst, I trow we shall outwit them yet."

And the boys took hands again and renewed their impromptu triumph dance. Their hearts were brimming over with satisfaction and hope. They had had a tough problem to think out during the past days, but now it seemed in a fair way of solution.

When the prior had left Chad after the banquet prepared for him, he professed himself perfectly satisfied that the missing Brother Emmanuel was not concealed upon the premises yet for all that, since the Lord of Mortimer had declared himself still dissatisfied, and because the escape of the monk was difficult to credit, nothing having been seen or heard of him abroad, he judged it wise still to keep his watch upon the place, that all might be satisfied that no precaution had been left untaken.

Sir Oliver had briefly, and with a slight accent of scorn, agreed with all the prior said, and had professed himself perfectly agreeable to the arrangement. He had nothing to hide either in his own comings and goings or in those of any member of his household. So long as his movements were not interfered with or his liberties infringed, the whole forest might be alive with spies for all that he cared. He had not known of the first watch set upon his house, and he was indifferent to the second. He should be soon leaving home to seek the king, and all he demanded was that the sanctity of his house should be duly regarded in his

absence. Of course the prior fully agreed to that. Indeed, after the rigorous and exhaustive search that had been already made, there was no reason why any further entrance should be made into Chad.

But although Sir Oliver had heard this mandate with indifference and contempt, it had filled the hearts of the boys with dismay. In a week's time the vessel would sail that was to carry Brother Emmanuel away to foreign soil, and out of the clutches of his present enemies; and if this guard around the house were to be maintained all that while, what chance had they of smuggling their fugitive away and down to the coast, as they had set their hearts on doing?

But inasmuch as necessity has ever been the mother of invention, and the lads were not only bold and fearless but ready of resource, they had laid their heads together with some good effect, and now the first and one of the most important steps of the little drama had been carried to a successful conclusion.

The next day was a busy and bustling one at Chad. Upon the morrow its lord and master rode forth to Windsor with his eldest son and the best of his followers. There was a great burnishing of arms and grooming and feeding of steeds. Every man was looking up his best riding dress and putting it into spic-and-span order, and the whole place rang with the sound of cheery voices and the clash of steel.

In and out and backwards and forwards throughout the day passed the three boys, watching everything, asking eager questions of all, and expressing keen interest in the whole expedition.

Edred was of course a great figure. His face was all swathed up. One side was completely concealed by the wrappings, and as he found the light trying to even the other eye, his plumed hat was drawn low down over his brow, so that no one would have guessed who he was but for the fact that his mishap was well known by this time to all the household.

Even after supper the restless boys could not keep still. Edred and Julian had won their father's consent to riding some few miles with him on the morrow towards Windsor, and they ran off as soon as the meal was concluded to visit their steeds and see that their saddles were in order. After they had done this, they sallied out by one of the smaller gates to take an evening stroll in the wood, calling out to the custodian of the portal that they should return by the great gate.

They wandered away some distance into the wood; but when they returned it was only Bertram and Julian who entered the gate and went up to their sleeping room. However, as nobody at the larger entrance had seen the three sally forth, no remark was occasioned by the return of only two; and it was supposed that Edred would have retired early, since he was in somewhat battered plight, and had to recover strength for the early start upon the morrow.

When they reached their room that night, Bertram and Julian carefully locked the door behind them--a precaution they did not often take; and when they took from the great chest their own best riding suits, they also took out Edred's and looked it well over.

"It will fit him to a nicety," said Bertram. "He and Edred are almost of a height, and both slim and slightly built. His pale face, so much as may be seen beneath the white linen, will look mightily like Edred's in the gray light of the early morn. This hat has a mighty wide brim--well that Edred affects such headgear. Pulled over his eyes, as he wore it yesterday, there be scarce a feature to be seen. We have but to say he is something late, take him his breakfast to eat up here, and get him on to horseback whilst all the bustle is going on, and not even our father will know him. He may ride past the spies with head erect and fearless mien, for there is not one of them but saw Edred this day, and will know at a glance who rides betwixt us twain with the white linen about his head!"

Sir Oliver had decided rather late in the day to take his lady with him. She was

in great favour always with the queen, and of late they had heard that the health of that gracious lady was something failing. It would be a graceful attention on the part of the mistress of Chad to visit her and learn of her welfare, and it was known that the queen had considerable influence with the king, and he might well give more favourable notice to Sir Oliver's plea were his wife to urge it upon him in response to what the lady might tell to her of their recent troubles with their haughty neighbour.

