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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OUR LITTLE LADY ***

Emily Sarah Holt

"Our Little Lady"

Chapter One.

Six Hundred Years ago—What things were like.

The afternoon service was over in Lincoln Cathedral, and the congregation were slowly filing out of the great west door. But that afternoon service was six hundred years ago, and both the Cathedral and the congregation would look very strange to us if we saw them now. Those days were well called the Dark Ages, and how dark they were we can scarcely realise in the present day. Let us fancy ourselves coming out of that west door, and try to picture what we should have seen there, six hundred years ago.

The Cathedral itself is hardly to be known. It is crowded with painted images and embroidered banners, and filled with the smoke and scent of burning incense. The clergy are habited, not in white surplices or in black gowns, but in large stiff cloaks—copes they are called—of scarlet silk, heavy with gold embroidery. The Bishop, who is in the pulpit, wears a cope of white, thick with masses of gold, and on his head is a white and gold mitre. How unlike that upper chamber, where the disciples gathered together after the crucifixion of their Master! Is it better or worse, do you ask? Well, I think if the Master were to come in, it would be easier to see Him in the quiet upper chamber, where there was nothing else to see, than in the perfumed and decorated Cathedral where there was so much else!

But now let us look at the congregation as they pass out. Are they all women? for all alike seem to wear long skirts and thick hoods: there are neither trousers, nor hats, nor bonnets. No, there is a fair sprinkling of men; but men and women dressed more alike then than they do now. You will see, if you look, that some of these long skirts are open in front, and you may catch a glimpse of a beard here and there under the hood. This is a poor woman who comes now: she wears a serge dress which has cost her about three-halfpence a yard, and a threadbare hood for which she may have given sixpence.

Are things so cheap, then? No, just the other way about; money is so dear. The wages of a mason or a bricklayer are about sixpence a week; haymakers have the same; reapers get from a shilling to half-a-crown, and mowers one and ninepence. The gentlemen who wait on the King himself only receive a shilling a day.

Here comes one of them, in a long green robe of shining silky stuff, which is called samite; round his neck is a curiously cut collar of dark red cloth, and in his hand he carries a white hood. Men do not confine themselves to the quiet, sober colours that we are accustomed to see; they are smarter than the ladies themselves. This knight, as he passes out, throws his gown back, before mounting his horse, and you see his yellow hose striped with black—trousers and stockings all in a piece, as it were—with low black shoes, and gilt spurs.

But who follows him?—this superbly dressed woman in rich blue glistening samite, with a black and gold hood, under which we see her hair bound with a golden fillet, and a necklace of costly pearls clasped round her throat—for it is a warm day, and she has not tied her hood. She must be somebody of consequence, for a smart gentleman leads her by the hand, and one with a long staff walks in front, to keep the people from pressing too close on her. She is indeed somebody of consequence—the Countess of Lincoln herself, by birth an Italian Princess; and she is so grand, and so rich, and so beautiful and stately—and I am sorry to add, so proud—that people call her the Queen of Lincoln. She has not far to go home—only through the archway, and past Saint Michael's Church and the Bull Gate, and then the great portcullis of the grim old Castle lifts its head to receive its lady, and she disappears from our sight.

Do you notice that carpets are spread along the streets for her?—not carpets like ours, but the only sort they have, which are a kind of rough matting. And indeed she needs them, if those purple velvet shoes of hers are not to be quite ruined by the time she reaches home. For there are no pavements, and the streets are almost ankle-deep in mud, and worse than mud. Dead cats, rotten vegetables, animal refuse, and every kind of abominable thing that you

could see or think of, all lie about in heaps, in these narrow, narrow streets, where the sun can hardly get down to the ground, and two people might sometimes shake hands from opposite windows in the upper stories, for they come farther out than the lower ones. Everybody throws all his rubbish into the street; all his slops, all his ashes, all his everything of which he wants to get rid. The smells are something dreadful, as soon as you come out of the perfumed churches. It is pleasanter to have the churches perfumed, undoubtedly; but it would be a good deal healthier if they kept the streets clean.

Quietly following the grand young Countess, at a respectful distance, come two women who are evidently mother and daughter. Their dress shows that they are not absolutely poor, but it tells at least as plainly that they are not at all rich. Just as they reach the west door, a little girl of ten comes quickly after them, dressed just like themselves, a woman in miniature.

“Why, Avice, where hast thou been?” says the elder of the two women.

“I was coming, Grandmother,” explains little Avice, “and Father Thomas called me, and bade me tell you that the holy Bishop would come to see you this afternoon, and sup his four-hours with you.”

Four-hours, taken as its name shows at four o’clock, was the meal which answered to our tea. Bishops do not often drink tea with women of this class, but this was a peculiar Bishop, and the woman to whom he sent this message was his own foster-sister.

“Truly, and I shall be glad to see him,” says the Grandmother; and on they go out of the west door.

The carpets which were spread for the Countess have been rolled away, and our three humble friends pick their steps as best they may among the dirt-heaps, occasionally slipping into a puddle—I am afraid Avice now and then walks into it deliberately for the fun of the splash!—and following the road taken by the Countess as far as the Bull Gate, they then turn to the left, leaving the frowning Castle on their right, and begin to descend the steep slope well named Steephill.

They have not gone many yards when two people overtake them—a man and a woman. The man stops to speak: the woman marches on with her arms folded and her head in the air, as if they were invisible.

“Good morrow, Dan,” says the old lady.

“Good morrow, Mother,” answers Dan.

“What’s the matter with Filomena?”

“A touch of the old complaint, that’s all,” answers Dan drily. “We’d a few words o’ th’ road a-coming—leastwise she had, for she got it pretty much to herself—and for th’ next twelve hours or so she’ll not be able to see anybody under a squire.”

“Is she often like that, Dan?”

“Well, it doesn’t come more days than seven i’ th’ week.”

“Why, you don’t mean to say it’s so every day?” said Agnes, the younger woman of our trio.

Dan shook his head. “Happen there’s an odd un now and then as gets let off,” said he. “But I must after her, or there’ll be more hot water. And it comes to table boilin’, I can tell you. Good morrow!”

Dan runs rather heavily after his incensed spouse, and our friends continue to pick their way down Steephill. For rather more than half the way they go, and when just past the Church of Saint Lawrence, they turn into a narrow street on the left, and in a few yards more they are at home.

Home is one of the smallest houses you ever saw. It has only two rooms, one above the other; but they are a fair size, being about twenty-five feet by sixteen. The upper, of course, is the bedroom; the lower one is kitchen and parlour; and a ladder leads from one to the other. The upper chamber holds a bed, which is like a box out of which the bottom has been taken, filled with straw, and on that is a hard straw mattress, two excessively coarse blankets, and a thick, shaggy, woollen rug for a counterpane. There are not any sheets or pillow-cases; but a thick, hard bolster, stuffed like the mattress with straw, serves for a pillow.

At the foot of the oak bedstead is a large oak chest, big enough to hold a man, in which the owners keep all their small property of any value. There are no chairs, but the deep windows have wooden seats, and two wooden stools are in the corners. As to wardrobes, chests of drawers, dressing-tables, and washstands, nobody knows of such things at that day. The chest serves the purpose of all except the washstand, and they find that (as much as they have of it) at the draw-well in the little back yard. The window is just a square hole in the wall, closed with a wooden shutter, so that light and air—if not wind and rain—come in together. A looking-glass they have, but a poor makeshift it is, being of metal and rounded; and those who know what a comical aspect your face takes when you see it in a metal teapot, can guess how far anybody could see himself rightly in it. It is nailed up, too, so high on the wall that it is not easy to see anything. This is all the furniture of the bedroom.

Downstairs there is more though there are no chairs and tables, unless a leaf-table in the wall, which lets down, can go by that name. There are two or three long settles stretching across the wall—the settle was called a bench when it had a back to it, and a form if it had not. There is a large bake-stone in one corner; the bread is put on the top to bake, with the fire underneath, and when there is no fire, the top can be used as a table, a moulding board, or in many other ways. But it must not be supposed that such bread is in large square or cottage loaves like ours. It is made in flat cakes, large or small, thick or thin. By the side of the bake-stone is the sink, or rather that which answers

to one, being a rough brick basin, with a plug in the bottom, and just beneath it is a little channel in the brick floor, by which, when the plug is pulled up, the dirty water finds its way out into the street under the house door. People who live in this way need—and wear—short gowns and stout shoes.

The opposite corner holds the pine-torches and chips; they burn nothing but wood, for though coal is known, it is very little used. This is partly because it is expensive; but also because it is considered shockingly unhealthy. The smoke from wood or turf is thought very wholesome; but that from coal is just the reverse. Opposite the bake-stone is the window; a very little one, much wider than it is high, and rilled with exceedingly small diamond-shaped panes of very poor greenish glass set in lead, there being so much lead and so little glass that the room is but dark in the brightest sunshine. Indeed, it is decidedly a sign of gentility that the house has any window at all, beyond the square hole with the wooden shutter.

Up and down the room there are several stools, high and low; the high ones serve when wanted as little movable tables. In the third corner is a bread-rack, filled with hard oat-cake above, and the soft flat cakes of wheat flour below; in the fourth stand several large barrels containing salt fish, salt meat, flour, meal, and ale. From the top of the room hang hams, herbs in canvas bags, strings of smoked fish, a few empty baskets and pails, and anything else which can be hung up. The rafters are so low that when the inmates move about they have every now and then to courtesy to a ham or a pail, which would otherwise hit them on the head. A door by the window leads into the street, and another beyond the barrels gives access to the back yard.

How would you like to go back, gentle reader, to this style of life? This was the way in which your forefathers lived, six hundred years ago—unless they were very grand people indeed. Then they lived in a big castle with walls two or three feet thick, and ate from gold or silver plates, and had the luxury of a chimney in their dining-rooms. But even then, there were a good many little matters in respect of which I do not fancy you would quite like to change with them! Would you like to eat with your fingers, and to find creeping creatures everywhere, and to have *no* books and newspapers, and no letters, and no shops except in great towns, and no way of getting about except on foot or horseback, and no lamps, candles, clocks or watches, china, spectacles, nor carpets on the floor? Yet this was the way in which kings and queens lived, six hundred years ago.

In respect of clothes, people were much better off. They dressed far more warmly than we do, and used a great deal of fur, not only for trimming or out-door wear, but to line their clothes in winter. But their furs comprised much commoner and cheaper skins than we use; ordinary people wore lambskins, with the fur of cats, hares, and squirrels. Such furs as ermine and miniver were kept for the great people; for there were curious rules and laws about dress in those days. It was not, as it is now, a question of what you could afford to buy, but of what rank you were. You could not wear ermine or samite unless you were an earl at the lowest; nor must you sleep on a feather bed unless you were a knight; nor might you eat your dinner from a metal plate, if you were not a gentleman. Such notions may sound ridiculous to us; but they were serious earnest, six hundred years ago. We should not like to find that we had to go before a magistrate and pay a fine, if our shoes were a trifle too long, or our trimmings an inch too wide. But in the time of which I am writing, this was an every-day affair.

In the house, women wore an odd sort of head-dress called a wimple, which came down to the eyebrows, and was fastened by pins above the ears. When they went out of doors, they tied on a fur or woollen hood above it. The gown was very loose, and had no particular waist; the sleeves were excessively wide and long. But when women were at work, they had a way of tucking up their dresses at the bottom, so as to keep them out of the perpetual slop of the stone or brick floor. Rich people put rushes on their floors except in winter, and as these were only moved once a year, all manner of unspeakable abominations were harboured underneath. In this respect the poor were the best off, since they could have their brick floors as clean as they chose: as, even yet, there are points in which they have the advantage of richer people—if they only knew it!

But our picture is not quite finished yet. Look out of the little window, and notice what you see. Can this be Sunday afternoon in a good street? for every shop is open, and in the doorways stand young men calling out to the passers-by to come in and look at their goods. “What lack you? what lack you?”

“Cherry ripe!”

“Buy my fine kerchiefs!”

“Any thimbles would you, maids?” Such cries as these ring on every side.

Yes, it is Sunday afternoon—“the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.” But look where you will, you can see no rest. Everywhere the rich are at play, and the poor are at work. What does this mean?

Think seriously of it, friends; for it will be no light matter if England return to such ways as these again, and there are plenty of people who are trying to bring them back. What it means is that if holiness be lost from the Sabbath, rest will never stay behind. Play for the few means work for the many. And let play get its head in, and work will soon follow.

If you want to walk the road of happiness, and to arrive at the home of heaven, you must follow after God, for any other guide will lead in the opposite direction. The people who tell you that religion is a gloomy thing are always the people who have not any themselves. And things are very different, according to whether you look at them from inside or outside. How can you tell what there may be inside a house, so long as all you know of it is walking past a shut door?

Ever since Adam hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden, men and women have been prone to fancy that God likes best to see them unhappy. The old heathen always used to suppose that their gods were jealous of them, and they were afraid to be too happy, lest the gods should be vexed! But the real God “takes pleasure in the prosperity of His people,” and “godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well

as of that which is to come.”

What language are our three friends talking? It sounds very odd. It is English, and yet it is not. Yes, it is what learned men call “Middle English”—because it stands midway between the very oldest English, or Anglo-saxon, and the modern English which we speak now. It is about as much like our English as broad Scotch is. A few words and expressions through the story will give an idea how different it is; but if I were to write exactly as they would have spoken, nobody would understand it now.

And how do they live inside this tiny house? Well, in some respects, in a poorer and meaner way than the very poorest would live now. Look up, and you will see that there is no chimney, but the smoke finds its way out through a hole above the fire, and when it is wet the rain comes in and puts the fire out. They know nothing about candles, but burn long shafts of pine-wood instead. There are such things as wax candles, indeed, but they are only used in church; nobody dreams of burning them in houses. And there are lamps, but they are made of gold and silver, and are never seen except in the big castles. There is no crockery; and metal plates, as I said, are only for the grand people. The middle classes use wooden trenchers—our friends have two—hollowed out to keep the gravy in; and the poor have no plates at all beyond a cake of bread. Their drinking-glasses are just cows’ horns, with the tip cut off and a wooden bottom put in. They have also a few wooden bowls, and one precious brass pot; half a dozen knives, rough unwieldy things, and four wooden spoons; one horn spoon is kept for best. Forks? Oh dear, no; nobody knows anything about forks, except a pitchfork. Table-linen? No, nor body-linen; those luxuries are only in the big castles. Let us watch Avice’s mother as she sets the table for four-hours, remembering that they are going to have company, and therefore will try to make things a little more comfortable than usual.

In the first place, there will be a table to set. If they were alone, they would use one or two of the high stools. But Agnes goes out into the little yard, and brings back two boards and a couple of trestles, which she sets up in the middle of the room. This is the table—rather a rickety affair, you may say; and it will be quite as well that nobody should lean his elbow on it. Next, she puts on the boards four of the cows’ horns, and the two trenchers, with one bowl. She then serves out a knife and spoon for each of four people, putting the horn spoon for the Bishop. Her preparations are now complete, with the addition of one thing which is never forgotten—a very large wooden salt-cellar, which she puts almost at one end, for where that stands is a matter of importance. Great people—and the Bishop is a very great person—must sit above the salt, and small insignificant folks are put below. We may also notice that the Bishop is honoured with a horn and a trencher to himself. This is an unusual distinction. Husband and wife always share the same plate, and other relatives very frequently. As to Avice, we see that nothing is set for her. The child will share her mother’s spoon and horn; and if the Bishop brings his chaplain, he will have a spoon and horn for himself, but will eat off the Grandmother’s plate.

Our picture is finished, and now the story may begin.

Chapter Two.

How Things Changed.

“Open the door, Avice, quick!” said Agnes, as a rap came upon it. “Yonder, methinks, must be the holy Bishop.”

Avice ran to the door, and opened it, to find two priests standing on the threshold. They entered, the foremost with a smile to the child, after which he held up his hand, saying, “Christ save all here!” Then he held out his hand, which both Agnes and her mother kissed, and sat down on one of the forms by the table. Every priest was then looked upon as a most holy person. Some of them were a long way from holiness. But there were some who really deserved the title, and few deserved it so well as Robert Copley, Bishop of Lincoln, whom, according to the fashion of that day, people called Grosteste, or Great-head.

For surnames were then only just beginning to grow, and very few people had them—I mean, very few had received any from their fathers. They had, therefore, to bear some name given to them. Sometimes a man was named from his father—he was Robert John-son, or John Wil-son. Sometimes it was from his trade; he was Robert the Smith, or John the Carter. Sometimes it was from the place where he lived; he was Robert at the Mill, or John by the Brook. But sometimes it was from something about himself, either as concerned his person or his ways; he was Robert Red-nose, or John White-hood, or William Turn-again. This is the way in which all surnames have grown. Now, as Bishop Copley’s soul lodged well (as Queen Elizabeth said of Lord Bacon), in a large head and massive brow, people took to calling him Great-head or Grosteste; and it is as Bishop Grosteste, not as Bishop Copley, that he has been known down to the present day.

I have said that he was a peculiar man. He was much more peculiar, at the time when he lived, than he would have been if he had lived now. Saint Peter told bishops that they were not to be lords over God’s heritage, but to be ensamples to the flock; but when Bishop Grosteste lived, most bishops were very great lords, and very poor examples. Bishops, and clergymen too, were fond of going about in gay clothes of all colours, playing at games, and even drinking at ale-houses. Many of them were positively not respectable men. But Bishop Grosteste and his chaplain were dressed in plain black, and they were of the few who walk not according to the course of this world. To them, “I like” was of no moment, and “I ought” was of great importance. And what other people would say, or what other people might be going to do, was a matter of no consequence whatever.

