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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WELL IN THE DESERT ***

Emily Sarah Holt

"The Well in the Desert"

Preface.

It is said that only travellers in the arid lands of the East really know the value of water. To them the Well in the Desert is a treasure and a blessing: unspeakably so, when the water is pure and sweet; yet even though it be salt and brackish, it may still save life.

Was it less so, in a figurative sense, to the travellers through that great desert of the Middle Ages, wherein the wells were so few and far between? True, the water was brackish; man had denied the streams, and filled up the wells with stones; yet for all this it was God-given, and to those who came, and dug for the old spring, and drank, it was the water of eternal life. The cry was still sounding down the ages.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." And no less blessed are the souls that come now: but for us, the wells are so numerous and so pure, that we too often pass them by, and go on our way thirsting. Strange blindness!—yet not strange: for until the Angel of the Lord shall open the eyes of Hagar, she must needs go mourning through the wilderness, not seeing the well.

"Lord, that we may receive our sight!"—and may come unto Thee, and drink, and thirst no more.

Chapter One.

My Lady's Bower is swept.

"I am too low for scorn to lower me,
And all too sorrow-stricken to feel grief."

Edwin Arnold.

Soft and balmy was the air, and the sunlight radiant, at an early hour of a beautiful June morning; and fair was the landscape that met the eyes of the persons who were gathered a few feet from the portcullis of a grand stately old castle, crowning a wooded height near the Sussex coast. There were two persons seated on horseback: the one a youth of some twenty years, in a page's dress; the other a woman, who sat behind him on the pillion. Standing about were two men and a woman, the last holding a child in her arms. The woman on the pillion was closely veiled, and much muffled in her wrappings, considering the season of the year and the warmth of the weather; nor did she lift her veil when she spoke.

"The child, Alina," she said, in a tone so soft and low that the words seemed rather breathed than spoken.

The woman who stood beside the horse answered the appeal by placing the child in the arms of the speaker. It was a pretty, engaging little girl of three years old. The lady on the pillion, lifting the child underneath her veil, strained it to her bosom, and bowed her head low upon its light soft hair. Meanwhile, the horse stood still as a statue, and the page sat as still before her. In respectful silence the other three stood round. They knew, every one of them, that in that embrace to one of the two the bitterness of death was passing; and that when it was ended she would have nothing left to fear—only because she would have nothing left to hope. At length, suddenly, the lady lifted her head, and held forth the child to Alina. Turning her head away toward the sea, from the old castle, from the child, she made her farewell in one word.

"Depart!"

The three standing there watched her departure—never lifting her veil, nor turning her head—until she was hidden from their sight among the abundant green foliage around. They lingered a minute longer; but only a minute—for a shrill, harsh voice from the portcullis summoned them to return.

“Ralph, thou lither hilding! Alina, thou jade! Come hither at once, and get you to work. My Lady’s bower yet unswept, by the Seven Sleepers! and ye lingering yonder as ye had leaden heels! By the holy bones of Saint Benedict, our master shall con you light thanks when he cometh!”

“That may be,” said Alina, under her breath. “Get you in, Ralph and Jocelyn, or she shall be after again.”

And she turned and walked quickly into the castle, still carrying the child.

Eleven hours later, a very different procession climbed the castle-hill, and passed in at the portcullis. It was headed by a sumptuous litter, beside which rode a gentleman magnificently attired. Behind came a hundred horsemen in livery, and the line was closed by a crowd of archers in Lincoln green, bearing cross-bows. From the litter, assisted by the gentleman, descended a young lady of some three-and-twenty years, upon whose lips hovered a smile of pleasure, and whose fair hair flowed in natural ringlets from beneath a golden fillet. The gentleman was her senior by about fifteen years. He was a tall, active, handsome man, with a dark face, stern, set lips, and a pair of dark, quick, eagle-like eyes, beneath which the group of servants manifestly quailed.