So that there was even more stir and excitement than usually attended an early morning's start. The sun was not yet up, and the gray dimness of the coming summer's day enshrouded the great courtyard as Bertram and Julian descended to it with a slim figure between them clad in a riding dress similar to their own, the slouched hat drawn over the face, which face was well wrapped and muffled in white linen, as Edred's had been the previous day.

The lady of the house came out with a look of preoccupation upon her face. She noted that the boys were already in the saddle, and smiled.

"Always in such haste," she said, as her own palfrey was led up. "But, Edred my son, why didst thou not come to me to have thy hurts looked to this morn? I was expecting thee."

"Sweet mother, I bound them for him today!" cried Julian eagerly. "Methought I must learn to be his leech since thou wast going with our father, and we knew that thou wouldst have much to do and to think of. Methinks I have not done amiss. It scarce looks as neat as though thy skilful fingers had had the care of it; but he says it feels not amiss, and that is a great thing."

"Ay, verily; and I am glad thou hast skill enough for his needs.

"Be cautious, Edred my son, that the cold gets not to the hurts. Draw up the collar of thy mantle well over that left cheek of thine, and do not talk whilst the air bites so keenly. When the sun is up all will be well; but be cautious in the first chill of the dawn."

The brothers went towards their companion, and rearranged the collar of his riding cloak so as still more to conceal his face. The hands of the younger lad were trembling somewhat; there was a quivering of the muscles of the face which betokened some repressed emotion. The muffled rider did not speak or make much movement. He obeyed the injunction of the lady of Chad to the letter.

Sir Oliver now appeared, and lifted his wife upon her palfrey. He gave a look to see that his sons were mounted, and his servants standing ready to follow his example when he sprang to the saddle.

Then his charger was led up, and he mounted and gave the word, and the little cavalcade moved out through the gate and into the still, dim forest track, watched intently by more than one pair of keen, sharp, suspicious eyes.

"I trust when I come back," remarked the knight to his lady, "that yon spies will have grown weary of their bootless watch, and will have taken themselves off. It is but the malice and suspicion of the Lord of Mortimer which causes the prior to act so. Alone he would never trouble himself. He knows that Brother Emmanuel is not at Chad, and has not been these many days. Wherever he be, he has escaped the malice of his foes this time. Heaven send that he may long escape! He was a godly and a saintly man, and no more heretic than thou or I. If the Church will persist in warring thus against her own truest sons, then indeed will she provoke some great judgment upon her own head. A house divided against itself can never stand, and she above all others should know that."

The spies had been some time passed before Sir Oliver spoke these words, and when he did so they were only loud enough to reach the ears of his wife and of his sons, who rode immediately behind him. Two of these turned their heads for a moment to look at him who rode between them, but his face was far too well

concealed for its expression to be seen.

A few miles further on and a pause was made. Julian suggested that he and Edred should be turning back; whilst the mother, who thought that Edred was scarce fit for the saddle yet, seconded the idea with approbation.

They were passing through a very dark part of the forest, where the trees grew dense, and where on one side the sandstone rose up in a wall, quite keeping out the level rays of the rising sun. It was almost as dim as night in this overgrown spot.

Julian sprang to his feet, and went and dutifully kissed the hand both of father and mother, and the bandaged lad with the concealed face followed his example, touching both hands reverently and gratefully, and murmuring some words of farewell that were only indistinctly heard in the champing of bits and stamping of impatient horse hoofs. Then whilst the mother still laid many charges upon Julian to be careful of his brother, and bent a few anxious regards upon the injured lad himself, Sir Oliver gave the signal for riding on again, as they had a long day's journey before them; and the little cavalcade vanished quickly into the forest, leaving the two companions and their respective steeds standing alone in that dim place.

When the last of the horses had quite vanished, and the sound of their steps was no longer to be heard, Julian flung his cap suddenly into the air, and uttered a long and peculiar cry.

Almost immediately that cry was answered from some place near at hand, and in a few minutes more a figure strangely like the one standing at Julian's side emerged from the sheltering underwood, leading by the rein a small forest pony, such as were much used in that part of the country. With bandaged face, hat drawn over the brows, and collar turned up to the ears, the newcomer was the very counterpart of the motionless figure in the path, save that the latter wore the better dress. Julian burst into a great laugh as the two stood facing each other; but for Edred the meeting was fraught with too much of thankful relief for him to be able to join in his brother's hilarity, and after standing very still for a moment, he suddenly bent his knee, and felt a hand laid upon his head in mute blessing.

Then Brother Emmanuel removed the wrappings from his head, and looked from one brother to the other with a world of gratitude in his dark eyes. But it was a time for action, not words, and that mute, eloquent gaze was all that passed at present.