Such men are scarce in this follow-my-leader world. If you are so fortunate as to be related to one of them, take care you make much of him, for you may go a long way before you see another. With most people “I like” comes up at the top; and “What will people say?” comes next, and often pretty near; but “What does God tell me to do?” is a long way off, and sometimes so far off that they never come to it at all!

Bishop Grosteste lived in one of the darkest days of Christianity. Thick, dense ignorance, of all kinds, overwhelmed

the masses of the people. Books were worth their weight in gold, there were so few of them; and still worse, very few could read them. When we know that there was a law by which a man who had been sentenced to death could claim pardon if he were able to read one verse of a Psalm, it gives us an idea how very little people can have known, and what a precious thing learning was held to be. Even the clergy were not much wiser than the rest, and they were generally the best educated of any. Most of them could just get through the services, not so much by reading them as by knowing what they had to say; and they often made very queer blunders between words which were nearly alike. A few, here and there, were really learned men; and Bishop Grosteste was one of them. He had learned "all that Europe could furnish," and he knew so much that the poor ignorant people about him fancied he must have obtained his knowledge by magic. But far better than all this, Bishop Grosteste was taught of God. His soul was like a plant which grew up towards the light, and Jesus Christ was his Sun.

In this day of full, brilliant Gospel light, we can hardly imagine the state of affairs then. Perhaps one fact will help us to do it as well as many. In every house there was an image set up before which all prayers were said. Sometimes it was a crucifix, sometimes an image of the Virgin Mary, sometimes of some other saint—for the saints, male and female, were a great crowd. But the crucifix or the Virgin Mary were generally preferred; and why? Because the poor worshippers fancied that the crucifix had more power than the image of a saint, and that the Virgin was able to look after her own candle! A torch, or in later times a candle, was always burning in front of the image; and of course if the image could keep it alight, it was much less trouble to the worshipper!

But had they no common sense in those days? Well, really, it looks sometimes as if they had not. When men once turn aside from God's Word, it is impossible to say to what folly or wickedness they will not go. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; yea, it giveth understanding unto the simple."

Very few bishops then living would have taken any notice of the humble foster-sister who lived in that tiny house, and worked: for her living—she and her daughter being both widows, and the child dependent on them. It was hard work then, as now, for such people to get along. It is often really harder for them than for the very poor.

The guests being now come, Agnes dished up the four-hours—if that can be called dishing up when there were no dishes! She lifted a great pan off the hook where it hung over the fire—for it must be remembered there were no bars, and pans had to be hung over the fire by a handle like that of a kettle—and poured out into the bowl a quantity of soup. She then served out a cake of white bread to the Bishop—a rare dainty—black bread to the chaplain and her mother, and hard oat-cake for herself and Avice. They then began to eat, after the Bishop had made the sign of the crossover the bowl, which answered to saying grace; all the spoons going into the one bowl, the Bishop being respectfully allowed to help himself first.

"And how goes it now with thee, my sister Muriel?" asked the Bishop.

The Grandmother gave a little shake of her head, though she answered cheerfully enough.

"Things go pretty well, holy Father, I thank you. Work is off and on, as it may be; but we manage to keep a roof over our heads, as you see, and we can even find a bowl of broth and a wheat-cake for our friends. The Lord be praised for all His mercies!"

"Well said, my sister. And what do you intend to make of your little maid here?"

"Marry, I intend to make a good worker of her," said Agnes in her turn, "and not an idle giggling good-for-nought, as most of the lasses be. She shall spin, and weave, and card, and sew, and scour, and wash, and bake, and brew, and churn, and cook, and not let the grass grow under her feet, or else I'll see!"

"Truly a goodly list of duties for one maid," replied the Bishop, with a smile. "And yet, good Agnes, I am about to ask if thou canst find room for another on the top of them."

"Verily, holy Father, I am she that should work my fingers to the bone to pleasure you," was the hearty answer.

"I thank thee, good my daughter. How shouldst thou like to go to London?"

"To London, Father!" And Agnes's eyes grew as round as shillings.

To go to London was then looked on as a very serious matter. People made their wills before they started. And to ignorant Agnes, who had never in her life been ten miles from Lincoln, it sounded almost as tremendous an idea as being asked to go to the moon.

The Bishop smiled. He had been to Paris and Lyons.

"Ay, even to London town. I do indeed mean it, my daughter. There is, methinks, a career open to thee, which most should reckon rare preferment, and good success. Ah, what is success?" he added, as if to himself. "Howbeit, thou shalt hear. The Lady Queen lacketh nurses for her children, and reckoning thou shouldst well fill such a place, I made bold to speak for thee. And she thus far granted me, that thou shouldst go up to Windsor, where the King's children are kept, and she herself is at this present, there to talk with her, and let her see if thou art fit for the post. If on further acquaintance she be pleased with thee, then shalt thou be made nurse to one of the children; and if not, then the Lady Queen will pay thy charges home. What sayest, my daughter?—and thou also, Muriel, my sister?"

Both Muriel and Agnes felt as if their breath were taken away. As to Avice, she was listening with those large ears for which little pitchers are proverbial. The Bishop had spoken quietly, as if it were an every-day occurrence, of this enormous change which would affect their whole lives.

"Verily, Father, you are too good to us," said Muriel gratefully.

"And I will try to thank you, Father," added Agnes, "when I get back my senses, and can find out whether I am on my head or my heels."

The Bishop and his chaplain laughed; and Agnes, recalled to her duties by seeing the soup-bowl empty, jumped up and took down the spit on which a chicken was roasting at the fire. Chickens were dear just then, and this one had cost three farthings, having been provided in honour of company. People helped themselves in those days in a very rough and simple manner. Agnes held the chicken on the spit to the Bishop, who cut from it with his own knife the part he preferred; then she served the chaplain and Muriel in the same way, and lastly cut some off for herself and Avice. Finally, when little was left beside the carcase, she opened the back door, and bestowed the remains on Manikin the turnspit dog, a little wiry, shaggy cur, which, released from his labours, had sat on the hearth licking his lips while the process of helping went on, knowing that his reward would come at last. Manikin trotted off into the yard with his treasure, and Agnes came back to the table and the subject.

"Truly, holy Father, I know not how to thank you. But indeed I will do my best to deserve your good word, should it please God so to order the same."

"I doubt not thou wilt do well, my daughter. Bear thou in mind that Christ our Lord is thy Master, and thy service must be good enough to be laid at His feet. Then shalt thou well serve the Queen."

Agnes was a very ignorant woman. Bishop Grosteste, being himself a wise man, could not at all realise how ignorant she was. She knew very little how to serve God, but she did really wish to do it. And that, after all, is the great thing. Those who have the will can surely, sooner or later, find out how.

When the guests were gone, Agnes threw another log of wood upon the fire, and came and stood before it. "Well, Mother, what must we do touching this matter? Verily I am all of a tumblement. What think you?"

"I think, my daughter," said old Muriel calmly from the chimney-corner, "that we are not going to set forth for London within this next half-hour."

"Nay, truly; yet we must think well on it."

"We shall do well to sleep on it, and yet better to ask counsel of the Lord."

"But we must go, Mother! It would never do to offend the holy Bishop!"

"Bishop Robert my brother is not he that should be angered because we preferred God's counsel to his. But it may be that we shall find, after prayer and thought, that his counsel is God's."

It was to that conclusion they came the next day.

After the Bishop's departure, for a long time all was bustle and confusion. Agnes declared that she did not know where her head was, nor sometimes whether she had any. Avice was at the height of enjoyment. Old Muriel went quietly about her work, keeping at it, "doing the next thing," and got through more work than either.

The Bishop did all he could to help them. He found them a tenant for the house, lent them money—all his money not spent on real necessaries was either lent or given to such as needed it more than he did; and at last he sent them southwards on his own horses, and in charge of three of his servants. From Lincoln to Windsor was a five days' journey of rather long stages; and when at last they reached the royal borough, simple—minded Agnes had begun to feel as if no further power of astonishment were left in her mind.

"Dear, I never thought the world was so big!" she had said before they left Grantham; and when they arrived at Aylesbury, her cry was—"Eh, what a power of folks be in this world!"

Old Muriel took her journey, as she did everything, calmly. She, like Bishop Grosteste himself, lived too much with God to be easily startled or overawed by the grandeur of man. Avice was in a state of excitement and delight through the whole time.

They slept at a small inn; and the next morning, one of the Bishop's servants, who had received his orders beforehand, took up to the Castle a letter from his master, and waited to hear when it would please the Queen to see them. He came back in an hour, with the news that the Queen would receive them that afternoon.

Agnes was in a condition of restless flutter till the time came. Then they dressed themselves in their very best, and Luke, the Bishop's servant, took them up to the Castle.

If Agnes had felt confused at the mere idea of her interview, she found the reality still more overwhelming than she expected. The first thing she realised was that she stood in an immense hall, surrounded by what seemed to her a crowd of very smart gentlemen. Then they were led through passages and galleries, upstairs and downstairs, till Agnes felt as though she could never hope to find her way back; and at last, in a very handsome room, where the walls were covered with painting, and the furniture upholstered in silk, they came into the midst of a second crowd of very grand ladies. By this time poor Agnes had quite lost her head; and when one of the fine ladies asked her what she wanted, she could only drop a succession of courtesies and look totally bewildered. Old Muriel managed better.

"Under your leave, Madam, we have been sent for by my Lady the Queen."

"Oh, are you the people who come about the nurses' place?" said the young lady, who looked good-natured enough. "Follow me, and I will lead you to the Queen's chamber."

How many more chambers can there be? was the wonder uppermost in the mind of Agnes. But they walked through

several more, each to her eyes grander than the last, painted, with stained glass windows, and silk-covered furniture. At length the young lady desired them to wait a moment where they were, while she took in their names to the Queen. She drew back a crimson silk curtain, and disappeared behind it; and the three—for they had never thought of leaving Avice behind—stood looking round them in admiring astonishment. They were not left to wonder long. The curtain was drawn back, and the voice of some unseen person bade them go forward.

They found themselves in a smaller room than the last, beautifully decorated. The walls were painted a very pale blue, and large frescoes ornamented each side of the chamber. Thick marble columns, highly polished, jutted out into the room, and in the recess between each pair was a marble bench, with cushions of crimson samite. Two walnut-wood chairs, furnished with crimson samite cushions, stood in the middle of the room. Small leaf-tables were fixed to the walls here and there. The floor was of waxed wood, very slippery to tread upon. At the farther side of the room two doors stood open, side by side, the one leading to a little oratory in the turret, the other to a balcony which ran round the tower. In one corner a young lady sat at an embroidery frame, and in another a little girl of seven years old, who deeply interested Avice, was feeding her pet peacock. In one of the chairs, with some fancy work in her hand, sat a lady whose age was about twenty-eight, and whose rich dress of gold-coloured samite, and the gold and pearl fillet which bound her hair, divided Avice's attention with the child and the peacock. Agnes was dropping flurried courtesies to everybody at once. Muriel, who seemed to have a much better notion of what she ought to do, took a step forward, and knelt before the lady who sat in the chair.

"Lady," she said, "we are the Queen's servants."

Queen Eleanor, for it was she, looked up on them with a smile. She was a beautiful brunette, lively and animated when she spoke, but with an easy-going, lazy expression when she did not. It struck Avice, who had eyes for everything, and was making good use of them, that her Majesty might have brushed her rich dark hair a little smoother, and have fastened her diamond brooch less unevenly than she had done.

It was the pleasanter side of Queen Eleanor which was being shown to them. She could be very pleasant when she was pleased, and very kind and affable when she liked people. But she could be very harsh and tyrannical to those whom she did not like; and she was one of those many people with whom out of sight is out of mind. Let her see a suffering child, and she would be sorry and anxious to help; but a thousand suffering people whom she did not see, even if something which she did had made them suffer, were nothing at all to her.

The Queen liked her visitors. She thought old Muriel looked reliable; she was amused with the bewildered reverence of Agnes; and as to Avice, a child more or less in Windsor Castle mattered very little. She would do to feed the peacock when Princess Margaret did not choose to attend to it. So the bargain was soon struck; and almost before she had discovered what was going to happen to her, Agnes found herself the day-nurse of the Lord Richard, the little Prince who was then in the cradle. Muriel was made mistress of the nurses; and even little Avice received a formal appointment as waiting-damsel on the Princess Margaret, the little girl who was feeding the peacock. They were then dismissed from the royal presence.

"Thou hadst better go with them, Margaret Bysset," said the Queen, with a rather amused smile, to the young lady who had brought them in; "otherwise they may wander about all day."

Guided by Margaret Bysset, they retraced their steps through the suite of rooms, down winding stairs, and across the hall, to the great door which led into the courtyard of the Castle.

"Can you find your way now?" asked the young lady.

"Nay, we can but try!" said Agnes. "Pray you, my mistress, how many chambers be there in this Castle?"

"Truly, I have not counted them," was the laughing answer.

"Eh, dear, but I marvel if I can ever find mine own when we come to dwell here!"

"That will you soon enough. Look, here cometh your serving-man. Give you good morrow!"

A few days saw them safely housed in the Castle, where two of them were to dwell for ten years before they returned to their own home at Lincoln. But old Muriel was never to return. She lived through half that time, just long enough to hear of the death of Bishop Grosteste, who passed away on the ninth of October 1253. He literally died weeping for the sins of his age.

"Christ came into the world to save souls," were the words uttered with his last breath. "He who takes pains to ruin them, shall he not be called Antichrist? God built the universe in six days; but it took Him thirty years to redeem fallen man. The Church can never be delivered but by the sword from the Egyptian bondage in which the Popes hold her."

The good old Bishop could say no more. His voice broke down in tears; and with one great sob for England he yielded up his soul.

Chapter Three.

At Uncle Dan's Smithy.

The royal baby for whose benefit Muriel and Agnes had been engaged did not live long; but he was succeeded by his brother Prince William, and before he was old enough to do without nurses, a little Princess came upon the scene. She was the last of the family, and she lived three years and a half. After her death, the services of the nurses were

no longer needed. Queen Eleanor dismissed them with liberal wages and handsome presents, and the two who were left—Agnes and Avice—determined to go back to Lincoln. Avice was now a young woman of twenty.

But when they reached their old home, they found many changes. The good Bishop Grosteste was gone, but his chaplain, Father Thomas, had looked after their interests, and Agnes found no difficulty in recovering her little property. Happily for them, their tenants were anxious to leave the house, and before many days were over, they had slipped quietly back into the old place.

There were no banks in those days. A man's savings bank was an old stocking or a tin mug. Agnes disposed of the money she had left from the Queen's payment, partly in the purchase of a cow, and partly in a stocking, which was carefully locked up in the oak chest. They could live very comfortably on the produce of the cow and the garden, aided by what small sums they might earn in one way and another. And so the years went on, until Avice in her turn married and was left a widow; but she had no child, and when her mother died Avice was left alone.

"I can never do to live alone," she said to herself; "I must have somebody to love and work for."

And she began to think whom she could find to live with her. As she sat and span in the twilight, one name after another occurred to her mind, but only to be all declined with thanks.

There was her neighbour next door, Annora Goldhue: she had three daughters. No, none of them would do. Joan was idle, and Amy was conceited, and Frethesancia had a temper. Little Roese might have done, who lived with old Serena at the mill end; but old Serena could not spare her. At last, as Avice broke her thread for the fourth time, she pushed back the stool on which she was sitting, and rose with her determination taken, and spoke it out—

"I will go and see Aunt Filomena."

Aunt Filomena lived about a mile from Lincoln, on the Newport road. Her husband was a greensmith: that is to say, he worked in copper, and hawked his goods in the town when made. Avice lost no time in going, but set out at once.

As she rounded the last turn in the lane, she heard the ring of Daniel Greensmith's hammer on the anvil, and a few minutes' more walking brought her in sight of the smith himself, who laid down his hammer and shaded his eyes to see who was coming.

"Why, Uncle Dan, don't you know me?" said Avice.

"Nay, who is to know thee, when thou comes so seldom?" said old Dan, wiping his hot face with his apron. "Art thou come to see me or my dame?"

"I want to see Aunt Filomena. Is she in, Uncle Dan?"

"She's in, unless she's out," said Dan unanswerably. "And her tongue's in, too. It's at home, *that* is. Was this morning, anyhow. What dost thou want of her?"

"Well," said Avice, hesitating, "I want her advice—"

"Then thou wants what thou'lt get plenty of," said Dan, with a comical twist of his mouth, as he turned over some long nails to find a suitable one. "I'll be fain if thou'lt cart away a middling lot, for there's more coming my way than I've occasion for at this present."

Avice laughed. "I daresay Aunt is overworked a bit," she said. "Perhaps I can help her, Uncle Dan. Folks are apt to lose their tempers when they are tired."

"Some folks are apt to lose 'em whether they are tired or not," said the smith, with a shake of his grizzled head. "I've got six lasses, and four on 'em takes after her. I could manage one, and maybe I might tackle two; but when five on 'em gets a-top of a chap, why, he's down afore he knows it. I'm a peaceable man enough if they'd take me peaceable. But them five rattling tongues, that gallops faster than Sir Otho's charger up to the Manor—eh, I tell thee what, Avice, they do wear a man out!"