“Is the Lady’s bower ready?” he asked, addressing the foremost of the women—the one who had so roughly insisted on Alina’s return.

“It is so, an’t like your noble Lordship,” answered she with a low reverence; “it shall be found as well appointed as our poor labours might compass.”

He made no answer; but, offering his hand to the young lady who had alighted from the litter, he led her up the stairs from the banqueting-hall, into a suite of fair, stately apartments, according to the taste of that period. Rich tapestry decorated the walls, fresh green rushes were strewn upon the floor, all the painting had been renewed, and above the fireplace stood two armorial shields newly chiselled.

“Lady,” he said, in a soft, courtly tone, “here is the bower. Doth it like the bird?”

“It is beauteous,” answered the lady, with a bright smile.

“It hath been anew swept and garnished,” replied the master, bowing low, as he took his leave. “Yonder silver bell shall summon your women.”

The lady moved to the casement on his departure. It stood open, and the lovely sea-view was to be seen from it.

“In good sooth, ’tis a fair spot!” she said half aloud. “And all new swept and garnished!”

There was no mocking echo in the chamber. If there had been, the words might have been borne back to the ear of the royal Alianora—“Not only garnished, but *swept!*”

My Lady touched the silver bell, and a crowd of damsels answered her call. Among them came Alina; and she held by the hand the little flaxen-haired child, who had played so prominent a part in the events of the morning.

“Do you all speak French?” asked the Countess in that language—which, be it remembered, was in the reign of Edward the Third the mother-tongue of the English nobles.

She received an affirmative reply from all.

“That is well. See to my sumpter-mules being unladen, and the gear brought up hither.—What a pretty child! whose is it?”

Alina brought the little girl forward, and answered for her. “The Lady Philippa Fitzalan, my Lord’s daughter.”

“My Lord’s daughter!” And a visible frown clouded the Countess’s brow. “I knew not he had a daughter— Oh! *that* child! Take her away—I do not want her. *Mistress* Philippa, for the future. That is my pleasure.”

And with a decided pout on her previously smiling lips, the Lady of Arundel seated herself at her tiring-glass. Alina caught up the child, and took her away to a distant chamber in a turret of the castle, where she set her on her knee, and shed a torrent of tears on the little flaxen head.

“Poor little babe! fatherless and motherless!” she cried. “Would to our dear Lady that thou wert no worse! The blessed saints help thee, for none other be like to do it save them and me.”

And suddenly rising, she slipped down on her knees, holding the child before her, beside a niche where a lamp made of pottery burned before a blackened wooden doll.

“Lady of Pity, hast thou none for this little child? Mother of Mercy, for thee to deceive me! This whole month have I been on my knees to thee many times in the day, praying thee to incline the Lady’s heart, when she should come, to show a mother’s pity to this motherless one. And thou hast not heard me—thou hast not heard me. Holy Virgin, what doest thou? Have I not offered candles at thy shrine? Have I not deprived myself of needful things to pay for thy litanies? What could I have done more? Is this thy pity, Lady of Pity?—this thy compassion, Mother and Maiden?”

But the passionate appeal was lost on the lifeless image to which it was made. As of old, so now, “there was neither

voice, not any to answer, nor any that regarded."

Nineteen years after that summer day, a girl of twenty-two sat gazing from the casement in that turret-chamber—a girl whose face even a flatterer would have praised but little; and Philippa Fitzalan had no flatterers. The pretty child—as pretty children often do—had grown into a very ordinary, commonplace woman. Her hair, indeed, was glossy and luxuriant, and had deepened from its early flaxen into the darkest shade to which it was possible for flaxen to change; her eyes were dark, with a sad, tired, wistful look in them—a look

"Of a dumb creature who had been beaten once,
And never since was easy with the world."