"We have a servant's dress ready in the hut hard by," said Edred quickly; "and then we must to horse again and get to the coast as fast as may be. Yon sturdy little pony good Warbel has provided will serve us as well as any stouter nag, and look more in keeping with the humble part thou must play this day, Brother Emmanuel. Come, let us change our dress quickly. I love not to linger in this forest, even though we be five good miles from Chad."

Julian took care of the three horses, whilst Edred and the disguised monk made their way through the thick growth of underwood.

When they reappeared it seemed to the boy as though the monk was as greatly disguised now as he had been with the wrappings of linen about his face. Certainly none but a spy on the watch and on the right scent would recognize in this serving man the young ecclesiastic of a few weeks back.

There was a stubble of beard upon his lips and chin which was in itself a marvellous disguise. He wore a loose riding dress, with a slouch hat and a high collar to the cloak which shaded and changed the outline of his features. There was nothing of the monk in his look, save perhaps in the steady glance of his eyes, where a bright intelligence and keen devotion beamed.

Julian flung his cap into the air again as he cried joyously:

"Why, not even the lord prior himself would know thee now. Sure, thou mightest almost have ridden past the spies themselves thus habited. We may push on in open daylight now, and none will heed thy presence."

Edred had now put on the riding dress which Brother Emmanuel had hitherto worn, so that on their return the same pair might be seen to re-enter the house. The disguised monk mounted the forest pony and followed his young masters, who pushed on quietly to the coast, feeling a greater and greater security with every mile they put between themselves and their home.

It was the day for the sailing of the sloop that would carry the monk away to a safe retreat. They were not afraid of losing the boat, for it was not to sail till nightfall; but their impatience acted like a spur, and drove them steadily forward; and save for the needful halts to refresh themselves and their beasts, they did not tarry or draw rein.

It was growing towards the westering of the sun when they beheld the great sea lying before them far below, and Edred's eyes glowed with joy as he saw the white-winged shallows flitting hither and thither on the wide expanse of blue water, and pictured how soon Brother Emmanuel would be sailing away out of the reach of peril. Truly God had been very good in hearing and answering prayer. Edred had, by some instinct for which he could not account, addressed his prayers of late less to the blessed Virgin and more to the Son of God Himself-struck, perhaps, by the words he had heard from the lips of the heretic peddler about the "one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus." He now turned in his saddle and waited till Brother Emmanuel came up. It was too solitary a place for them to care to keep up the appearance of master and servant.

Riding thus side by side, Brother Emmanuel talked with the boys out of the fulness of his heart. His week of captivity had been spent in deep and earnest thought, and some of these thoughts were imparted to the boys in that last serious talk. He bid them hold in all reverence and godly fear that Church which was the body of Christ, and those ordinances which had been given at the beginning for the perfecting of the saints, and which were God's ways of dealing with man. But he warned them in solemn tones of the fearful disease which had attacked the body, and which threatened a fearful remedy before that body could be cleansed; he warned them also of the perils which beset the path of those who should live to see the coming struggle. There would be men who would vow that whatever the Church said and did must be right because the Church was the body of Christ, not knowing that even that body can become corrupt (though never the Head) if the will of man be put in the stead of the will of God; and these would cling to the corruptions as closely as to the ordinances of God, and become bitter persecutors of those who would arise and seek to cleanse and renew the body by God-given remedies. But again there would be men who would arise and deny that there was a body, would condemn the very name of the Church, and avow that what the Lord wanted was not a body, but a number of individuals each seeking light and salvation in his own fashion. That would be a fearful evil--an evil which would rend the body into a thousand schisms, and bring down at last the heavy wrath of God, who has from the beginning taught men that the body must be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing before it can be fit to be the bride of the Lamb.

The young monk earnestly strove to show the perils of both these ways to the boys who rode beside him, and his words were earnestly listened to, and, by one at least, laid seriously to heart, to be remembered in after days almost as the words of prophecy, and destined to have a lasting effect upon his own future career.

From that day Edred renounced all thought of the monastic life, feeling that such a life would but trammel his conscience and stultify his judgment. He resolved to live his life in the world, whilst seeking to be not of the world. How that resolve was kept there is no space in these pages to tell.

Slowly and quietly the three friends jogged down into the little fishing and trading hamlet that lay at the base of the cliffs. In the small bay lay one or two sloops and frigates, and it was not hard to find the owner of the one which was to sail that night and carry Brother Emmanuel away. Julian found the man, and made all arrangements; whilst Edred saw that Brother Emmanuel made a sufficient meal, and sat talking with him to the very last, drinking in new thoughts and aspirations with every word, and striving, in the joy of knowing his beloved preceptor to be safe, to still the ache at heart which this parting involved.