"Poor Uncle Dan! I should think they do. But are all the girls at home? I thought Mildred and Emma were to be bound apprentices in Lincoln."

"Fell through wi' Mildred," said the smith. "Didn't offer good enough; and She"—by which pronoun he usually designated his vixenish wife—"wouldn't hear on it. Emma's bound, worse luck! I could ha' done wi' Emma. She and Bertha's the only ones as can be peaceable, like me."

"Mildred's still at home, then?"

"Mildred's at home yet. And so's El'nor, and so's Susanna, and so's Ankaret; and every one on 'em's tongue's worse nor t'other. And"—a very heavy sigh—"so's She!"

Avice knew that Uncle Dan was usually a man of fewer words than this. For him to be thus loquacious showed very strong emotion or irritation of some sort. She went round to the back door, and before she reached it, she heard enough to let her guess the sort of welcome she might expect to receive.

Just inside the open door stood Aunt Filomena, a thin, red-faced, voluble woman, with her arms akimbo, pouring out words as fast as they could come; and in the yard, just outside the door, opposite to her, stood her daughter Ankaret, in exactly the same attitude, also thin, red-faced, and voluble. The two were such precise counterparts of one another that Avice had hard work to keep her gravity. Inside the house, Susanna and Mildred, and outside Eleanor,

were acting as interested spectators; the funniest part of the scene being that neither of them listened to a word said by the other, but each ran at express speed on her own rails. The youngest daughter, Bertha, was nowhere to be seen.

For a minute the whole appearance of things struck Avice as so excessively comical that she could scarcely help laughing. But then she realised how shocking it really was. What sort of mothers, in their turn, could such daughters be expected to make? She waited for a moment’s pause, and when it occurred, which was not for some minutes, she said—

“Aunt Filomena!”

“Oh, you’re there, are you?” demanded the amiable Filomena. “You just thank the stars you’ve got no children! If ever an honest woman were plagued with six good-for-nothing, sluttish, slatternly shrews of girls as me! Here’s that Ankaret—I’ve told her ten times o’er to wash the tubs out, and get ’em ready for the pickling, and I come to see if they are done, and they’ve never been touched, and my lady sitting upstairs a-making her gown fine for Sunday! I declare, I’ll—”

Her intentions were drowned in an equally shrill scream from Miss Ankaret. “You never told me a word—not once! And ’tain’t my place to scour them tubs out, neither. It’s Susanna as always—”

“Then I won’t!” broke in Susanna. “And you might be ashamed of yourself, I should think, to put such messy work on me when Eleanor—”

“You’d best let me alone!” fiercely chimed in Eleanor.

“Oh dear, dear!” cried Avice, putting her hands over her ears. “My dear cousins, are you going to drive each other deaf? Why, I would rather scour out twenty tubs than fight over them like this! Are you not Christian women? Come, now, who is going to scour the tubs? I will take one myself if you will do the others. Who will join me?”

And Avice began to turn up her sleeves in good earnest. “No, Avice, don’t you; you’ll spoil your gown,” said Eleanor, looking ashamed of her vehemence. “See, I’ll get them done. Mildred, won’t you help?”

“Well, I don’t mind if I do,” was the rather lazy answer.

But Ankaret and Susanna declined to touch the work, the latter cynically offering to lend her apron to Avice.

As Avice scrubbed away, she began to regret her errand. To be afflicted with such a lifelong companion as one of these lively young ladies would be far worse than solitude. But where was the youngest?—the quiet little Bertha, who took after her peaceable father, and whom Avice had rarely heard to speak? She asked Eleanor for her youngest sister.

“Oh, she’s somewhere,” said Eleanor carelessly.

“She took her work down to the brook,” added Mildred. “She’s been crying her eyes out over Emma’s going.”

“Ay, Emma and Bertha are the white chicks among the black,” said Eleanor, laughing; “they’ll miss each other finely, I’ve no doubt.”

Avice finished her work, returned Susanna’s apron, and instead of requesting advice from her Aunt, went down to the brook in search of Bertha. She found her sitting on a green bank, with very red eyes.

“Well, my dear heart?” said Avice kindly to Bertha.

The kind tone brought poor Bertha’s tears back. She could only sob out—“Emma’s gone!”

“And thou art all alone, my child,” said Avice, stroking her hair. She knew that loneliness in a crowd is the worst loneliness of all. “Well, so am I; and mine errand this very day was to see if I could prevail on thy mother to grant me one of her young maids to dwell with me. What sayest thou? shall I ask her for thee?”

“O Cousin! I would be so—” Bertha’s ecstatic tone went no farther. It was in quite a different voice that she said—“But then there’s Father! Oh no, Cousin. Thank you so much, but it won’t do.”

“That will we ask Father,” said Avice.

“Father couldn’t get on, with me and Emma both away,” said Bertha, in a tone which she tried to make cheerful. “He’d be quite lost—I know he would.”

“Well, but—” began Avice.

“Then he’d find his self again as fast as he could,” said a gruff voice, and they looked up in surprise to see old Dan standing behind them. “Thou’s done well, lass. Thou’s ta’en advice o’ thy own kind heart, and not o’ other folks. Thee take the little maid to thee, and I’ll see thee safe out on’t. She’ll be better off a deal wi’ thee, and she can see our Emma every day then. So dry thy eyes, little un; it’ll be all right, thou sees.”

“But, Father, you’ll not do without me!”

“Don’t thee be conceited, lass.” Old Dan was trying hard to swallow a lump in his throat. “I’ll see thee by nows and thens. Thou’ll be a deal better off. And there’s—there’s El’nor.”

“Eleanor’s not *always* in a good temper,” said Bertha doubtfully.

“She’s best o’ t’other lot,” said old Dan. “She’s none so bad, by nows and thens. I shall do rarely, thou’ll see. But, Avice—dost thou think thou could just creep off like at th’ lee-side o’ th’ house, wi’ the little maid, afore She sees thee? When thou’rt gone I’ll tell her, and then I’ll have a run for’t till it’s o’er. She’s better to take when first comings-off is done. She’ll smooth down i’ th’ even, as like as not, and then I’ll send El’nor o’er wi’ the little maid’s bits o’ gear. Or, if she willn’t go, I can bring ’em myself, when work’s done. Let’s get it o’er afore She finds aught out!”

Avice scarcely knew whether to laugh or to be sorry. Poor, weak, easy-tempered Dan! They took his advice, and crept round by the lee-side of the house, under cover of the hedge. When they were out of sight, with a belt of trees between, old Dan took leave of them.

“Thou’ll be good to the little maid, Avice,” said he. “I know thou will, or I’d never ha’ let her go. But she’ll be better off—ay, a deal better off, she’ll be. She gets put upon, she does. And being youngest, thou sees—I say, my lass, thou’d best call her aunt. She’s so much elder than thee; it’ll sound better nor cousin.”

“Very good, Father,” said Bertha. “But, O Father! who’ll stitch your buttons on, and comb your hair when you rest after work, and sing to you? O Father, let me go back!”

“Tut, tut, lass!” said old Dan, clearing his throat energetically. “If one wife and four daughters cannot keep a man’s buttons on, there’s somewhat wanting somewhere. I shall miss thy singing, I dare say; but I can come down, thou knows, of a holy-day even, to hear thee. And as to combin’—stars knows I shall get enough o’ that, and a bit o’er that I can spare for old Christopher next door. He’s got no wife, and only one lass, and she’s a peaceable un. He’s a deal to be thankful for. Now, God be wi’ ye both. Keep a good heart, and step out. I’ll let ye get a bit on afore I tell Her. And then I’ll run for’t!”

Avice and Bertha “stepped out” accordingly; and as nobody came after them, they concluded that things were tolerably smooth. They did not see anybody from the smithy until two days later; and then, rather late in the evening—namely, about six o’clock—Dan himself made his appearance, with one bundle slung on a stick over his shoulder, and another carried like a baby.

“Well!” said he, as he sat down on the settle, and wiped his hot face with his apron. “Well!”

“O Father, I’m so glad!” said Bertha. “Are those my things? How good of you to bring them!”

“Ay, they be,” said Dan emphatically. “Take ’em and make the best thou can of ’em; for thou’ll get no more where they came from, I can tell thee.”

“Was Aunt Filomena very much put out?” asked Avice, in a rather penitent tone.

“She wasn’t put out o’ nothing,” answered Dan, “except conduct becoming a Christian woman. She was turned into a wild dragon, all o’er claws and teeth, and there was three little dragons behind her, and they was all a-top o’ me together. If El’nor hadn’t thought better on’t, and come and stood by me, there wouldn’t have been much o’ me to bring these here.”

“Then you did not run, Uncle Dan?” replied Avice.

“She clutched me, lass!” responded Dan, with awful solemnity. “And t’others, they had me too. Thee try to run with a wild dragon holding on to thy hair, and three more to thy arms and legs—just do! I wonder I’m not tore to bits—I do. Howsome’er, here I be; and I just wish I could stop. Ay, I do so!”

And Dan’s apron took another journey round his face.

“Uncle Dan, would you like to take Bertha back?” was Avice’s self-sacrificing suggestion.

“Don’t name it!” cried Dan, dropping the apron. “Don’t name it! There wouldn’t be an inch on her left by morning light! I wonder there’s any o’ me. Eh, but this world is a queer un. Is she a good lass, Avice?”

“Yes, indeed she is,” said Avice.

“I’m fain to hear it; and I’m fain thou’s fallen on thy feet, my little un. And, Avice—if thou knows of any young man as wants to go soldiering, and loves a fray, just thee send him o’er to th’ smithy, and he shall ha’ the pick o’ th’ dragons. I hope he’ll choose Ankaret. He’ll get my blessing!”

Aunt Filomena seemed to have washed her hands of her youngest daughter. She never came near them; and Avice thought it the better part of valour to keep away from the smithy. When Emma had a holiday, which was a rare treat, she often spent it with her sister; and on still rarer occasions Eleanor paid a short visit. But the only frequent visitor was old Uncle Dan, and he came whenever he could, and always seemed sorry to go home.

Chapter Four.

Baby.

A very quiet life was led by Avice and Bertha. The house work was done by the two in the early morning—cleaning, washing, baking, churning, and brewing, as they were severally needed; and in the afternoon they sat down to their work, enlivened either by singing or conversation. Sometimes both were silent, and when that was the case,

unknown to Avice, Bertha was generally watching her features, and trying to read their meaning. At length, one evening after a long silence, she suddenly broke the stillness with a blunt question.

“Aunt, I wish you would tell me what you are thinking of when you look so.”

“How do I look, Bertha?”

“As if you were looking at something which nobody could see but yourself. Sometimes it seems to be something pretty, and sometimes something shocking; but oftener than either, something just a little sad, and yet as if there were pleasantness about it. I don’t know exactly how to describe it.”

“That will do. When a woman comes to fifty years, little Bertha, there are plenty of things in the past of her life, which nobody can see who did not go through them with her. And often those who did so cannot see them. That will leave a scar upon one which makes not a scratch upon another.”

“But of what were you thinking, Aunt, if I may know?”

“That thou mayest. I fancy, when thou spakest, I was thinking—as I very often do—about my little Lady.”

“Now, if Aunt Avice is *very* good,” said Bertha insinuatingly, and with brightened eyes, “that means a story.”

Aunt Avice smiled. “Ay, thou shalt have thy story. Only let us be sure first that all is done which need be. Cast a few more chips on the fire, and light another pine-torch; that is burnt nigh out. And see thy bodkin on the floor—careless child!”

Bertha jumped up and obeyed. From one corner of the room, where lay a heap of neatly-cut faggots, she brought a handful, and threw it into the wide fire-place, which stretched across half one side of the room, and had no grate, the fire burning on the stone hearth: then from a pile of long pointed stakes of pitch pine, she brought one, lighted it, and set it in an iron frame by the fire-place made for that purpose; and lastly, she picked up from the brick floor an article of iron, about a foot in length, and nearly as thick as her little finger, which she called a bodkin, but which we should think very rude and clumsy indeed.

“Hast thou heard, Bertha,” said Avice, “that when I was young, I dwelt for a season in the Castle of Windsor, and my mother was nurse to some of the children of the Lord King that then was? Brothers and sister they were of our Lord King Edward that reigns now.”

Bertha’s eyes brightened. She liked, as all girls do, to hear a story which had to do with great people.

“No, Aunt Avice, I never knew that. Won’t you tell me all about it?”

So Avice began and told her what we know already—how the Bishop had recommended Agnes to the Queen, and all about the journey, and the Castle, and the Queen herself. Then she went on to tell the rest of the story.

“We lived nigh five years,” said Avice, “in the Castle of Windsor—until the Lord Richard was dead, and the Lord William was nearly four years old. Then the Lady Queen removed to the royal Palace of Westminster, for the Lord King was gone over seas, and she with Earl Richard his brother was left to keep England. It was in August, the year of our Lord 1253, at we took up our abode in Thorney Island, where the Palace of Westminster stands. It is a marshy place—not over healthy, some folks say; but I never was ill while we dwelt there. And it was there, on Saint Katherine’s Day”—which is the 25th of November—“that our little Lady was born. Her royal mother named her Katherine, after the blessed saint. She was the loveliest babe that eye could rest on, and she was christened with great pomp. And on Saint Edward’s Day, when the Lady Queen was purified”—namely, churched—“there was such a feast as I never saw again while I dwelt with her. The provisions brought in for that feast were fourteen wild boars, twenty-four swans, one hundred and thirty-five rabbits, two hundred and fifty partridges, sixteen hundred and fifty fowls, fifty hares, two hundred and fifty wild ducks, thirty-six geese, and sixty-one thousand eggs.”

“Only think!” cried Bertha. “Did you get some, Aunt?”

“Surely I did, child. The Lady Queen, I told thee, was then keeper of England, for the Lord King was away across the seas; and good provision she made. Truly, she was free-handed enough at spending. Would she had been as just in the way she came by her money!”

“Why, Aunt, what mean you?” asked Bertha, when Avice expressed her wish that Queen Eleanor had been as just in gaining money as she was liberal in spending it.

“Why, child, taxes came heavy in those days. When the Lord King needed money, he sent home to his treasurer, and it was had as he could get it—sometimes by selling up divers rich folks, or by levying a good sum from the Jews, or any way man could; not always by equal tenths or fifteenths, as now, which comes not nigh so heavy on one or two when it is equally meted out to all. But never was there king like our late Lord King Henry (whom God pardon) for squeezing money out of his poor subjects. Yet old folks did use to say his father King John was as ill or worse.”

Taxes, in those days, were a very different thing from what they are now, and were far more at the mere pleasure of the King, not only as to the collecting of them, but as to the spending. Ignorant people fancy that this is the case still; but it is not so. Queen Victoria has no money from the taxes for her private spending. When she became Queen, she gave up all the land belonging to her as Queen, on condition that her daughters should be portioned, and that she should receive a certain sum of money every year, of less value than the land she gave up; so that it would be fraud and breach of trust in the people if they did not keep their word to pay the sum agreed on to the Queen. There is so much misunderstanding on this point that it is worth while to mention it.

“Then were the King and Queen—” Bertha began.

Avice answered the half-asked question. “They were like other folks, child. They liked their own way, and tried to get it. And they liked fine clothes, and great feasts, and plenty of company, and so forth; so they spent their money that way. I’ll not say they were bad folks, though they did some bad things they were folks that only thought what they liked, and did it; and folks that do that are sure to bring sorrow to themselves and others too, whether they be kings and queens or cooks and haymakers. The kings and queens can do it on a larger scale; that is all the difference. There are few enough that think what God likes, as holy Bishop Robert did, and like to do His will better than their own; those that do scatter happiness around them, as the other sort scatter misery.

“Well, after a while, the Lady Queen left England, to join the Lord King across seas; but before she went, she took our little Lady down to the Castle of Windsor to the rest of the King’s children. There was first the Lady Beatrice, who was a maiden of twelve years; and the Lord Edmund, a very pretty little boy of nine; and the Lord William, who was but four; and there were also with them other children of different ages that were brought up with them; but only one was near our little Lady’s age, or had much to do with her. That was Alianora de Montfort, daughter of Earl Simon of Leicester, that bold baron that headed the lords against the King; and her mother was the King’s own sister, the Lady Alianora. She was fifteen months older than our little Lady, and being youngest of all, the two used to play together. A sweet child she was, too; but not like my own little Lady—there never was a child like her.”

“What was she like, Aunt?”

“Tell me what the angels are like in Heaven, and thou shalt hear then. She is an angel now—she hath been one these three-and-twenty years. But methinks there can have been little to change in her face when she blossomed into a cherub, and the wings would unfold themselves from her as by nature. Never a child like her!—no, there never was one. She had bright, dark eyes, wonderful eyes—eyes that her whole soul shone in, and that took in everything which passed. She spoke with her eyes; she had no other way. The souls of other children came out of their lips; but she had not spent many months in this lower world, before we saw with bitter apprehension and deep sorrow that God had sealed her sweet lips with eternal silence. She saw all; she heard nothing; she could never speak. My darling was deaf and dumb.”

“O Aunt Avice!”