Her face was white and thin, her figure tall, slender, angular, and rather awkward. None had ever cared to amend her awkwardness; it signified to nobody whether she looked well or ill. In a word, *she* signified to nobody. The tears might burn under her eyelids, or overflow and fall,—she would never be asked what was the matter; she might fail under her burdens and faint in the midst of them,—and if it occurred to any one to prevent material injury to her, that was the very utmost she could expect. Not that the Lady Alianora was unkind to her stepdaughter: that is, not actively unkind. She simply ignored her existence. Philippa was provided, as a matter of course, with necessary clothes, just as the men who served in the hall were provided with livery; but anything not absolutely necessary had never been given to her in her life. There were no loving words, no looks of pleasure, no affectionate caresses, lavished upon her. If the Lady Joan lost her temper (no rare occurrence), or the Lady Alesia her appetite, or the Lady Mary her sleep, the whole household was disturbed; but what Philippa suffered never disturbed nor concerned any one but herself. To these, her half-sisters, she formed a kind of humble companion, a superior maid-of-all-work. All day long she heard and obeyed the commands of the three young ladies; all day long she was bidden, "Come here," "Go there," "Do this," "Fetch that." And Philippa came, and went, and fetched, and did as she was told. Just now she was off duty. Their Ladyships were gone out hawking with the Earl and Countess, and would not, in all probability, return for some hours.

And what was Philippa doing, as she sat gazing dreamily from the casement of her turret-chamber—hers, only because nobody else liked the room? Her eyes were fixed earnestly on one little spot of ground, a few feet from the castle gate; and her soul was wandering backward nineteen years, recalling the one scene which stood out vividly, the earliest of memory's pictures—a picture without text to explain it—before which, and after which, came blanks with no recollection to fill them. She saw herself lifted underneath a woman's veil—clasped earnestly in a woman's arms,—gazing in baby wonder up into a woman's face—a wan white face, with dark, expressive, fervent eyes, in which a whole volume of agony and love was written. She never knew who that woman was. Indeed, she sometimes wondered whether it were really a remembrance, or only a picture drawn by her own imagination. But there it was always, deep down in the heart's recesses, only waiting to be called on, and to come. Whoever this mysterious woman were, it was some one who had loved her—her, Philippa, whom no one ever loved. For Alina, who had died in her childhood, she scarcely recollected at all. And at the very core of the unseen, unknown heart of this quiet, undemonstrative girl, there lay one intense, earnest, passionate longing for love. If but one of her father's hawks or hounds would have looked brighter at her coming, she thought it would have satisfied her. For she had learned, long years ere this, that to her father himself, or to the Lady Alianora, or to her half-brothers and sisters, she must never look for any shadow of love. The "mother-want about the world," which pressed on her so heavily, they would never fill. The dull, blank uniformity of simple apathy was all she ever received from any of them.

Her very place was filled. The Lady Joan was the eldest daughter of the house—not Mistress Philippa. For the pleasure of the Countess had been fulfilled, and Mistress Philippa the girl was called. And when Joan was married and went away from the castle (in a splendid litter hung with crimson velvet), her sister Alesia stepped into her place as a matter of course. Philippa did not, indeed, see the drawbacks to Joan's lot. They were not apparent on the surface. That the stately young noble who rode on a beautiful Barbary horse beside the litter, actually hated the girl whom he had been forced to marry, did not enter into her calculations: but as Joan cared very little for that herself, it was the less necessary that Philippa should do so. And Philippa only missed Joan from the house by the fact that her work was so much the lighter, and her life a trifle less disagreeable than before.

More considerations than one were troubling Philippa just now. Blanche, one of the Countess's tire-women, had just visited her turret-chamber, to inform her that the Lady Alesia was betrothed, and would be married six months thence. It did not, however, trouble her that she had heard of this through a servant; she never looked for anything else. Had she been addicted (which, fortunately for her, she was not) to that most profitless of all manufactures, grievance-making,—she might have wept over this little incident. But except for one reason, the news of her sister's approaching marriage was rather agreeable to Philippa. She would have another tyrant the less; though it was true that Alesia had always been the least unkind to her of the three, and she would have welcomed Mary's marriage with far greater satisfaction. But that one terrible consideration which Blanche had forced on her notice!