The sun was just setting as the boat bearing Brother Emmanuel to the sloop pushed off from shore. The skipper resolved to set sail forthwith, and the boys stood watching whilst she shook out her canvas to the favouring breeze, and glided like a white-winged sea bird out from the shelter of the bay and into the wide ocean.

There were smarting tears in Edred's eyes despite his joy and relief. But Julian had room only for the latter feeling, and waved his cap with an air of exultant triumph as the sails expanded more and more and the little vessel went skimming its way over the shining sea.

"He is safe, and we have saved him!" he cried with flashing eyes. "Let men say what they will, but he was no heretic. I fear not but that we have done right in the sight of God, even though we may not whisper in the confessional this deed, nor receive priestly absolution therefor."

"God will give us His pardon if we have done amiss," said Edred thoughtfully. "But I have no fear that He regards this deed as a sin. It was done in His name, and as such will He receive it."

"Yes, verily; though perchance it were better to leave such words unsaid. And now we must to horse and make all speed back to Chad. As it is we shall not reach it till after nightfall, and they will something wonder at our delay."

"They will but think we went far and rested long for thy sake. We have travelled leisurely today to keep the horses fresh. We can travel back in the cool right merrily. It is but twenty miles. We can take the most of it at a hand gallop."

The boys and the horses were alike refreshed and ready for a gallop through the cool evening air, rushing on as fast as the nature of the road would let them, they reached Chad in three hours, and rode beneath the gateway just as the old seneschal was wondering how much longer he must wait before he closed the gate for the night.

The spies saw them ride in, as they had (to their thinking) seen them ride out; and all unconscious that the prey had escaped their vigilance, continued their weary and fruitless watch with the pertinacity which in so many like cases had given them success at the last.

One bright evening some three weeks later the bugle at the gate was loudly blown, and Edred and Julian came flying out to welcome their eldest brother, who had ridden hither with some dozen servants to bring news to his brothers at home.

"We have had marvellous good hap. The king received us right graciously, and heard our story with kingly friendliness and goodwill. He is none of your bigoted, priest-ridden monarchs; and although he hates true heresy, and would destroy it root and branch, he cries shame that all enlightened men who would cleanse the Church from some of her corrupt practices should be branded by that evil term. The great and worthy Dean Colet was called in, and he knows well the pamphlet Brother Emmanuel wrote, and says it is a work which should be read and taken to heart by all. That such a man should be dubbed a heretic is vile and wicked; and right glad were all to hear that he had escaped the malice of his enemies, and fled where they could not reach him. I did not dare even then to tell all the tale, but I

said how we had laid our heads together and had helped him to escape. The king and the queen themselves praised me for our courage, and called me a good lad and a brave one not even to trouble our father with the knowledge of a secret that might have made ill work for him.

"My Lord of Mortimer had not been idle. He had been before us in seeking the king; but as good chance befell, he had a quarrel with young Henry, the king's fiery son; and the prince was mightily offended, and made his sire offended likewise. Wherefore Mortimer was something in disgrace even before we got there, and when our story was told he was called up before the king and prince. And all our old forest rights have been restored to us--nay, have been widened and increased, and that at the expense of Mortimer. Ye should have seen his face when that mandate was brought forth and duly signed and sealed with the royal seal and delivered to our father! And the prior has been warned to take his spies from Chad, and the prince has promised to come and visit us, and to enjoy a week's hunting in the forest."

Bertram's breath gave out before he had well finished outpouring his story, and the pause was filled by a great huzza, led off by Julian, and taken up by all the company, who were hearing scraps of like information from the men-at-arms who had conducted home the heir.

"Our parents are constrained to remain awhile longer at court; but I hungered to bring the news to Chad, and to hear the end of the story."

Bertram here dismounted, and taking his brothers by the arm, led them up to their own room, which was always their favourite haunt.

"I see that thy face is well-nigh recovered, Edred; but it stood us in marvellous good stead. Tell me, how fared you when you parted from us? All went well?"

"Excellent well in all truth. Not a soul accosted us by the way. We saw him take boat to the sloop, and saw the sloop sail out of the bay. In truth, it seems like a dream now that it is all passed. But it was a fearful time whilst it lasted."

"Yet it has led to good. We are higher in favour with the king than ever, and I trow it will be long ere our haughty neighbour dares to raise his crest against us."

Bertram paused smiling, and laid his hand upon the masked door which had kept its secret so long.

"And if it be that our gracious prince doth in very truth visit us here, methinks that to him and to him alone will we tell the whole of the strange story, and disclose to him the trick of the secret chamber at Chad!"

The End.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SECRET CHAMBER AT CHAD ***

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