“Ay, verily at times I wondered if she were indeed an angel that God had sent down to earth, for whose pure lips our English was too rough, and our French too rude, and who could only speak the tongue they speak in Heaven. She went back but whence she came; we were not fit company for her. Methinks she was sent to let our earthbound hearts have one glimpse of that upper world; and when her work was done, her Father sent for her back home.

“Though our little Lady could never speak, yet long before we discovered that, we found how lively, and earnest, and intelligent she was. As I told thee, she talked with her eyes. Nothing could be done in her presence but she must see and know all about it. A little pull at my gown would tell me she was there; and then I turned to see the bright eager eyes looking into mine, and asking me as plainly as eyes could ask to let her know all about it. She would never rest till she knew what she wanted. Ay me, those eager eyes look into angels’ faces now, and maybe into the face of God upon the throne.”

“But, Aunt, how could she understand, if she could not hear?”

“God told her somehow, child. He taught her, not we. We did our best, truly; but our best would have been a poor business, if He had not taken her in hand. Many a time, before I had finished trying to explain something to her, that quick little nod would come which meant, ‘I understand.’ Then she had certain signs for different things. She made those herself; we never taught them to her. She stroked what she liked, as man would stroke a dog; when she disliked anything, she made a feint of throwing her open hand out from her, as though she were pushing it away. She had odd little ways of indicating different persons, by something in them which struck her. Master Russell, the Queen’s clerk, and keeper of the royal children, used often to have a sprig of mint or thyme in his lips as he went about; her sign for him was a bit of stick or thread between her lips. For the priest, she tolled a bell. For the Lady Beatrice, her sister, who had a little airy way of putting her head on one side when anything vexed her, and my Lord Henry de Lacy, who pouted if he were cross (which he was pretty often)—my little Lady imitated them exactly. The Lady Alianora flourished her hands when she spoke; that was the sign for her. For the Lord King, her father, whose left eyelid drooped over his eye, she pulled her own down. She had some such sign for everybody. She noticed everything.”

“Could she not say one word, Aunt?”

“Yes, she could say three. Verily, sometimes I marvelled if she might not have been taught more; but we knew not how, and how she got hold of those three we could never tell.”

“What were they?”

“They were, ‘up,’ ‘who,’ and ‘poor.’”

“Well, she could not do much with those.”

“Could she not! ‘Who’ asked all her questions. It answered for who, what, where, when, how, and why. She went on saying it until we understood and replied to the sense in which she meant it. ‘Poor’ was the word of emotion; it signified ‘I pity you,’ ‘I love you,’ ‘I am sorry,’ and ‘Forgive me.’ And sometimes it meant, ‘Forgive him,’ or ‘Don’t you feel sorry for her?’ And I think ‘up’ served for everything else.”

“Aunt,” said Bertha softly, “how did you teach the little Lady to pray? She could tell her beads, I suppose; but would

she know what they meant?”

For Bertha, like everybody else at that time, thought it necessary to keep count of her prayers. Prayer, in her eyes, was not so much communion with God, as it was a kind of charm which in some unaccountable way brought you good luck.

“Beads would have meant nothing to her but toys,” was Avice’s reply. “The Lady de la Mothe taught her the holy sign”—by which Avice meant the cross—“and led her to the image of blessed Mary, that she might do it before her. But I do not think she ever properly understood that She seemed only to have an idea that it was something she must do when she saw an image; and she did it to the statue of the Lady Queen in the great hall. We could not make her understand that one image was not the same thing as another image. But I fancy she had some idea—strange and dim it might be—of what we meant when we knelt and put our hands together and looked up. I know she did it very often, without telling—always at night, before she slept. But it was strange that she never went to the holy images at that time; she always seemed to go away from them, and kneel down in a corner. And in her last illness, several times, coming into the chamber, I found her lying with her hands folded in prayer, and her eyes lifted up to Heaven. Perhaps God Himself told her how to speak to Him. One of the strangest things of all was when the little Lord William died; she was nearly three years old then. She had been very fond of her little brother; he was nearest her age of all her brothers and sisters, though he was almost four years older than herself. She came to me sobbing bitterly, and with her little cry of ‘Who? who?’ I took it to mean ‘What has happened to him?’ and I was completely puzzled how to explain it to her. But all at once, while I was beating my brains to think what I could say that would make her comprehend it, she told me herself what I could not tell her. Making the sign for the little Lord who was dead, she laid her head upon her hand, and closed her eyes; and then all at once, with a peculiar grace that I never saw in any child but herself, she lifted her arms, fluttering her fingers like a bird flaps its wings, and gazing up into the sky, while she said, ‘Up! up!’ in a kind of rapture. And I could only smile and bow my head to the truth which God had told her.” (See Note 1.)

II. 36

“She lifted her arms, fluttering her fingers, like a bird flaps its wings, and gazing up into the sky, while she said, ‘Up! up!’ in a kind of rapture.”—*Page 81.*

“But how could she know it?” asked astonished Bertha.

Avice shook her head. “I cannot explain it; I can only tell what happened. She was always very tender-hearted; she never could bear to see any quarrelling, or cruelty, or injustice. If two of the children strove together, our little Lady would run to them with a face of deep distress, and take a hand of each and draw them together, as though she were begging them to be friends; and if she could not get them to kiss each other, she would kiss first one and then the other. I missed her one day, and, after hunting a long while, I found her in the gallery before a fresco of our Lord upon the Cross. She was stroking it and kissing it, with tears in her eyes; and she turned to me saying, ‘Poor! poor!’ Her eyes always filled with tears when she saw the crucifix. The moon used to interest her exceedingly; she would sit and watch it, and kiss her hand to it. But, dear me! how the time must be getting on! Jump up, Bertha, and prepare supper.”

Bertha folded up her work and put it aside. She drew one of the high stools between her aunt and herself, and put out upon it the two wooden trenchers and two tin mugs. Going to a corner cupboard, Bertha brought out a few cakes of black bread, which she set on a smaller stool beside the other; and then, lifting a pan upon the fire, she threw into it some pieces of mutton fat. As soon as these were melted, Bertha broke four eggs into them, stirring this indigestible mixture with a wooden thible—an article of which my northern readers will not require a description, but the southern must be told that it is a long flat instrument with which porridge is stirred. For the eggs were not merely fried in the fat, but were beaten up with it, the dish when finished bearing the name of franche-mule. A sprig or two of dried herbs were then shred into the pan, and the whole poured out, half on each of the trenchers. It is more than possible that the extraordinarily rich, incongruous, indigestible dishes wherein our fathers delighted, may have something to do with the weaker digestions of their children. The tin mugs were filled with weak ale from a barrel which stood under the ladder. It was an oddity at that time to drink water.

When supper was finished, Bertha washed the mugs and scraped the trenchers clean (water never touched those), putting them back in their places. She had scarcely ended when a tap was heard at the door.

“Step in, Hildith,” said Bertha, as she opened it. “Christ give thee a good even!”

“The like to thee,” was the answer, as a rather worn-looking woman came in. “Mistress Avice, your servant. Pray you, would you lend me the loan of a tinder-box? I am but now come home from work, and am that weary I may scarce move; and yon careless Jaket hath let the fire out, and I must needs kindle the same again ere I may dress supper for the children.”

It was no wonder if Hildith looked worn out, or if she could not afford a tinder-box. That precious article cost a penny, and her wages were fifteen pence a year. If we do a sum to find out what that would be now, when money is much more plentiful, we shall find that Hildith’s wages come to twenty-two shillings and sixpence, and the tinder-box was worth eighteen-pence. We should fancy that nobody could live on such a sum. But we must remember two things: first, they then did a great deal for themselves which we pay for; they spun and wove their own linen and woollen, did their own washing, brewed their own ale and cider, made their own butter and cheese, and physicked themselves with herbs. Secondly, prices were very much lower as respected the necessaries of life; bread was four loaves, or cakes, for a penny, of the very best quality; a lamb or a goose cost fourpence, eight chickens were sold for fivepence, and twenty-four eggs for a penny. Clothing stuffs were dear, but then (as people sometimes say) they wore “for everlasting,” and ladies of rank would send half-worn gowns to one another as very handsome presents. Fourpence was a good price to give for a pair of shoes, and a halfpenny a day for food was a liberal allowance.

“Any news to-night, Hildith?” asked Avice, as she handed her neighbour the tinder-box.

“Well, nay; without you call it news that sheriffs man brought word this morrow that the Lord King had granted the half of her goods to old Barnaba o’ the Lichgate.”

“She that was a Jew, and was baptised at Whitsuntide? I am glad to hear that.”

“Ay, she. I am not o’er sorry; she is a good neighbour, Jew though she be.”

“Then I reckon she will tarry here, and not go to dwell in the House of Converts in London town?”

“Marry, she will so, if she have any wisdom teeth left. I would not like to be carried away from all I know, up to yon big town, though they do say the houses be made o’ gold and silver.”

Avice smiled, for she knew better.

“Nay, Hildith, London town is built of brick and stone like Lincoln.”

“Is it, now? I always heard it was made o’ gold. But aren’t there a vast sight o’ folk there? nigh upon ten thousand?”

“Ay, and more.”

“However do they get victuals for them all?”

“I got mine when I lived there,” said Avice, laughing.

“And don’t they burn sea-coal?”

“They did once; it is forbidden now.”

“Dirty, poisonous stuff! I wouldn’t touch it. Well, good-even. Shut the door quick, Bertha, and don’t watch me out o’ sight; ’tis the unluckiest thing man can do.”

And Bertha believed it, as she showed by shutting the door.

Old Barnaba, the Jewess, had been dealt with tenderly. In those days, if a Jew were baptised, he forfeited all he had to the King. Most unaccountable it is that any Christian country should have let such a law exist for an hour! These destitute Jews, however, were provided for in the House of Converts, in London, which stood at the bottom of Chancery Lane, between it and Saint Dunstan’s Church.

It was bed-time soon after. Avice put away her distaff, Bertha folded up her sewing, and they mounted the ladder. This was about seven o’clock, which was then as late an hour as it was thought that respectable people ought to be about. But by two o’clock the next morning, Bertha was sweeping the kitchen, and Avice carding flax in the corner. They did not trouble themselves about breakfast; it was an unknown luxury, except for people who were very old or very delicate. Two meals a day were the rule: dinner, at nine in the morning: supper, at three in the afternoon. In those days they lived in a far harder and less comfortable way than we do, and they had generally better health. But, it must be admitted, they did not live nearly so long, and the infant mortality among them was very great.

Morning was no time for story-telling. The rooms had to be swept, the bread to be baked, the clothes to be washed, the pigs and chickens to be fed. Moreover, to-day was the first day of the Michaelmas fair, and things must be bought in to last till Christmas. The active work was finished by about seven o’clock. Dinner was now got ready. It consisted of two bowls of broth, then boiled dumplings, and lastly some stewed giblets. Having made things tidy, our friends now tied on woollen hoods, and each taking down from the rafter-hooks a capacious basket, they went forth to do their shopping.

Note 1. The peculiar ways attributed to the little Princess, and especially this incident, are taken from an account of a real deaf and dumb child, published many years ago. There was certainly something about the Princess which her attendants considered wonderful and beautiful.

Chapter Five.

The Dumb Playmates.

Out into the Michaelmas fair our friends went.

In these days, when fairs have quite changed their character, we cannot easily form a notion of what they once were. The fair, held in every town four times a year, was a very important matter. There were much fewer shops than now; and not only in the town, but from all the surrounding villages people flocked to the fair, to lay in food and clothes and all sorts of necessaries, enough to last till the next fair-day. They had very little fresh butcher's meat, and very few vegetables except what they grew themselves; so they ate numbers of things salted which we have fresh. Not only salt fish and salt neat, but salt cabbage formed a great part of their diet. The consequence of all this salt food was that they suffered dreadfully from scurvy. But they did not run to the doctor, for except in rare instances there was no doctor to run to! All doctors were clergymen then, and there were very few of them. In the large towns there were apothecaries, or chemists, who often prescribed for people; and there were "wise women" who knew a good deal about herbs, and sometimes gave good medicines, along with a great deal of foolish nonsense in the way of charms and all sorts of silly fancies. At that time, ladies were taught a good deal about medicine, and a benevolent lady was often the doctor for a large neighbourhood. But we are wandering away from the Michaelmas fair, and we must come back.

The fair was a very busy scene. In some places it was hard work to get along at all. The booths were set up, not in the streets but in the churchyards, the market place, and on any waste space available. And what with the noise of business, the hum of gossip, the shouts of competing sellers, and the sound of hundreds of clogs on the round paving-stones, it may be readily supposed that quiet was far away.

Avice's first business was to lay in a stock of salt meat and salt fish. Very little of either was used fresh, for it was not obtainable: and still less would have been used so far as fish is concerned, had not the law, alike of the Church and of the State, compelled it to be eaten throughout Lent, and on every Friday in the year. Little enough fish would anybody have touched then, but for that provision. Avice bought half of a salted calf, which cost a shilling; five hundred herrings, at half-a-crown; a bushel of salt, at threepence (which was dear); twenty-five stock-fish, at two shillings; a quarter of a sheep, at fourpence; a quarter of wheat, at six shillings; a quarter of oats, at five shillings; half a quarter of salt cabbage, at five shillings; and five pounds of figs, at three-halfpence a pound. This was her provision for the three months which would elapse before the Christmas fair. She then went to the drapery stalls, and laid in two hoods, for herself and Bertha, at a shilling each; ten ells of russet, to serve for two gowns, at eighteen-pence the ell; twelve ells of serge, at three-halfpence the ell; two pairs of shoes, at fourpence each. The russet was intended for their best dresses; the serge for common. Considering how very little went to make a garment, it seems likely that our ancestors wove their stuff a good deal wider than we do. Avice also laid in a few other articles of different kinds: a brass pot, which cost her 2 shillings 2 pence; five pounds of tallow, at three-halfpence a pound, and as many of wax at sixpence; wax was largely used for a variety of objects. Her last and costliest purchase she would have been better without. It was a painted and gilded image of Saint Katherine, and cost fifteen shillings. But Avice, though a good woman according to her light, had enjoyed very little light, and did not understand half so well as we do that she might go straight to God through the new and living way opened upon the cross, without the intervention of any mediator except the Lord Jesus. She thought she must pray through a saint; and she had no idea of praying unless she could see something to pray to. Her old image had lost much of its paint, and half an arm, and its nose was hopelessly damaged. Therefore, as she must have one, poor Avice thought it best to buy a new one, rather than have her old saint tinkered up. Alas for the gods or the mediators who require to be tinkered!

By the time that these purchases were made, and the goods brought home, it was not far from the supper hour; and Bertha prepared that meal by boiling a dish of salt cabbage from one of the barrels. This, with black bread and ale, made their supper.

The meal was just ready, and Avice had put away her carding, having finished that kind of work for the day, when a rap at the door was followed by the lifting of the latch, and the old smith put in his head.

"Any room for a man, have ye?"

"Plenty for you, Uncle Dan," answered Avice heartily; and Bertha's eyes lighted up at the sight of her father.

Dan came forward and sat down on the stool which Bertha set for him.

"Has it not been a charming day?" said Avice.

"Ay, it's fine weather i' Lincoln," was Dan's dry answer. "Up at smithy, it's none so bad neither—yet. Just a touch of thunder we had this morning,—a bit of a grumble i' th' distance like: but I've known worser storms a deal. Ay, I have so!"

Avice quite understood what kind of storm he meant.

"How do you get on without me, Father?" asked Bertha.

"Well, I'll not say I don't miss thee, my singing bird; but I'm willing, when it's for thy good. I've got—let me see—two

buttons left o' my blouse, and I think there's one o' my flannel shirt, but I'm none so sure. It's rather troublesome, for sure, when there's none o' th' sleeves; they keep for ever a-slippin' up man's arm; but I could put up wi' that easy if there was nought more. It's true I don't want to pull 'em down while even comes."

"Oh, Father, let me sew you some on!" cried Bertha.

"So thou shall," said Dan. "But I've a bit o' news for thee, lass. Susanna's to be wed."

"With whom, Uncle?"

"Michael, cartwright, at corner."

"Is it a good match?"

"He's got his match, and she's got hern."

"They are well matched, then," said Bertha, laughing.

"They're a pair," said Dan, grimly. "He's eagre, and she's mustard; and they'll none mix ill—but they'll set folks' throats a-fire as meddles wi' 'em."

Eagre is the old English word for vinegar, which is just "wine-eagre." It means anything sharp and acid.

"Is Aunt Filomena pleased?" asked Avice.

"She's never pleased wi' nothing," was the reply of her unfortunate husband. "She give him lots o' sauce when he first come, and he's had another spoonful every time since. He gives it her every bit as hot—I will say that for him. His mother went by name o' old Maud Touchup, and he doth her no disfavour. She knew how to hit folks—*she* did. And Michael's a chip o' th' old block."

"A little more cabbage, Uncle Dan?"

"Nay, I thank thee. I must be going home, I reckon. Eh, but you're peaceable here! I reckon man could sleep i' this house, and not be waked up wi' jarring and jangling. I tell thee what, Avice—when the big folks up to London town runs short o' money, I wonder they don't clap a bit of a tax on women's tongues! It'd bring 'em in a tunful in a week, *that* would."

"How would you collect it, Uncle Dan?"

"Nay, there thou floors me. They'd best send down a chap all over steel to th' smithy, He'd get plucked o' pieces else. Well, God be wi' thee, Avice. God bless thee, Bertha, my lass. Good-night!"