"I marvel, indeed, that my gracious Lord hath not thought of your disposal, Mistress Philippa, ere this."

Suppose he should think of it! For to Philippa's apprehension, love was so far from being synonymous with marriage, that she held the two barely compatible. Marriage to her would be merely another phase of Egyptian bondage, under a different Pharaoh. And she knew this was her probable lot: that (unless her father's neglect on this subject should continue—which she devoutly hoped it might) she would some day be informed by Blanche—or possibly the Lady Alianora herself might condescend to make the communication—that on the following Wednesday she was to be married to Sir Robert le Poer or Sir John de Mountchenesey; probably a man whom she had never seen, possibly one whom she just knew by sight.

Philippa scarcely knew how, from such thoughts as these, her memory slowly travelled back, and stayed outside the castle gate, at that June morning of nineteen years ago. Who was it that had parted with her so unwillingly? It could not, of course, be the mother of whom she had never heard so much as the name; she must have died long ago. On her side, so far as Philippa knew, she had no relations; and her aunts on the father's side, the Lady Latimer, the Lady

de l'Estrange, and the Lady de Lisle, never took the least notice of her when they visited the castle. And then came up the thought—"Who am I? How is it that nobody cares to own me? There must be a reason. What is the reason?"

"Mistress Philippa! look you here: the Lady Mary left with me this piece of arras, and commanded me to give it unto you to be amended, and beshrew me but I clean forgot. This green is to come forth, and this blue to be set instead thereof, and clean slea-silk for the yellow. Haste, for the holy Virgin's love, or I shall be well swunged when she cometh home!"

Chapter Two.

Hidden Treasure.

"Who hears the falling of the forest leaf?
Or who takes note of every flower that dies?"

Longfellow.

The morning after Blanche and the arras had thus roughly dispelled Philippa's dream, the Lady Alianora sat in her bower, looking over a quantity of jewellery. She put some articles aside to be reset, dismissed others as past amendment, or not worth it, and ordered some to be restored to the coffer whence they had been taken. The Lady Alesia was looking on, and Philippa stood behind with the maids. At last only one ornament was left.

"This is worth nothing," said the Countess, lifting from the table an old bracelet, partly broken. "Put it with the others—or stay: whence came it?"

"Out of an ancient coffer, an't like your Ladyship," said Blanche, "that hath been longer in the castle than I."

"I should think so," returned the Countess. "It must have belonged to my Lord's grandmother, or some yet more ancient dame. 'Tis worth nothing. Philippa, you may have it."

Not a very gracious manner of presenting a gift, it must be confessed; but Philippa well knew that nothing of any value was likely to be handed to her. Moreover, this was the first present that had ever been made to her. And lastly, a dim notion floated through her mind that it might have belonged to her mother; and anything connected with that dead and unknown mother had a sacred charm in her eyes. Her thanks, therefore, were readily forthcoming. She put the despised bracelet in her pocket; and as soon as she received her dismissal, ran with a lighter step than usual to her turret-chamber. Without any distinct reason for doing so, she drew the bolt, and sitting down by the window, proceeded to examine her treasure.

It was a plain treasure enough. A band of black enamel, set at intervals with seed-pearl and beryls, certainly was not worth much; especially since the snap was gone, one of the beryls and several pearls were missing, and from the centre ornament, an enamelled rose, a portrait had apparently been torn away. Did the rose open? Philippa tried it; for she was anxious to reach the device, if there were one to reach. The rose opened with some effort, and the device lay before her, written in small characters, with faded ink, on a scrap of parchment fitting into the bracelet.

Philippa's one accomplishment, which she owed to her old friend Alina, was the rare power of reading. It was very seldom that she found any opportunity of exercising it, yet she had not lost the art. Alina had been a priest's sister, who in teaching her to read had taught her all that he knew himself; and Alina in her turn had thus given to Philippa all that she had to give.

But the characters of the device were so small and faint, that Philippa consumed half an hour ere she could decipher them. At length she succeeded in making out a rude rhyme or measure, in the Norman-French which was to her more familiar than English.

"Quy de cette eaw boyra
Ancor soyf aura;
Mais quy de cette eaw boyra
Que moy luy donneray,
Jamais soif n'aura
A l'éternité."

Devices of the mediaeval period were parted into two divisions—religious and amatory. Philippa had no difficulty in deciding that this belonged to the former category; and she guessed in a moment that the meaning was a moral one; for she was accustomed to such hidden allegorical allusions. And already she had advanced one step on the road to that Well; she knew that "whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Ay, from her that weary thirst was never absent. But where was this Well from which it might be quenched? and who was it that could give her this living water?

Philippa's memory was a perfect storehouse of legends of the saints, and above all of the Virgin, who stood foremost in her pantheon of gods. She searched her repertory over and over, but in vain. No saint, and in particular not Saint Mary, had ever, in any legend that she knew, spoken words like these. And what tremendous words they were! "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

There were long and earnest prayers offered that night in the little turret-chamber. Misdirected prayers—entreaties to be prayed for, addressed to ears that could not hear, to hands that could not help. But perhaps they reached another Ear that could hear, another Hand that was almighty. The unclosing of the door is promised to them that ask.

Thanks be to God, that while it is not promised, it does sometimes in His sovereign mercy unclose to them that know not how to ask.

The morning after this, as Philippa opened her door, one of the castle lavenders, of washerwomen, passed it on her way down the stairs. She was a woman of about fifty years of age, who had filled her present place longer than Philippa could recollect.

Throughout the whole of the Middle Ages—for a period of many centuries, closing only about the time of the accession of the House of Hanover—laundress was a name of evil repute, and the position was rarely assumed by any woman who had a character to lose. The daughters of the Lady Alianora were strictly forbidden to speak to any lavender; but no one had cared enough about Philippa to warn her, and she was therefore free to converse with whom she pleased. And a sudden thought had struck her. She called back the lavender.

“Agnes!”

The woman stopped, came to Philippa’s door, and louted—the old-fashioned reverence which preceded the French courtesy.

“Agnes, how long hast thou been lavender here?”

“Long ere you were born, Lady.”

“Canst thou remember my mother?”

Philippa was amazed at the look of abject terror which suddenly took possession of the lavender’s face.

“Hush, Lady, Lady!” she whispered, her voice trembling with fear.

Philippa laid her hand on the woman’s arm.

“Wilt thou suffer aught if thou tarry?”

Agnes shook her head.

“Then come in hither.” And she pulled her into her own room, and shut the door. “Agnes, there is some strange thing I cannot understand: and I will understand it. What letteth (hinders) thee to speak to me of my mother?”

Agnes looked astonished at Philippa’s tone, as well she might. “It hath been forbidden, Lady.”

“Who forbade it?”

The lavender’s compressed lips sufficiently intimated that she did not mean to answer that question.

“Why was it forbidden?”

The continued silence replied.

“When died she? Thou mayest surely tell me so much.”

“I dare not, Lady,” replied Agnes in a scarcely audible whisper.

“How died she?”

“Lady, I dare not answer,—I must not. You weary yourself to no good.”

“But I will know,” said Philippa, doggedly.

“Not from me, Lady,” answered the lavender with equal determination.

“What does it all mean?” moaned poor Philippa to her baffled self. “Look here, Agnes. Hast thou ever seen this bracelet?”

“Ay, Lady. The Lady Alianora never deigns to speak to such as we poor lavenders be, but *she* did not think it would soil her lips to comfort us when our hearts were sad. I have seen her wear that jewel.”

A terrible fancy all at once occurred to Philippa.

“Agnes, was she an evil woman, that thou wilt not speak of her?”

The lavender’s heart was reached, and her tongue loosed.