And Uncle Dan disappeared into the darkness. There were no street lamps then. Every man had to carry his own lantern, unless he chose to run the risk of breaking his neck over the round stones which formed the streets, or the rough ground, interspersed with holes and pits, to be found everywhere else.

They now sat down to work for the rest of the evening, Avice on the settle in the corner, Bertha on one of the low stools which she brought up to the hearth.

"Lack-a-day! what have I forgot!" said Avice as Bertha drew up her stool and unfolded the apron she was making. "I thought to have asked Nora Goldhue for a sprig of betony, or else purslane. 'Tis o'er late to-night, and verily I am too weary to go forth again."

"Have you bad dreams, Aunt?" asked Bertha, knowing that a sprig of either of those herbs under the pillow was believed to drive them away.

"Ay, child; they have troubled me these four nights past, but last night more especially."

No wonder, after a supper on franche-mule! But it never occurred to ignorant Avice that supper and dreams could have anything to do with one another.

"Shall I fetch you a laurel leaf, Aunt?" suggested Bertha.

"Ay, do, child; maybe that shall change the luck. Best go ere it rain, too; and that will not be long, for I saw a black snail in the channel as we came in."

Bertha tied on her hood, and ran out to the house of the next-door neighbour, who had a laurel in her garden, to beg a few of its leaves, which were supposed to bring pleasant dreams. Having placed these under her aunt's bolster, she sat down again to her work, and Avice resumed her interrupted story.

"It was in July, 1254, when our little Lady was but eight months old, that the Lady Queen set forth to join the Lord King in Gascony. There were many ships taken up for her voyage, amongst which were the *Savoy*, the *Falcon*, and the *Baroness*, that was my Lord of Leicester's ship. In the ship wherein the Lady Queen sailed, was built a special chamber for her, of polished wood, for the which three hundred planks were sent from the forest to Portsmouth. But so short was she of money, that she was compelled to bid the Treasurer to send her all the cups and basins which the King had of silver, and all gold in coin or leaf that could be found in the treasuries. Moreover, the Jews throughout England were distrained for five thousand marks, for the ransom of their bodies, and their wives and little ones, and by sale of their lands and houses. The Lady Queen took with her divers pieces of English cloth for the Lord King, seeing that French cloth is not nigh so good. Some things also she commanded for the children, who were to tarry at

Windsor during her absence. Twenty-four silver spoons were made, and fifty wild animals taken for their provision in the park at Guildford. Robes were served out, furred with hare's fur, for Edmund the King's son and Henry de Lacy; four robes for the gentlewomen that had the care of the children; and for Richard the chaplain, Master Simon de Wycumb the keeper, and Master Godwyn the cook: these were of sendal. And there were robes furred with lamb for the King's wards, and for John the Varlet, and Julian the Rocker, and my mother, and me thine aunt." (See Note 1.)

Both to Avice and Bertha it seemed quite a matter of course that the Jews should find the money when the King wanted silk, or the King's children silver spoons.

"But it seems to me, Aunt," suggested Bertha, "that the Lady Queen must have spent all her money before she started."

"Oh no! the money was for the Lord King. In truth, I know not whether she paid for the other things. But I did hear that as soon as the Lord King knew she would come, and that she was bringing with her so much money and plate, he began to spend with both hands on his side of the sea. He sent at once for six cloths of gold that the Queen and Lord Edward might offer in the churches of Bordeaux when they should arrive there; he commanded to be made ready a fair jewel for Saint Edward the Martyr, and a hundred pounds of jewels for Saint Edward the King, and divers more for Saint Thomas of Canterbury, all which were offered when he and the Queen returned home in December. There came in also, for the King's coming back, many frails of figs, raisins, dates, cinnamon, saffron, pepper, ginger, and such like; I remember seeing them unpacked in Antioch Chamber, the little chamber by the garden."

"And what did it all cost, Aunt?"

"I know not, child. Maybe he never paid for those. He used to pay for such things as he offered to the holy saints; but for debts to tradesfolk and such, they took their chance. If he had money, he might pay some of them or no, at his pleasure; and if not, then of course they had to wait. Very sure am I that many a pound of musk came into the wardrobe more than was paid for. Never was such a Prince for scents. He loved musk as much as he feared lightning; and there was only one thing in all this world that he feared more, and that was Earl Simon of Leicester."

"And did the Lady Queen squander her money as much as the Lord King, Aunt Avice?"

"She was every bit as bad. She always seemed to me as if a piece of her brains had never grown up along with the rest. Some folks are like that. In respect of money, she was a very child. She had not a notion how far it would go, and she never would wait to have it before she spent it. She always appeared to think it would come somehow: and so far as she was concerned, it often did. But then she never saw the homeless Jews who were sold up to furnish it, nor the ruined tradesmen who had to wait till they could not pay their own way, and were sent to prison for debt. I think she might have been sorry, if she had done. I suppose we should all be sorry, if we knew half the evil we do. Well, God pardon her!—she is a holy sister now in the priory at Amesbury. And our present Queen always pays her bills, I have heard say. Long may she live to do it!"

"How old was the little Lady when her parents came back?"

"She was just over a year old. I waited on her from the Castle of Windsor to the Palace at Westminster, for the Lord King desired to behold her at once. And was not he delighted with her! I doubt if any of the royal children were as dear to the hearts of their parents as our little Lady."

"Was she pleased to go?"

"Pleased!—she gave nobody a bit of rest," said Avice, laughing. "All the journey through she was plucking at my gown, and pointing, first here and then there, with her little cry of 'Who? who?'—for she talked at fifteen months old as much as she ever spoke in this world. And before I could find out what she meant, she was pointing to something else, and 'Who? who?' came over again."

"Did you know then that she was deaf and dumb?"

"No! nor for months after. Truly, all her ways were so bright, and her sense so keen, and her laugh so gladsome, that we never thought of such a thing till she was long past the age when children ought to speak freely. But when at last they began to fear the truth, it was indeed a bitter grief to the royal parents. The Lord King offered five cloths of gold at Saint Edward's shrine for the children, and specially for our little Lady, in hope that the Divine mercy might be moved to have pity on her. But it was all in vain."

Avice sighed heavily. And there was no one to say to her, O woman, *small* is thy faith! Was the Divine mercy no greater, which called that little child, unspotted by the world, to tread the fair streets of the Golden City, than the mercy thou wouldst have had instead of it?

"It was not long after that," said Avice, slowly drawing out the white threads, "that our little Lady's health began to fail. The heats of summer tried her sorely. She drooped like a flower that had no water. Instead of playing with the other children, her gleeful laughter ringing through the galleries of the Castle, she would come and draw her little velvet stool to my side, and lay her head on my knee as if she were very weary. And when I looked down and smiled on her, instead of smiling back as she was wont, the great, dark wistful eyes used to look up so sadly, as if her soul were looking out of them. Oh, it was pitiful to read the dear eyes, when they said, 'I am suffering: cannot you help me?' And as time went on, they said it more and more. When the Lady Queen came to Windsor, she was shocked at the sad change in our darling little Lady. She called in Master Thomas, the King's surgeon, and he advised that our little Lady should be removed from Windsor to some country place, where the air was good, and where she could play about in the fields. So she was put in charge of Emma La Despenser, Lady de Saint John, at her manor of Swallowfield, in Berkshire. Of course I went with her, and her cousin Alianora also, who was her favourite playfellow, for it was not thought well she should be entirely with older people, though I cannot say I was sorry to get rid of all

those rough boys. The Lord King also commanded that a kid should be taken in the forest, as small and fair as might be found, for our little Lady to play with: and very fond she was of it. It was a lovely little creature, and grew as tame as possible. Ah, they were much alike, those two little things!—both young, soft, lovely—and both dumb! I marvelled sometimes whether they understood each other.”

“And did she not get any better, Aunt?”

“Yes; for a time she did. The country air and food and quiet did seem to do her good. She was so much better that she came back to Windsor for the winter. But it was not thought well by Master Thomas that she should go to London to be present at the great rejoicings that were made when the Lady Alianora came from Spain—our Queen that now is, the holy saints bless her! There were grand doings then, I heard; all London city was curtained in her honour, and processions in every church, and all superbly decorated; and the poor fed in the halls at Westminster, as many as could get in; and the Lord King presented a silver cross to the Abbey, and a golden plate of an ounce weight. Oh, it must have been a grand sight!”

“Who paid that bill, I wonder?” said Bertha, laughing.

“Bless thee, child! how do I know? That was the autumn when there was so much ado here at Lincoln touching the crucifixion of the blessed Hugh, son of Beatrice, by the wicked Jews; one hundred and more of them were brought to prison, first here, and afterwards at Westminster; and when eighteen had been hanged, the rest were graciously allowed to buy their lives for eighteen thousand marks. I daresay some of that went for it—that is, for as much of it as got paid for.”

That sum would now be equal to about two hundred and sixteen thousand pounds. It never came into Avice’s head to doubt whether the Jews had crucified little Hugh. Such charges were often enough brought against them—when those who called themselves Christians wanted an excuse for stealing the jews’ money and jewels. There has never been a single instance, in this country or any other, in which the charge has been proved true. A further favourite accusation, that the Jews used the blood of Christian children to make their passover cakes, we know cannot have been true; for the Bible tells us that the Jews were strictly forbidden to eat blood. But what absurdity might not be expected from people who had no Bibles, and of whom not more than one in a thousand could have read it if he had had one? Are we half thankful enough for our own privileges?

“Well!” continued Avice, “after this, the Lady Alianora came down to Windsor with the Lady Queen, and our little Lady and she took to one another wonderfully. And, indeed, it was little wonder, for she was as fair and sweet a damsel as ever tripped over the greensward. Our little Lady would run to her whenever she sat down in the children’s chamber, and say, ‘Up! up!’ and then the Lady Alianora would smile sweetly, and take her up beside her in the great state chair; and there they sat with their arms round one another, looking like two doves with their heads resting on each other’s necks. And the Lady Alianora once said to me, stroking our little Lady’s hair—‘I hope, Avice, thou givest her plenty of love. She can understand that, if she cannot anything else.’ Ay, and so she could! She fretted sadly over the Lady Alianora when she went away from Windsor. I think she and the little kid were more than ever together after that. I have found them both asleep in a corner of the chamber, resting on one another.”

“Was she fond of pets?”

“She loved her little kid dearly, and she seemed to go to it for comfort. I do not know that she cared much for anything else. The Lord King was the one for gathering curious animals of all sorts. He had three leopards in the Tower, and a white bear, which was taken out to fish in the Thames; the citizens of London paid fourpence a day for the bear’s keep, and had to provide a chain and muzzle for it, and a long cord whereby it was held when it fished in the river. And in the spring, before the coming of the Lady Alianora, the French King sent to our King a very strange animal, the like of which was never before seen in England. It had scarcely any eyes that man might see, and not much of a tail; but great flapping ears, and a most extraordinary thing that hung down from its face, which was hollow like a pipe, and it could pick things up with it as thou dost with thy fingers. It was a lead-coloured beast, and ate nought but grass and hay and such-like; it would not touch meat nor bones. They called it an oliphant,”—for so in old time people pronounced elephant. “The Lord King thought great things of this beast, and had a house built for it, forty feet by twenty, at the Tower: it was made very strong, lest the great beast should break forth and slay men. But truly it seemed a peaceable beast enough.

“We dwelt much more quietly at Windsor, after the departure of the Lady Alianora. For she went abroad with the Lord Edward her husband, and Mariot de Ferrars, who had been there for some time—she went too; and the King’s son Edmund was made King of Sicily by the Lord Pope, and he and the other lads were taken away; our little Lady and her cousin Alianora de Montfort alone were left. The King thought to have made money by Edmund his son; he was a fair boy in very truth, and he clad him in Sicilian dress, which was graceful and comely, and showed him before the Parliament, entreating them to find him money for all these many expenses. But the Parliament did not seem disposed to pay for seeing the young Lord. And, indeed, I heard Master Russell say that he thought it strange the Lord King should make merchandise of his child’s beauty, as though he were some curious animal to be seen in a show. But Bertha, my dear heart! we clean forgot to buy any honey—and only this minute is it come to my mind. Tie on thine hood, I pray thee, and run to the druggist for an half-dozen pounds.”

When it is understood that honey held in Avice’s cookery and diet the place that sugar does in ours, the necessity of remedying this mistake will be seen. Sugar was much too expensive to be used by any but wealthy people.

Note 1. The robes provided for Agnes and Avice are the sole imaginary items in this account. Sendal was a very thin silk.

Chapter Six.

Set Free.

As Bertha came back, carefully carrying her jar of honey, she heard a considerable tumult in a street on her left hand, which led to the Jews’ quarter of the city. In every town, the Jews were shut up in a particular part of it; and after London itself, the towns in which the greatest number of Jews lived were Lincoln, York, Norwich, Oxford, and Northampton. Since the dreadful persecution arising from the (real or supposed) murder of little Hugh, Lincoln had been comparatively quiet from such tumults; and Bertha was too young to know anything about it but from hearsay. Wondering if some fresh commotion was going to arise, and anxious to be safe at home before it should begin, Bertha quickened her steps. There were only three more streets to cross, one of which was a dark, narrow alley leading directly to the Jews’ quarter. As Bertha crossed this, she heard a low, frightened call upon her name, and a slight figure crept out and crouched at her feet.

“O Bertha!” said a girl’s voice, broken by sobs and terrified catching of the breath, “you are kind-hearted; I know you are. You saved a little dog that the dreadful boys were trying to drown. Will you save me, though I am beneath a dog in your eyes?”

“Who are you?” asked astonished Bertha.

“I am Hester, the daughter of Aaron,” said the girl, “and there is a deadly raid on our quarter. They accuse us of poisoning the wells. O Bertha, they lay things to us that we never do! Save me, for my womanhood’s sake!”

“Poor soul!” said Bertha, looking down at her. “Come with me to Aunt Avice. Maybe she will let thee tarry in some corner till the tumult is over. I dare say it will not be much.”

Bertha spoke in rather contemptuous tones, though they were not wanting in pity. Everybody in England was taught then to rank Jews with vermin, and to look upon it as a weakness to show them any kindness.

The two girls reached the door in safety, and Bertha led Hester in.

“Aunt Avice,” she said, “there is a commotion in the Jews’ quarter, and here is a Jew maiden that wants to know if we will shelter her. I suppose she won’t hurt us much, will she?”

The very breath of a Jew was fancied to be poisonous.

Avice looked at the pale, terrified face and trembling limbs of the girl who had cast herself on her mercy.

“Well, I dare say not,” said she; “at any rate, we will risk it. Perhaps the good Lord may not be very angry; or if He is, we must say more prayers, and beg our Lady Saint Mary to intercede for us. Come in, child.”

H. 36.

“She sat down meekly on the floor, in a dark corner, not daring to offer any help, lest they should imagine that she would pollute anything she touched.”—*Page 118.*

Poor Avice! she knew no better. She had been taught that the Lord who died for her was a stern, angry Judge, and that all the mercy rested in His human mother. And the Jews had crucified Christ; so, thought Avice, He must hate them! Perhaps, of such Christians as she was, He may have said again, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Hester came in quietly. “May God bless you!” she said. “I will try not to breathe on you, for I know what you think.” And she sat down meekly on the floor, in a dark corner, not daring to offer any help, lest they should imagine that

she would pollute anything she touched. Avice threw her a cake of bread, as she might have done to a dog; and Hester knew that it was a kinder act than she would have received from most of the Christians around.

It was not yet quite bed-time, and Bertha sat down again to her work, begging her aunt to finish the tale. They took no notice of Hester.

“It is almost finished,” said Avice; “there is little more to tell. The winter got over, but spring was scarcely begun when our little Lady’s health failed again. The Lord King was so anxious about her that when he was away from Windsor, he bade the Lady Queen to send him a special messenger with news of her; and so delighted was he to hear of her recovery, that he commanded a good robe to be given to the messenger, and offered in thanksgiving an image of silver, wrought in the form of a woman, to the shrine of Saint Edward.”

“Then she did recover, Aunt?”

“Ay, but it was for the last time. As the summer drew on, the Lady Queen asked Master Thomas if he thought it well that the little Lady should have change again, and be sent into the country till the heat was past. Master Thomas answered that he reckoned it unnecessary; and the Lady Queen departed, well pleased. But as soon as she was gone, Master Thomas said to me and Julian the Rocker, who were tending our little Lady—‘She will have a better change than to Swallowfield.’ Quoth Julian, ‘Say you so, Master? Whither do you purpose sending her?’ And he said, looking sadly on the child, ‘*I* purpose sending her? Truly, good Julian, no whither. But ere long time be over, the Lord our God will send for her, by that angel that taketh no bribe to delay execution of His mandate.’ And then I knew his meaning: my darling was to die. But the steps of the angel were very slow. The autumn came and went. The child seemed languid and dull, and the Lord King offered a chasuble of samite to the blessed Edmund of Pontigny at his altar at Canterbury.”

Edmund Rich, afterwards called Saint Edmund of Pontigny, was an Archbishop of Canterbury with whom King Henry the Third was at variance as long as he lived, much in the same way as Henry the Second had been with Becket. Now he was dead, a banished man, the Pope had declared him a saint, and King Henry made humble offerings at his shrine. But it is amusing to find that with respect to this offering at least, his Majesty’s instructions were to buy the samite of the lowest price that could be found!