“No, no, Lady, no!” she cried, with a fervour of which Philippa had not imagined her capable. “The snow was no whiter than her life, the honey no sweeter than her soul!”

“Then what does it all mean?” said Philippa again, in a tone of more bewilderment than ever.

But the momentary fervour had died away, and silence once more settled on the lavender’s tongue. Agnes louted, and walked away; and Philippa knew only one thing more—that the broken bracelet had been her mother’s. But who was she, and what was she, this mysterious mother of whom none would speak to her—the very date of whose death her child was not allowed to know?

"That is too poor for you, Alesia," said the Lady Alianora.

"'Tis but thin, in good sooth," observed that young lady.

"I suppose Philippa must have a gown for the wedding," resumed the Countess, carelessly. "It will do for her."

It was cloth of silver. Philippa had never had such a dress in her life. She listened in mute surprise. Could it be possible that she was intended to appear as a daughter of the house at Alesia's marriage?

"You may choose your hood-stuff from chose velvets," said the Countess condescendingly to Philippa. "I trow you will have to choose your own gowns after you are wedded, so you may as well begin now."

"Will Philippa be wed when I am?" yawned Alesia.

"The same day," said the Lady Alianora.

The day was about sixty hours off; and this was the first word that Philippa had heard of her destiny. To whom was she to be handed over after this summary fashion? Would the Countess, of her unspeakable goodness, let her know that? But the Countess could not tell her; she had not yet heard. She thought there were two knights in treaty for her, and the last time he had mentioned it, the Earl had not decided between them.

As soon as Alesia's wardrobe was settled, and Philippa was no longer wanted to unfold silks and exhibit velvets, she fled like a hunted deer to her turret-chamber. Kneeling down by her bed, she buried her face in the coverlet, and the long-repressed cry of the sold slave broke forth at last.

"O Mother, Mother, Mother!"

The door opened, but Philippa did not hear it.

"Lady, I cry you mercy," said the voice of Agnes in a compassionate tone. "I meant not indeed to pry into your privacy; but as I was coming up the stairs, I thought I heard a scream. I feared you were sick."

Philippa looked up, with a white, woe-begone face and tearless eyes.

"I wish I were, Agnes!" she said in a hopeless tone. "I would I were out of this weary and wicked world."

"Ah, I have wished that ere now," responded the lavender. "'Tis an ill wish, Lady. I have heard one say so."

"One that never felt it, I trow," said Philippa.

"No did, Lady? Ay, one whose lot was far bitterer than yours."

"Verily, I would give something to see one whose lot were so," answered the girl, bitterly enough. "I have no mother, and as good as no father; and none would care were I out of the world this night. Not a soul loveth me, nor ever did."

"She used to say One did love us," said Agnes in a low voice; "even He that died on the rood. I would I could mind what she told us; but it is long, long ago; and mine heart is hard, and my remembrance dim. Yet I do mind that last time she spake, only the very day before—never mind what. But that which came after stamped it on mine heart for ever. It was the last time I heard her voice; and I knew—we all knew—what was coming, though she did not. It was about water she spake, and he that drank should thirst again; and there was another well some whither, whereof he that should drink should never thirst. And He that died on the rood would give us that better water, if we asked Him."

"But how shall I get at Him to ask Him?" cried Philippa.

"She said He could hear, if we asked," replied the lavender.

"Who said?"

"She—that you wot of. Our Lady that used to be."

"My mother?"

Agnes nodded. "And the water that He should give should bring life and peace. It was a sweet story and a fair, as she told it. But there never was a voice like hers—never."

Philippa rose, and opened her cherished bracelet. She could guess what that bracelet had been. The ornament was less common in the Middle Ages than in the periods which preceded and followed them; and it was usually a love-token. But where was the love which had given and received this? Was it broken, too, like the bracelet?

She read the device to Agnes.

"It was something like that," said Agnes. "But she read the story touching it, out of a book."

"What was she like?" asked Philippa in a low tone.