“It was all of no use,” pursued Avice sorrowfully. “The angel had received the mandate. Great feasts were held at Easter—there were twenty beeves and fifty muttons, fifteen hundred pullets, and six hundred shillings’ worth of bread, beside many other things—but ere one month was over, the feast became a fast. When Saint Philip’s day dawned my darling lay in her bed, with her fair eyes turned up to heaven and her hands folded in prayer; and who may know what she said to God, or yet more what He told to her? She had never been taught to pray; she could not be.” Avice’s only notion of prayer was repeating a form of words, and keeping time by a string of beads. “But I shall always think that in some way beyond our comprehension, my darling could speak to God. And on the evening of the Invention of the Cross”—which is May 3rd—“she spoke to Him in Heaven.”

“And did the Lady Queen sorrow very much, Aunt? I suppose, though, great ladies like her would not care as much as poor people.”

“Wouldst thou, child? Ah, a mother is a mother, let her be a cottager or a queen. And she sorrowed so sorely that for weeks afterwards she lay ill, and all the skill of her physicians could avail nothing. The Lord King, too, fell sick of a tertian fever, which held him many days, and I believe it was out of sheer anguish for his dearest child. He commanded a brass image of her to be placed on the tomb, but ere it was finished he would have one of silver: and he gave fifty shillings a year to the hermit of Charing, for a priest to pray daily for her in the chapel of the hermitage.”

“Do you think she is still in Purgatory, Aunt?”

Avice’s religion, as taught not by the Word of God, but the traditions of men, led her to be doubtful on that point. But her heart broke its way through the bonds.

“What, my white dove? my little unspotted darling, that never wilfully sinned against God and holy Church? Child, if our holy Father the Pope were to tell me himself that she was there, I would not believe him. Do the angels go to Purgatory? Nay, I do verily believe that, seeing her infirmity, Christ our Lord did all the work of salvation for her, and that she sings now before our Father’s face.”

Poor Avice! she could get no further. But we, who know God’s Word, know that there is but one Mediator between God and man, and that He has offered a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Before Bertha could reply, an answer came unexpectedly from the dark corner.

“Your God must be hard to propitiate,” said the young Jewess. “In old times, after the sacrifice was offered, a man was cleansed from sin. He had not to cleanse himself by his own pain.”

“But you are heathens,” said Avice, feeling it a condescension to argue with a Jew. “Our religion is better than yours.”

“How?” was Hester’s rejoinder.

“Because we have been redeemed by our Lord, who died to save us from Hell.”

“It does not sound like it. Then why had the little child to go there?”

“She did not go there! She went to Purgatory.”

“She went to pain, if I understood you rightly. Why did your Messiah not finish His work, and keep her from going to pain altogether?”

“I cannot answer such wicked questions,” said Avice. “The Church teaches that God’s love purifies His servants in Purgatory, and as soon as their souls are clean they go to Heaven.”

“Our God does better for us than that,” was Hester’s quiet answer. “I do not know what ‘the Church’ is. But I suppose God’s love is not for Gentiles.”

And she relapsed into silence. Avice sat and span—and thought. Both of them were terribly ignorant; but Avice did honestly desire to know God’s will, and such truth as was in Hester’s words troubled her. And as she thought, other words came to her, heard years ago from the pulpit of Lincoln Cathedral, and from the long silent lips of that holy Bishop Grosteste whom she so deeply revered.

“By leaning on Christ,” the Bishop had said, “every true Christian rises into true life, peace, and joy; he lives in His life, sees light in His light, is invigorated with His warmth, grows in His strength, and leaning on the Beloved, his soul ascends upwards.”

Then for those who loved Christ and leaned on Him, either He must be with them in Purgatory, and then it would be no pain at all: or—Avice shrank from the alternative that perhaps there was no Purgatory at all! It is hard to break free from trammels in which we have been held all our lives. Bertha did not follow the course of her aunt’s thoughts, and wondered why she said, after long silence—

“Methinks God is enough for His people, wherever they are.”

Hester also had been thinking, and to as much purpose.

“It is written, ‘In His name shall the Gentiles trust,’” she said. “And I think, if He can love any Gentiles, it must be kindly and merciful hearts like yours. Perhaps the Great Sacrifice—the Messiah Himself—is meant for all men. But I think He will finish His work, and not leave it incomplete, as your priests seem to teach you.”

“He will do right by all men, if thou meanest our Lord,” replied Avice gently. “And what was right for all, and best for us, we shall know when we come to Him.”

“Then the little Lady knows it now, Aunt,” said Bertha.

“Yes, my darling knows it now. It may be she knows why her ears were sealed and her tongue bound, now that they are unstopped and loosed. And I marvel if any voice in the choirs of the angels can be so sweet as hers.”

There was silence for a little while. Then Hester rose.

“I thank you very much for your kindness,” she said. “I think I might go home. The streets seem quieter now.”

Avice went to the door, unlatched it, and peered forth into the night.

“Yes, there seems to be no noise in the direction of your quarter now. I think you will be safe. But if you feel uneasy, you can stay the night in this room.”

“No, thank you,” replied Hester gratefully. “I will not put you to that trouble. You have been very good to me. May the God of Israel bless you with His blessing!”

Avice felt rather uneasy. She had always been taught that Jews were idolaters, and she never imagined that Hester could be blessing her in the name of the one living God. She fancied that the benediction of some horrible Moloch was being called down upon her, and feared it accordingly. But she answered kindly, for unkindness was not in her simple, loving, God-fearing heart. Hester went out, and latched the door behind her.

“I am glad she is gone,” said Bertha. “I could not feel easy while she was here. Yet I could not have borne to turn her away without asking you if you would take her in, Aunt. I hope we have not done wrong!”

“I hope not, indeed,” replied Avice, who was not quite easy in her own mind. “I wonder why it should be so wrong to pity Jews, and be kind to them. It looks so different from all the other commands of our Lord.”

Different, most truly! But such causes for wonder were likely to be frequent enough, so long as men allowed the traditions of men to run alongside of the infallible Word of God. And they had no power to read for themselves the real words of the Lord, who had said to the father of all Israel, “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.”

But the influx of visitors was not yet over for the evening. Hester had not been gone long when a heavy rap came on the door. “Come in!” said Avice; and Uncle Dan appeared.

“Could you spare a chap a seat, think ye?” said he. “I’ve come for a bit o’ peace. We’ve got thunder and lightning and rain up at smithy. *She’s* thunder, and Ankaret’s lightning, and Mildred’s rain, for she’s a-crying: and El’nor and me, we ’re wet to skin wi’ ’t. So I put my cap on and come here to dry me a bit.”

Avice laughed. “You’re always welcome, Uncle Dan, and I hope you know it,” said she. “Bertha, my maid, bake a short-cake for thy father. There’s enough warmth in the bake-stone.”

“Short-cake’s good,” said Dan, “and I’ll not go to deny it; but love and peace are better. *She* can make short-cake wi’ anybody. It’s th’ jam as goes wi’ ’t I don’t like. She makes it so tart, and puts so much on. Sure, if th’ fire had went out, she’d easy bake a cake a-top of her temper, and so could Ankaret. Eh, it do take a whole hive of honey to sweeten some folks. There’s bees in this world, for sure; but there’s many a waps to every bee.”

In the present day, “waps” is considered a vulgar way of pronouncing the word; but it was correct English at the time of which I am writing. “Wasp” is really the corrupt pronunciation. In the same way, they said “claps” where we say “clasp.”

“Uncle Dan, I sometimes wonder you do not come and live in Lincoln town.”

“Dost thee? Think I haven’t noise enough at smithy?”

“But I think you would make friends here, and find things pleasanter.”

“Humph!” said Dan, laying a big, hardened brown hand upon each knee. “It’s very plain to me, Avice, as thou doesn’t live in a house where everything thou does turns to hot water. Me make friends! She’d have ’em out o’ th’ door afore they’d a-comed in. They wouldn’t come twice, I reckon—nay, they wouldn’t. That’d be end o’ my friend-making, Avice.”

“Uncle Dan, did you never try standing up to Aunt Filomena?”

“Did I never try *what*? Ay did I, once—and got knocked down as sharp as ninepins. Standing up! I’d love to see thee try it. Thou’d not be right end up long.”

Bertha had gone upstairs, or Avice perhaps would not have spoken so plainly, though the smith himself had long passed the stage of ignoring his wife’s failings in the presence of her children.

“But you are her husband, Uncle Dan.”

“I reckon I know that Thou would, if she’d plucked as much of thy whiskers out as she has o’ mine.”

“And wives ought to obey their husbands.”

“Thou’ll oblige me by saying so to her, and I’ll be glad to know if thou likes what thou’ll get.”

“You think she cannot be managed?”

“Not without one o’ th’ archangels likes to try. I’ll not say he wouldn’t be sorry at after.”

“It does seem such a sad way for you to live,” said Avice pityingly.

“Grin and bide,” said Dan philosophically. “Grin while I can, and bide when I can’t. But I’ll tell thee what—if some o’ them fighting fellows as goes up and down a-seeking for adventures, ’d just take off Ankaret and Mildred—well, I don’t know about El’nor: she’s been better o’ late—and eh, but they couldn’t take Her, or I’d ha’ given th’ cow into th’ bargain, and been right glad on’t—and if me and Emma and Bertha could ha’ settled down in a bit of a house somewhere, and been peaceable— Come, it’s no use hankering over things as can’t be. Elsewise, I’d ha’ said a chap might ha’ had a bit o’ comfort then.”

“Uncle Dan, did you ever think of praying that Aunt Filomena might have a better temper?”

“Ever think of what?” demanded Uncle Dan in the biggest capitals ever seen on a placard.

“You know God could make her temper sweet, Uncle Dan.”

“Thou believes that, does thou?”

“I do.”

“So will I—when I see’t. I reckon I’ll have a rare capful o’ larks by th’ sky falling, first.”

“The sky will fall some day, my son,” said the voice of Father Thomas, behind Dan. His soft rap had been unheard through Dan’s bass voice, and he had entered unperceived.

“Well, Father, you should know the rights on’t,” was Dan’s answer, with a pull at his hair. “Being a priest, I reckon you’re good friends wi’ th’ angels and th’ sky and all that sort of thing; but—I ask your pardon, Father, but She belongs to t’other lot, and you don’t know her. Eh, you don’t, so!”

And with an ominous shake of his head, and a good-night to Avice and Bertha, Dan passed out.

“Our Lord could do that, Father?” said Avice softly.

“Certainly, my daughter. ‘Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He—in the heavens, and in the earth, and in the sea, and in all depths.’”

Father Thomas had not much of the Bible—only one Gospel and a Book of Psalms—but what he had he studied well. And one page of the Word of God will do a great deal for a man, with the Spirit of God to bring it home to a willing ear and a loving heart.

“May I pray for Aunt Filomena? I am so sorry for Uncle Dan. He is not a bad man, and she makes his home unbearable.”

“God forgive her! By all means pray for both.”

Chapter Seven.

A Spice of Philosophy.

While Dan was thus detailing his troubles in Avice's kitchen, his daughter Emma was finishing her day's work. She was apprenticed to an embroideress; for all kinds of embroidery were in much greater use then than now. There was no sort of trimming except embroidery and fur; there were no such things as printed cottons; and not only ladies' dresses, but gentlemen's, and all kinds of curtains and hangings, were very largely ornamented with the needle. Mrs De la Laund kept eighteen apprentices, and they worked in a long, narrow room with windows at each end—not glass windows, but just square openings, where light, wind, and rain or snow, came in together. It was about half an hour before it would be time to stop work. There was no clock in the room, and there were only three in all Lincoln. Clocks such as we have were then unknown. They had but two measures of time—the clepsydra, or water-clock, and the sun-dial. When a man had neither of these, he employed all kinds of ingenious expedients for guessing what time it was, if the day were cloudy and the sun not to be seen. King Alfred had invented the plan, long before, of having candles to burn a certain time; the monks knew how long it took to repeat certain psalms. Mrs De la Laund stopped work when the cathedral bell tolled for vespers—that is, at four o'clock.

"You look tired, Antigone," said Emma to her nearest neighbour, a pale girl of eighteen.

"Tired? Of course I'm tired," was the unpromising answer. "Where's the good? One must go on."

"She does not like the work," said the girl on the other side of her.

"Do you?" responded Antigone, turning to her.

The girl gave a little laugh. "I don't think whether I like it or not," she said. "I like being taught what will get me a living some day."

"I hate it!" answered Antigone. "Why should I have to work for my living, when Lady Margaret, up at the Castle, never needs to put a needle in or out unless she pleases?"

"Nay, you're wrong there. My sister Justina is scullion-maid at the Castle, and I am sure, from what she tells me, you wouldn't like to change with Lady Margaret."

"My word, but I would!"

"Why not, Sarah?" asked Emma.

"Well," replied Sarah with a smile, "Antigone likes what she calls a bit of fun when the day's work is over; and she would not get nearly so much as she does, if she were in Lady Margaret's place. She dwells in three chambers in her mother's tower, and never comes down except to hall," (namely, to meals,) "with now and then a decorous dance under the eyes of the Lady Countess. No running races on the green, nor chattering away to everybody, nor games—except upstairs in her own room with a few other young damsels. Antigone would think she was in prison, to be used like that. And learning!—why, she has to learn Latin, and surgery, and heraldry, and all sorts of needlework—not embroidery only; and cooking, and music, and I do not know what else. How would you like it, Antigone?"

"Well, at any rate, she has a change!" said Antigone, with some acerbity.

"Not quite the same thing as no work at all, for which I thought you were longing. And no liberty, remember."

"But her gowns, Sarah, her gowns!—and her hoods, and cloaks, and everything else! Did you see her last Saint Michael? I'd have given a bit of liberty for that orange samite and those lovely blue slippers!"

Sarah laughed and gave a little shake of her head.

"I know who is fond of Hunt the Slipper," said she. "A pretty figure an orange samite gown would cut after an evening of it! I think, too, I would rather be free to go about on my feet than even to wear lovely blue slippers. Nay, Antigone, you may depend upon it, there are less pleasant things in Lady Margaret's life than orange gowns and blue slippers. We can have a say about our weddings, remember: but she will be handed over to somebody she never saw, as like as not. I'd rather be as I am. Mother says folks' lots are more even than they like to think. Poor folks fancy that rich ones have nothing to trouble them worth mention; and a sick man thinks, if he were only well, he would not mind being poor; and a man in prison says that if he could but be free, he could bear both illness and poverty. The truth is, everybody thinks his own trouble the worst; and yet, if we had our neighbours' instead, nine times out of ten we should be glad to get back to our own. We know the worst of them, and often we don't of the others. So that is why I say, I'd rather be as I am."

"But people look down on you!" said Antigone.

"Well, let them. *That* won't hurt me," answered Sarah.

"Sarah, I do believe you've not a bit of spirit!"

"I'd rather keep my spirit for what it is good for—to help me over hard places and along weary bits of road. All women have those at times. Mother says—"

"Where's the good of quoting old women? They have outlived their youth."

"Well, at any rate they lived through it, and some of them picked up a bit of wisdom by the way."

"You may keep your musty wisdom to yourself! I want none of it!" said Antigone, scornfully.

"I want all I can get," quietly responded Sarah. "Mother says (if you don't care for it, Emma may) that discontent is the worst companion a girl can have for making everything look miserable. You'll be a deal happier, she says, with a dry crust and a good will to it, than with a roast ox and a complaining temper."

"Ay, that's true!" said Emma, with a sigh.

"Poor Emma!" laughed Antigone. "You get enough of it, don't you, at the smithy?"

"I would rather not talk over my mother and sisters, if you please," returned Emma.

"Oh, you don't need to take airs, my lady. I know!"

"Come, let Emma be," said Sarah. "Let's keep our tempers, if we haven't much else. There's the vesper bell!"

Antigone's work was not likely to be improved by the hasty huddled-up style in which it was folded, while Sarah and Emma shook theirs straight and carefully avoided creases. They had then to give it in to the mistress, who stood at one end of the room, putting all away in a large coffer. When the last girl had given in her work, Mrs De la Laund called for silence.

"On Thursday next," said she, "I shall give you a holiday after dinner. The Queen comes to Lincoln on that day, and I wish to give as many as are good girls the chance of seeing her enter. But I shall expect to have no creased work like Antigone's; nor split and frayed like Geneveva's; nor dirtied like Femiana's. Now you may go."

They had odd names for girls in those days. Among the nobles and gentry, most were like ours; young ladies of rank were Alice, Cicely, Margaret, Joan, Isabel, Emma, or Agnes: a strange name being the exception. But among working women the odd names were then the rule: they were Yngeleis, Sabelina, Orenge, Pimma, Cinelote, Argentella, and very many more of the same high-sounding kind.

When the apprentices left the work-room, they were free to do as they liked till seven o'clock, when they must all re-assemble there, answer to their names called over, repeat some prayers after Mrs de la Laund, and go to bed in a large loft at the top of the house. Characters came out on these occasions. The majority showed themselves thoughtless and giddy: they went to run races on the green, and to play games—the better disposed only among themselves: but the wild, adventurous spirits soon joined a lot of idle youths as unsteady as themselves, with whom they spent the evening in rough play, loud laughter, and not altogether decorous joking. The little group of sensible girls kept away from such scenes. Most of them went to see their friends, if within reasonable distance; those who had none at hand sat or walked quietly together. Emma and Sarah were among these.

Any person entering Lincoln on the following Wednesday would plainly have seen that the town was preparing for some great event. Every house draped itself in some kind of hanging—the rich in coarse silk, the poorer in bunting or whatever they could get. The iron hoops here and there built into the walls for that purpose, held long pine-sticks, to be lighted as torches after dark; and they would need careful watching, for a great deal of the city was built of wood, and if a spark lighted on the walls, a serious fire might be the result. In the numerous balconies which projected from the better class of houses sat ladies dressed in their handsomest garments on the Thursday morning, and below in the street stood men and women packed tightly into a crowd, waiting for the Queen to arrive. There was not much room in a mediaeval street, and the sheriffs did not find it easy to keep a clear passage for the royal train. As to keeping any passage for the traffic, that would have been considered quite unnecessary. There was not much to keep it for; and what there was could go round by back streets, just as well as not. Few people set any value on time in the Middle Ages.

Queen Alianora was expected to arrive about twelve o'clock. She was not the Queen Eleanor of whom we read at the beginning of the story (for Alianora is only one of the old ways of spelling Eleanor), but her daughter-in-law, the Lady Alianora who had been a friend to the dumb Princess. She was a Spanish lady, and was one of the best and loveliest Queens who ever reigned in England. Goodness and beauty are not always found in company—perhaps I might say, not often; but they went together with her. She was a Spanish blonde—which means that her hair was a bright shade of golden—neither flaxen nor red; and that her eyes were a deep, deep blue—the blue of a southern sky, such as we rarely if ever see in an English one. Her complexion was fair and rosy, her features regular and beautiful, her figure extremely elegant and well-proportioned. The crowd, though good-humoured, was beginning to get tired, when she came at last.

The Queen, who was not quite thirty years of age, rode on a white horse, whose scarlet saddle-cloth was embroidered with golden lions and roses, and which was led by Garcia, her Spanish Master of the Horse. She was dressed in green samite, trimmed with ermine. On her left hand rode the Earl of Lincoln, on her right, her eldest surviving son, the little Prince Alphonso, who was only seven years old. He died at the age of eleven. After the Queen rode her two damsels, Aubrey de Caumpeden and Ermetrude; and after them and the officers of the household came a number of lesser people, the mob of sight-seers closing in and following them up the street. (See Note 1.) Her Majesty rode up Steephill to the Castle, where the Countess of Lincoln and her daughter Lady Margaret—a girl of about fifteen—received her just inside the gate. Then the mob cheered, the Queen looked back with a smile and a bow, the Almoner flung a handful of silver pennies among them, the portcullis was hauled down, and the sight was over.

As Emma turned back from the Castle gate, she met her father and her sister Eleanor, who, like her, had been sight-seeing.

“Well!” said Dan, “did thou see her?”

“Oh yes, beautifully!” answered Emma. “Isn’t she handsome, Father?”

“‘Handsome is as handsome does,’” philosophically returned Dan. “Some folks looks mighty handsome as doesn’t do even to it. *She* was just like a pictur’ when I wed her. Ay, she was, so!—Where art thou going, Emma?”

“I thought of looking in on Aunt Avice, Father. Are you and Eleanor coming, too?”

“I’m not,” said Eleanor. “I’m going to see Laurentia atte Gate. So I’ll wish you good even.”

She kept straight on, while Dan and Emma turned off for Avice’s house. It was not surprising that they found nobody at home but the turnspit dog, who was sufficiently familiar with both to wag a welcome; but somebody sat in the chimney-corner who was not at home, but was a visitor like themselves. When the door was unlatched, Father Thomas closed the book he had been reading and looked up.

“Good even, Father,” said Dan to the priest. “I reckon you’ve come o’ th’ same errand as us.”

“What is that, my son?”

Dan sat down on the form, and put a big hand on each knee.

“Well, it’s some’at like t’ shepherd comin’ to count t’ sheep, to see ’at none of ’em’s missin’,” said he. “It’s so easy to get lost of a big moor full o’ pits and quagmires. And this world’s some’at like it.—Ah, Avice! folks as goes a-sight-seeing mun expect to find things of a mixtur’ when they gets home.”

“A very pleasant mixture, Uncle,” said Avice. “Pray you of your blessing, holy Father.”

Father Thomas gave it, and Bertha, stooping down, kissed Dan on his broad wrinkled forehead.

“Did thou get a penny?” asked Dan.

“I got two!” cried Bertha, triumphantly. “And Aunt Avice got one. Did you, Father?”

“Nay, lass—none o’ my luck! Silver pennies and such knows better nor to come my way. Nor they’d better not, without they’ll come right number. I should get tore to bits if I went home wi’ one, as like as not. She ’d want it, and so ’d Ankaret, and so ’d Susanna, and so ’d Mildred; and atwixt ’em all it ’d get broke i’ pieces, and *so* should I. And see thou, it’s made i’ quarters, and I amn’t, so it wouldn’t come so convenient to me.”

Pennies were then made with a deep cross cut athwart them, so that they were easily broken, when wanted, into halfpence and farthings, for there were no separate ones coined.

“Father, have one of mine!” cried Bertha at the beginning of Dan’s answer.

“Nay, nay, lass! Keep thy bit o’ silver—or if thou wants to give it, let Emma have it. She’ll outlive it; I shouldn’t.”

The silver penny changed hands at once. Avice had meanwhile been hanging up her hood and cloak, and she now proceeded to prepare a dish of eggs, foreseeing company to supper. Supper was exceedingly early to-day, as it was scarcely three o’clock; but dinner had been equally so, for nobody wanted to be busy when the Queen came. A large dish of “eggs and butter” was speedily on the table—the “buttered eggs” of the north of England, which are, I believe, identical with the “scrambled eggs” of the United States. The party sat down to supper, Father Thomas being served with a trencher to himself.

“And how dost thou get along wi’ thy Missis, my lass?” said Dan to his daughter.

“Oh, things is very pleasant as yet, Father,” answered Emma with a smile. “There’s a mixture, as you said just now. Some’s decent lasses enough; and some’s foolish; and some’s middlin’. There’s most of the middlin’ ones.”

“I’m fain to hear it,” said Dan. “Lasses is so foolish, I should ha’ thought there ’d be most o’ that lot. So ’s lads too. Eh, it’s a queer world, this un: mortal queer! But I asked thee how thou got on with thy Missis, and thou tells me o’ th’ lasses. Never *did* know a woman answer straight off. Ask most on ’em how far it is to Newark, and they’ll answer you that t’ wind was west as they come fro’ Barling.”

“Thou hast not a good opinion of women, my son,” said Father Thomas, who looked much amused.

“I’ve seen too much on ’em!” responded Dan, conclusively. “I’ve got a wife and six lasses.”

“Bertha, we’d better mind our ways!” said Emma, laughing.

“Nay, it’s none you,” was Dan’s comment. “You’re middlin’ decent, you two. So’s Avice; and so’s old Christopher’s Regina. I know of ne’er another, without it ’s t’ cat—and she scratches like t’ rest when she’s put out. There *is* other decent ’uns, happen. They haven’t come my way yet.”

“Why, Father!” cried Emma. “Think who you’re lumping together—the Lady Queen, and my Lady at the Castle, and Lady Margaret, and the Dean’s sister, and—”

“Thou’ll be out o’ breath, if thou reckons all thou’st heard tell of,” said Dan. “There’s cats o’ different sorts, child: some’s snowy white (when so be they’ve none been i’ th’ ash-hole), and some’s tabby, and some’s black as iron; but they all scrats. Women’s like ’em.—You’re wise men, you parsons and such, as have nought to do wi’ ’em. Old

Christopher, my neighbour up at smithy, he says weddin's like a bag full o' snakes wi' one eel amongst 'em: you ha' to put your hand in, and you may get th' eel. But if you dunna—why you've got to do t' best you can wi' one o' t' other lot. If you'll keep your hand out of the bag you'll stand best chance of not getting bit."

"It is a pity thou wert not a monk, my son," said the priest, whose gravity seemed hard to keep.

"Ay, it is!" was Dan's hearty response. "I'm alway fain to pass a nunnery. Says I to myself, There's a bonnie lot o' snakes safe tied up out o' folkses' way. They'll never fly at nobody no more. I'm fain for the men as hasn't got 'em. Ay, I am!"

Avice and her young cousins laughed.

"Do you think they never fly at one another, Uncle Dan?" asked the former.

"Let 'em!" returned that gentleman with much cordiality. "A man gets a bit o' peace then. It's t' only time he does. If they'd just go and make a reg'lar end o' one another! but they never does,"—and the smith pushed away his trencher with a sigh. "Well! I reckon I mun be going. She gave me while four:—and I'm feared o' vesper bell ringing afore I can get home. There'll be more bells nor one, if so. God be wi' ye, lasses! Good even, Father."

And the door was shut on the unhappy husband of the delightful Filomena. Emma took leave soon after, and Bertha went with her, to see another friend before she returned to her employer's house. Avice and the priest were left alone. For a few minutes both were silent; but perhaps their thoughts were not very unlike.

"I wish, under your leave, Father," said Avice at length, "that somebody would say a word to Aunt Filomena. I am afraid both she and Uncle Dan are very ignorant. Truly, so am I: and it should be some one who knows better. I doubt if he quite means all he says; but he thinks too ill of women,—and indeed, with five such as he has at home, who can wonder at it? He has no peace from morning to night; and he is naturally a man who loves peace and quiet—as you are yourself, holy Father, unless I mistake."

"Thou art not mistaken, my daughter," said Father Thomas. Something inside him was giving him a sharp prick or two. Did he love quiet too much, so as to interfere with his duties to his fellow-men? And then something else inside the priest's heart rose up, as it were, to press down the question, and bid the questioner be silent.

"I wonder," said Avice, innocently, quite unaware of the course of her companion's thoughts, "whether, if Aunt Filomena knew her duty better, she might not give poor Uncle Dan a little more rest. He is good, in his way, and as far as he knows. I wish I knew more! But then," Avice concluded, with a little laugh, "I am only a woman."

"Yet thou art evidently one of the few whom he likes and respects," answered the priest. "Be it thine, my daughter, to show him that women are not all of an evil sort. Do thy best, up to the light thou hast; and cry to God for more light, so that thou mayest know how to do better. 'Pour forth thy prayers to Him,' as saith the Collect for the First Sunday after the Epiphany, 'that thou mayest know what thy duty requires of thee, and be able to comply with what thou knowest.' It is a good prayer, and specially for them that are perplexed concerning their duty." (See Note 2.)

"But when one does know one's duty," asked Avice with simplicity, "it seems so hard to make one's self do it."

"Didst thou ever yet do that? Daughter, dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost?"

Avice's immediate answer was what would be the instinctive unthinking response of most professing Christians.

"Why, Father, of course I do!"

"Good. What dost thou believe?"

Avice was silent. "Ah!" said the priest. "It is easy to think we believe: but hard to put our faith into plain words. If the faith were clearer, maybe the words would follow."

"It is so difficult to get things clear and plain!" sighed poor Avice.

"Have one thing clear, daughter—the way between God and thine own soul. Let nothing come in to block up that—however fair, howsoever dear it be. And thou shalt have thy reward."

"Father, is it like keeping other things clear? The way to have the floor clear and clean is to sweep it every morning."

"Ay, my daughter, sweep it every morning with the besom of prayer, and every night bear over it the torch of self-examination. So shall the evil insects not make their nests there."

"I don't quite know how to examine myself," said Avice.

"And thou wilt err," answered Father Thomas, "if thou set about that work alone, with a torch lighted at the flame of thine own righteousness. Light thy torch at the fire of God's altar; examine thyself by the light of His holy law; and do it at His feet, so that whatever evil thing thou mayest find thou canst take at once to Him to be cleansed away. Content not thyself with brushing away thoughts, but go to the root of that same sin in thine own heart. Say not, 'I should not have spoken proudly to my neighbour'—but, 'I should not be proud in my heart.' Deal rather with the root that is in thee than with the branches of acts and words. There are sins which only to think of is to do. Take to our Lord, then, thy sins to be cleansed away; but let thine own thoughts dwell not so much on thy sins, thy deeds done and words said, but rather on thy sinfulness, the inward fount of sin in thy nature."

"That were ugly work!" said Avice.

"Ay. I reckon thou countest not the scouring of thy floor among thine enjoyments. But it is needful, my daughter: and is it no enjoyment to see it clean?"

"Ay, that it is," admitted Avice.

"I remember, my child, many years ago—thou wert but a little maid—that holy Bishop Robert came to sup with thy grandmother Muriel. Tell me, wouldst thou have been satisfied—I say not as a little child, since children note not such things—but as a woman, wouldst thou have been satisfied to receive the holy Bishop with a dirty floor, and offer to him an uncleansed spoon to put to his lips?"

"Oh no, Father, surely not!"

"Then see, daughter, that when the Bishop of thy soul lifteth the latch to come in and sup with thee, He find not the soiled floor and the unclean vessel, and turn sorrowfully away, saying, 'I thought to sup with My child this night, but this is no place for Me.' Trust me, thou wilt lose more than He, if He close the door and depart."

Avice's eyes filled with tears.

"O Father, pray for me! I cannot bear to think of that."

Father Thomas rose and laid his hand on Avice's head. His words, as coming from a priest, rather surprised her.

"My child," he said softly, "let us pray for each other."

Avice stood looking out of the window after him as he went down the street.

"I wonder," she said to herself, "if our Lord ever turned away thus because Father Thomas's chamber was not clean! He seemed to know what it was so well—yet how could such a good, holy man know anything about it?"

Note 1. Aubrey is now a man's name only, but in the earlier hall of the Middle Ages it was used for both sexes.

Note 2. This collect was slightly altered from that in the Sarum Missal. The form here quoted is the older one.

Chapter Eight.

As a Little Child.

If you put a single straw into an eddying stream, other straws and bits of rubbish of all sorts will come and join it, until by and bye it looks like a little island in the midst of the water. And we often see something like this going on in men's minds. A man drops one idea, which another man takes up and considers, till ideas of his own come to join it, many things seen and heard contribute their help, and at last the single sentence grows into a mountain of action.

Avice would have been astonished if any one had told her that she had made an island. But her simple suggestion fell like an odd straw into the stream of Father Thomas's thoughts, and grew and grew there, until a few days later it led to decided action.

Father Thomas was by nature a quiet man. His temper was gentle and even; he hated everything like noise and bustle, far more tumult and quarrelling. He was not fond even of conversation, except now and then as a pleasant variety to a quiet life, full of thinking and reading. A man of this sort is generally an innocent man—by which I mean, a man who does no harm to his neighbours: and considering how many men and women spend their lives in doing their neighbours harm of one sort or another, that is a good deal to say of any man. But there is another point to be taken into account, namely, what good does such a man do? Why, no more than a chrysalis. And he is a poor specimen of manhood who is content to be of no more use in the world than a chrysalis, and to be as little missed when he goes out of it. This was the point which troubled Father Thomas's meditations. It was as if an angel had come down to him, and pointed to the old smithy on the green, and said, "What are you doing for those people? God will demand an account of their souls, some day, and from somebody. Are you not your brothers' keeper?" Hitherto Father Thomas had gone on very comfortably, with a reflection which serves a great many of us to excuse our pride or our laziness—I wish it might never be heard again from human lips—"It is not my place." It was true, in one sense. The smithy was in Newport parish, and Father Thomas belonged to the Cathedral. He tried to quiet the angel—which was really his own conscience—with the thought that he had no business to intrude into somebody else's parish. But the angel would not be quiet.

"Will God take that answer at the Judgment Day?" he said. "You know very well that the Vicar of Newport is an idle, careless man, who never troubles himself about the souls of his people: that so long as you observe the proper forms of civility, and ask his leave to visit these people, he will give it you in a minute, and be glad enough to think he is saved the trouble. That is the truth, and you know it."

Now, it is very unpleasant when one's conscience says in that blunt, downright, cutting way, "You know it:" and Father Thomas found it so. He made a few more excuses, which his conscience blew to the winds before they were well finished: and at last it laid hold of him, as it were, by the shoulders, and said, "Look there!"

Father Thomas looked there—at the cross which then hung in every clergyman's room. There were two lines carved on the wood at the bottom of this—lines which it was then not unusual to put at the bottom of these crosses.

"This did I for thee; What dost thou for Me?"

“Look there!” cried the Angel Conscience. “Christ bore that heavy cross for you—bore the reviling and the agony, the spitting, the scourging, and the shame; and you won’t face the Vicar of Newport for Him! You can’t walk half a mile, and ask a civil question of a man from whom you expect a civil answer, for love of the Man who came down all the way from Heaven to earth, and endured all the contradiction of sinners for three-and-thirty years, and faced all the malice of the devil, for the love of you! Are you ashamed of yourself, Thomas de Vaux, or are you not?”

When it reached that point, Father Thomas was painting in a book. Books in those days were often ornamented with very beautiful paintings: and the one on which the priest was working, represented Peter denying Christ in the High Priest’s palace. He had just painted one side of Peter’s hair, but the other side was still blank. But when the Angel asked that question, down went the brush.