"Look in the mirror, Lady," answered Agnes.

Philippa began to wonder whether this were the mysterious reason for her bitter lot.

"Dost thou know I am to be wed?"

"Ay, Lady."

So the very lavenders had known it before herself! But finding Agnes, as she thought, more communicative than before, Philippa returned to her former subject.

"What was her name?"

Agnes shook her head.

"Thou knowest it?"

The lavender nodded in answer.

"Then why not tell it me? Surely I may know what they christened her at the font—Philippa, or Margaret, or Blanche?"

Agnes hesitated a moment, but seemed to decide on replying. She sank her voice so low that Philippa could barely hear her, but she just caught the words.

"The Lady Isabel."

Philippa sat a minute in silence; but Agnes made no motion to go.

"Agnes, thou saidst her lot was more bitter than mine. How was it more bitter?"

Agnes pointed to the window of the opposite turret, where the tiring-women slept, and outside of which was hung a luckless lark in a small wicker cage.

"Is his lot sweet, Lady?"

"I trow not, in good sooth," said Philippa; "but his is like mine."

"I cry you mercy," answered the lavender, shaking her head. "He hath known freedom, and light, and air, and song. That was her lot—not yours, Lady."

Philippa continued to watch the lark. His poor caged wings were beating vainly against the wicker-work, until he wearily gave up the attempt, and sat quietly on the perch, drooping his tired head.

"He is not satisfied," resumed Agnes in a low tone. "He is only weary. He is not happy—only too worn-out to care for happiness. Ah, holy Virgin! how many of us women are so! And she was wont to say that there was happiness in this life, yet not in this world. It lay, she said, in that other world above, where God sitteth; and if we would ask for Him that was meant by the better water, it would come and dwell in our hearts along with Him. Our sweet Lady help us! we seem to have missed it somehow."

"I have, at any rate," whispered Philippa, her eyes fixed dreamily on the weary lark.

Chapter Three.

Guy of Ashridge.

"For merit lives from man to man,
And not from man, O Lord, to Thee."

Tennyson.

Not until the evening before her marriage did Philippa learn the name of her new master. The Earl's choice, she was then informed, had fallen on Sir Richard Sergeaux, a knight of Cornwall, who would receive divers manors with the hand of the eldest daughter of Arundel. Philippa was, however, not told that Sir Richard was expected to pay for the grants and the alliance in extremely hard cash.

For to the lofty position of eldest daughter of Arundel (for that morning only) Philippa, to her intense surprise, found herself suddenly lifted. She was robed in cloth of silver; her hair flowed from beneath a jewelled golden fillet; her neck was encircled by rubies, and a ruby and pearl girdle clasped her waist. She felt all the time as though she were dreaming, especially when the Lady Alianora herself superintended her arraying, and even condescended to remark that "the Lady Philippa did not look so very unseemly after all."

Not least among the points which astonished her was the resumption of her title. She did not know that this had formed a part of the bargain with Sir Richard, who had proved impracticable on harder terms. He did not mind purchasing the eldest daughter of Arundel at the high price set upon her; but he gave the Earl distinctly to understand that if he were merely selling a Mistress Philippa, there must be a considerable discount.

When the ceremony and the wedding festivities were over, and her palfrey was standing ready at the door, Philippa timidly entered the banqueting-hall, to ask—for the first and last time—her father's blessing. He was conversing with the Earl of Kent, the bridegroom of Alesia, concerning the merits of certain hawks recently purchased; and near him, at her embroidery-frame, sat the Countess Alianora.

Philippa knelt first to her.

"Farewell, Philippa!" said the Countess, in a rather kinder tone than usual. "The saints be with thee."

Then she turned to the only relative she had.

Earl Richard just permitted his jewelled fingers to touch Philippa's velvet hood, saying carelessly,—“Our Lady keep thee!—I cry you mercy, fair son; the lesser tercel is far stronger on the wing.”