“Lord, pardon Thy servant!” said Father Thomas humbly. “I am not worthy to carry so much as the corner of Thy cross after Thee. But I will take it up, and go forth. Indeed, I did not know I was such a selfish, lazy, ease-loving man as I am!”

Saint Peter had to put up with only half his hair for the rest of that day, for Father Thomas determinately washed and wiped his brush, threw a cloth over his book and painting tools to keep them from the dust, put on his fur cap, and went off to see the Vicar of Newport.

When a man braces himself up to do something which he does not like for the love of God, sometimes God makes it a great deal easier and less disagreeable than he expected to find it. The Vicar was just coming out of his door as Father Thomas reached it.

“A fine day—peace be with thee!” said he. “Whither go you, Brother?”

“May I have your leave, Father, to visit one of your parishioners—the smith that dwells about a mile hence, on the Newport road?”

“The saints love you! you may visit every man Jack of my parishioners, and take my blessing with you!” said the Vicar with a hearty laugh. “I am not over fond of that same visiting of smiths and tailors and fellows of that sort. I never know what to say to them, save hear confession, and they never have nought to say to me. You are cut from another quality of stuff, I reckon. Go your way, Brother Thomas, and make decent Christians of them if you can. There’s a she-bear lives there: I wish you luck with her.”

And with a farewell nod, the careless Vicar strode away.

“And into such hands as these, men’s souls are given!” thought Father Thomas. “Lord, purify Thy Church! Ah, dear old Bishop! you might well weep in dying.”

He walked on rapidly till he came within sight of the forge. Daniel Greensmith’s ringing blows on the anvil grew more and more distinct and at last the words he was singing as he worked came to the priest’s ears:

> “All things turn unto decay,
> Fall, and die, and pass away.
> Sinketh tower and droppeth wall,
> Cloth shall fray and horse shall fall,
> Flesh shall die and iron rust,
> Pass and perish all things must.
> Well I understand and say,
> All shall die, both priest and lay;
> And small time, for praise or blame,
> When man dieth, lives his fame.”

Note. This is translated from an old French poem, written before the time of the story.

Father Thomas stopped beside the anvil, but the smith’s back was turned, so that he did not see him.

“A sad song, my friend—if that were all.”

“Eh?” said Dan, looking behind him, and then immediately throwing down the hammer, and giving a pull to his forelock. Great respect was paid to priests at that day. “Axe your pardon, Father! Didn’t see who it were.”

“I came to see thy wife, my son. Shall I go forward?”

“Not if you’re o’ my mind. Happen you aren’t.”

“Is she not at home?”

“Oh, ay, she’s at home!”

The smith’s tone might have meant that he could have wished she was somewhere else. Father Thomas waited, till Dan flung down the hammer, and looked up at him.

“Had ye e’er a mother?” asked he.

“Ay,” replied the priest.

“Was she one ’at took th’ andirons to you when you didn’t suit her?”

"Truly, no. She was a full good and gentle woman."

"And had ye e'er a sister?"

"Ay; three."

"Was they given to rugging your hair when they wasn't pleased?"

"Not at all, my son."

"Ah! you'd best go home, I reckon."

"What meanest thou?" asked Father Thomas, feeling much amused at the very unusual style of Dan's reception.

"Well!" said Dan, passing his fingers through his hair, "I mean, if that's the way you was fetched up, you don't know the animal you've got to deal with here. There's five dragons i' that house o' mine: and each on 'em's got teeth and claws, and they knows how to use 'em, they does. If one on 'em wern't a bit better nor t'others, and did not come and stand by me now and then, I should ne'er ha' lived to talk to you this even. Nay, I shouldn't! Best go home, Father, while you've getten a coat on your back, and some hair on your head."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"Ah, it is!" was Dan's short but emphatic reply.

"But surely, my son, thy wife would never use a man ill that meant her good?"

"Think she'll stop to ask your meanin'?" said Dan, with a contemptuous grunt. "If she's not changed sin' I come fro' dinner, she'll be a-top of you before you can say 'mercy.' And she's none a comfortable thing to have a-top of you, I give you fair warning."

"How was she at supper, then?—no better?"

"Supper! I durstn't go in for no supper. I likes hunger better nor a fray. Happen El'nor 'll steal out to me with a crust after dark. She does, sometimes."

"And how long does it take thy wife to cool down?"

Dan rubbed his forehead with his blackened hand.

"I was wed to her," said he, "th' year afore the great frost, if you know when that were—and I'd better have been fruz, a deal. I've had it mortal hot ever since. She's had that time to cool down in, and she's no cooler nor she were then. Rather, if either, t'other way on, I reckon."

Before Father Thomas could reply, the shrillest scream that had ever met his ears came out of the window of the smithy.

"Ankaret!" it said. "Ankaret! An-ka-ret!"

"Ha! That's Her!" whispered Dan, as if he were awed by the sound.

An answering scream, as shrill, but scarcely so loud, came from the neighbouring cottage.

"Whatever do you want now?" said the second shriek.

"What dost thou yonder, thou slatternly minx?" returned the first. "I'll mash every bone of thee, if thou doesn't come in this minute!"

"Then I sha'n't!" shrieked the second voice. "Two can play at that."

"Who is Ankaret?" asked Father Thomas of the smith.

"She's th' eldest o' th' dragons—that's our Ank'ret," said Dan in the same half-frightened whisper. "If you mun face Her, you'd best do it while Ank'ret's next door: both on 'em's too much for any man. Th' Angel Gabriel couldn't match the pair on 'em: leastwise, if he comes down to axe me, *I* sha'n't send him forward. And don't you go and say I sent you, now. For pity's sake, don't!"

Father Thomas walked off, and knocked at the house door. He was beginning to think that if the former part of his task had been easier than he expected, the latter was going to prove more difficult. The door was opened by a young woman.

"Good day, my daughter. Is thy mother within?"

"She's here, Father. Pray you, come in."

The priest stepped inside, and sat down on a bench. For those times, the house was comfortable, and it was very clean. The young woman disappeared, and presently a pair of heavy boots came clattering down the stairs, and Father Thomas felt pretty sure that the sweet Filomena herself stood before him.

"Now then, what do *you* want?" quoth she, in a tone which did not sound as if she were delighted to see her visitor.

“My daughter, I am a priest,” said Father Thomas gently; “and I am come to see thee for thy good.”

“I’ve got eyes!” snapped Filomena. “Can’t I see you’re a priest? What’s the good of such as you? Fat, lazy fellows that lives on the best o’ the land, wrung out of the hard earnings o’ the poor, and never does a stroke o’ work theirselves, but sits a-twirling o’ their thumbs all day long. That’s what you are—the whole boiling of you! Get you out o’ my house, or I’ll help you!”

And Filomena took up a formidable-looking mop which stood in the corner, as if to let the priest clearly understand the sort of help which she proposed to give him. She had tried this style of reception when the Vicar took the liberty of calling on her some months before, with the result that the appalled gentleman in question never ventured to renew his visit, and told the anecdote with many shakes of the head over “that she-bear up at the smithy.” She understood how to deal with a man of the Vicar’s stamp, and she mistakenly fancied that all priests were of his sort. Sadly too many of them were such lazy, careless, self-indulgent men, who, having just done as much work as served to prevent the Bishop or their consciences (when they kept any) from becoming troublesome, let all the rest go, and thought their duty done. But Father Thomas, as the Vicar had said, was cut from another kind of stuff. Very sensitive to rudeness or unkindness, his feelings were not permitted to override his duty of perseverance: and while he dearly loved peace, he was not ready to buy it at the cost of something more valuable than itself. While he might be slow to see his duty, yet once seen, it would not escape him again.

The personal taunts which Filomena had launched at him he simply put aside as not worth an answer. They did not apply to him. He was neither fat nor lazy: and if Filomena were so ignorant as to fancy that the clergy were paid out of the earnings of the poor, what did it matter, when he knew they were not? He went straight to the root of the thing. His words were gentle enough, but his tone was one of authority.

“Daughter, what an unhappy woman thou art!”

Filomena’s fingers slowly unclosed from the mop, which fell back into the corner. Father Thomas said no more: he merely kept his eyes upon her. His calm dignity took effect at last. Her angry eyes fell before his unchanged look. She was not accustomed to hear her abuse answered in this manner.

“I just am!” she muttered with intense bitterness.

“Dost thou wish to be happy?”

“That’s none for the like of us. It’s only for rich folks, isn’t that,—folks as has all they wants, and a bit over.”

“No man has that,” said Father Thomas, “except the little children who sit at the feet of Jesus Christ. Become thou as a little child, and happiness shall come to seek thee.”

“Me a little child!” There was no merriment in the laugh which accompanied the words.

“Ay, even thou. For ‘if there be a new creature in Christ, old things pass away; behold, all things are made new.’ (Note. 3 Corinthians five 17, Vulgate version.) That is the very childhood, my daughter—to be made new. Will thou have it? It may be had for the asking, if it be asked of God by a true heart—that childhood of grace, which is meek, patient, gentle, loving, obedient, humble. For it is not thou that canst conquer Satan, but Christ in thee, that shall first conquer thee. Thou in Christ—this is safety: Christ in thee—here is strength. Seek, and thou shalt find. Farewell.”

And without giving Filomena time to answer, Father Thomas turned away, and was lost in a moment behind the bushes which separated the cottage from the smithy. She stood for a minute where he left her, as if she had been struck to stone. The whole style of his address was to her something completely new, and so unlike anything she had expected that for once in her life she was at a loss.

Filomena took up the corner of her apron and wiped her forehead, as if she were settling her brains into their places.

“Well, that’s a queer set-out!” said she at last, to nobody, for she was left alone. “Me a baby! Whatever would the fellow be at? I reckon I was one once. Eh, but it would be some queer to get back again! What did he say? ‘Meek, patient, gentle, loving, obedient, humble.’ *That’s* not me! Old Dan wouldn’t think he’d picked up his own wife, if I were made new o’ that fashion. It didn’t sound so bad, though. Wonder how it ’d be if I tried it! That chap said it would make me happy. I’m none that, neither, nor haven’t been these many years. Eh deary me! to think of me a baby!”

While these extremely new ideas were seething in Filomena’s mind, Father Thomas reached the smithy.

“Glad to see you!” said Dan, laying down his hammer. “You did not ’bide so long!” with a grim smile.

“Long enough,” said the priest shortly.

“I believe you! If you wasn’t glad to get your back turned, you liked a tussle wi’ a dragon better nor most folks. Was she white-hot, or no-but (Only) red? El’nor, she came down to me while you was in there, wi’ a hunch o’ bread and cheese, and she said it were gettin’ smoother a bit nor it had been most part o’ th’ day. What said she to you?”

“Less than I said to her.”

“You dunnot mean she hearkened you?”

“Not at first. But in the end, she hearkened me, and made me no answer.”

Dan looked his visitor all over from head to foot.

“Well!” said he, and shook his head slowly. “Well!” and wiped his face with his apron, “Well!” he exclaimed a third time. “If I’d ha’ knowed! I’d ha’ given forty marks (Note 1.) to see th’ like o’ that. Eh, do ’bide a minute, and let me take th’ measure on you! T’ chap that could strike our Filomena dumb mun ha’ come straight fro’ Heaven, for there isn’t his like o’ earth! Now, Father, do just tell a body, what did you say to her?”

“I told her how to be happy.”

Dan stared. “She wants no tellin’ that, I’ll go bail! she’s got every mortal thing her own way.”

“That is not the way to be happy,” answered the priest. “Nay, my son, she is a most unhappy woman, and her face shows it. Thou art happier far than she.”

Dan dropped the big hammer in sheer astonishment, and if Father Thomas had not made a rapid retreat, more than his eyes and ears would have told him so.

“Me happier nor our Filomena! Me! Father, dunnot be angered wi’ me, but either you’re downright silly, or you’re somewhat more nor other folks.”

“I have told thee the truth, my son. Now, wilt thou do somewhat to help thy wife to be happy? If she is happy, she will be humble and meek—happy, that is, in the way I mean.”

“I’ll do aught as ’ll make our Filomena meek,” replied Dan, with a shake of his grizzled head: “but how that’s going to be shaped beats me, I can tell you. Mun I climb up to th’ sky and stick nails into th’ moon?”

“Nay,” said the priest with a smile. “Thou shalt pray God to make her as a little child.”

“That’s a corker, *that* is!” Dan picked up the hammer, and began meditatively to fashion a nail. “Our Ank’ret were a babby once,” said he, as if to himself. “She were a bonnie un, too. She were, so! I used to sit o’ th’ bench at th’ door of an even, wi’ her on my knee, a-smilin’ up like—eh, Father, but I’ll tell you what, if them times could come back, it ’d be enough to make a chap think he’d getten into Heaven by mistake.”

“I trust, my son, thou wilt some day find thee in Heaven, not by mistake,” said the priest. “But if so, Daniel, thou must have a care to go the right road thither.”

“Which road’s that, Father?”

“It is a straight road, my son, and it is a narrow road. And the door to it goes right through the cross whereon Jesus Christ died for thee and me. Daniel, dost thou love the Lord Jesus?”

“Well, you see, Father, I’m not much acquaint wi’ Him. He’s a great way up, and I’m down here i’ t’ smithy.”

“He will come down here and abide with thee, my son, if thou wilt but ask Him. So dear He loveth man, that He will come any whither on earth save into sin, if so be He may have man’s company. ‘Greater than this love hath no man, that he give his life for his friends.’”

“Well, that stands to reason,” said Dan. “When man gives his life, he gives all there is of him.”

“Thou sayest well. And is it hard to love man that giveth his life to save thine?”

“I reckon it ’d be harder to help it, Father.”

Father Thomas turned as if to go. “My son,” said he, “wilt thou let the Lord Jesus say to the angels round His Throne, —‘I gave all there was of Me for Daniel Greensmith, and he doth not love Me for it?’”

The big smith had never had such an idea presented to him before. His simple, transparent, child-like nature came up into his eyes, and ran over. Men did not think it in those earlier ages any discredit to their manliness to let their hearts be seen. Perhaps they were wiser than we are.

“Eh, Father, but you never mean it’d be like that?” cried poor Dan. “Somehow, it never come real to me, like as you’ve put it. Do you mean ’at He *cares*—that it makes any matter to Him up yonder, whether old Dan at t’ smithy loves Him or not? I’m no-but a common smith. There’s hundreds just like me. Does He really care, think you?”

“Thou art a man,” said the priest, “and it was for men Christ died. And there is none other of thee, though there were millions like thee. Is a true mother content with any babe in exchange for her own, because there are hundreds of babes in the world? Nay, Daniel Greensmith, it was for thee the Lord Christ shed His blood on the cruel cross, and it is thyself whose love and thanksgivings He will miss, though all the harps of all the angels make music around His ear. Shall He miss them any longer, my son?”

Once more Dan threw aside the big hammer—this time on the inner side of the smithy.

“Father,” said he, “you’ve knocked me clean o’er. I never knowed till now as it were real.”

“As a little child!” said Father Thomas to himself, as he went back to Lincoln. “The road into the kingdom will be far smoother for him than her. Yet the good Lord can lead them both there.”

The very next visit that Dan paid to Avice and Bertha showed them plainly that a change of some sort had come over him, and as time went on they saw it still more plainly. His heart had opened to the love of Christ like a flower to the sunlight. The moment that he really saw Him, he accepted Him. With how many is it not the case that they do not love Christ because they do not know Him, and they do not know Him because no one of those who do puts Him

plainly before them?

It was much longer before Father Thomas and Avice saw any fruit of their prayers for Filomena. There was so much more to undo in her case than in her husband’s, that the growth was a great deal slower and less apparent. Avice discovered that Dan’s complaints were fewer, but she set it down entirely to the change in himself, long before she noticed that Filomena’s voice was less sharp, and her fats of fury less frequent. But at length the day came when Filomena, having been betrayed into a very mild copy of one of her old storms of temper, would suddenly catch herself up and walk determinately out of the back door till she grew cool: and when she came back would lay her hand upon her husband’s shoulder, and say—

“Dan, old man, I’m sorry I was bad to thee. Forgive me!”

And Dan, at first astounded beyond measure, grew to accept this conclusion as a matter of course, and to say—

“Let her alone, and she’ll come round.”

And then Avice’s eyes were opened.

One day, when she was unusually softened by the death of Susanna’s baby, Filomena opened her heart to her niece.

“Eh, Avice, it’s hard work! Nobody knows how hard, that hasn’t had a temper as mastered ’em. I’ve pretty nigh to bite my tongue through, many a time a day. I wish I’d begun sooner—I do! It’d ha’ come easier a deal then. But I’m trying hard, and I hope our Lord’ll help me. Thou does think He’ll help me, doesn’t thou, Avice? I’m not too bad, am I?”

“Father Thomas says, Aunt,” replied Avice, “that God helps all those who want His help: and the worse we are, the more we want of His mercy.”

“That’s true!” said Filomena.

“And Father Thomas says,” continued Avice, “that we must all go to our Lord just like little children, ready to take what He sees good for us, and telling Him all our needs of body and soul, as a child would tell its mother.”

They were walking slowly up Steephill when Avice said this.

“Father Thomas has one apt scholar,” said the priest’s unexpected voice behind her. “But it was a Greater than I, my daughter, who told His disciples that ‘whosoever did not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, should in no wise enter therein.’”

Note 1. A mark was 13 shillings 4 pence, and was the largest piece of money then known.

The End.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OUR LITTLE LADY ***

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