As Philippa rose, Sir Richard Sergeaux took her hand and led her away. So she mounted her palfrey, and rode away from Arundel Castle. There were only two things she was sorry to leave—Agnes, because she might have told her more about her mother,—and the grave, in the Priory churchyard below, of the baby Lady Alianora—the little sister who never grew up to tyrannise over her.

It was a long journey ere they reached Kilquyt Manor, and Philippa had time to make the acquaintance of her new owner. He was about her own age, and so far as she could at first judge, a reasonably good-tempered man. The first discovery she made was that he was rather proud of her. Of Philippa the daughter of Arundel, of course, not of Philippa the woman: but it was so new to be reckoned anything or anybody—so strange to think that somebody was proud of her—that Philippa enjoyed the knowledge. As to his loving her, or her loving him, these were ideas that never entered the minds of either.

So at first Philippa found her married life a pleasant change. She was now at the head, instead of being under the feet of every one else; and her experience of Sir Richard gave her the impression at the outset that he would not prove a hard master. Nor did he, strictly speaking; but on further acquaintance he proved a very trying one. His temper was not of the stormy kind that reigned at Arundel, which had hitherto been Philippa's only idea of a bad temper: but he was a perpetual grumbler, and the slightest temporary discomfort or vexation would overcast her sky with conjugal clouds for the rest of the day. The least stone in his path was treated as a gigantic mountain; the narrowest brooklet as an unfathomable sea. And gradually—she scarcely knew how or when—the old weary discomfort crept back over Philippa's heart, the old unsatisfied longing for the love that no one gave. Her bower at Kilquyt was no more strewn with roses than her turret-chamber at Arundel. She found that “On change du ciel—l'on ne change point de soi.” The damask robes and caparisoned palfreys, which her husband did not grudge to her as her father had done, proved utterly unsatisfying to the misunderstood cravings of her immortal soul. She did not herself comprehend why she was not happier. She knew not the nature of the thirst which was upon her, which she was trying in vain to quench at the broken cisterns within her reach. Drinking of this water, she thirsted again; and she had not yet found the way to the Well of the Living Water.

About seven years after her marriage, Philippa stood one day at the gate of her manor. It was a beautiful June morning—just such another as that one which “had failed her hope” at the gate of Arundel Castle, thirty years before. Sir Richard had ridden away on his road to London, whence he was summoned to join his feudal lord, the Earl, and Lady Sergeaux stood looking after him in her old dreamy fashion, though half-an-hour had almost passed since she had caught sight of the last waving of his nodding plume through the trees. He had left her a legacy of discomfort, for his spurs had been regilded, not at all to his mind, and he had been growling over them ever since the occurrence, “Dame, have you a draught of cold water to bestow on a weary brother?”

Philippa started suddenly when the question reached her ear.

He who asked it was a monk in the habit of the Dominican Order, and very worn and weary he looked. Lady Sergeaux called for one of her women, and supplied him with the water which he sorely needed, as was manifest from the eager avidity with which he drank. When he had given back the goblet, and the woman was gone, the monk turned towards Philippa, and uttered words which astonished her no little.

“Quy de cette eaw boyra
Ancor soyf aura;
Mays quy de l'eaw boyra
Que moy luy donneray,
Jamays soyf n'aura
A l'éternité.”

“You know that, brother?” she said breathlessly.

“Do you, Lady?” asked the monk—as Philippa felt, with a deeper than the merely literal meaning.

“I know the ‘ancor soyf aura,’” she said, mournfully; “I have not reached beyond that.”

“Then did you ask, and He did *not* give?” inquired the stranger.

“No—I never asked, for—” she was going on to add, “I never knew where to ask.”

“Then 'tis little marvel you never had, Lady,” answered the monk.

“But how to ask?—whom to ask? There may be the Well, but where is the way?”

“How to ask, Lady? As I asked you but now for that lower, poorer water, whereof whosoever drinketh shall thirst again. Whom to ask? Be there more Gods in Heaven than one? Ask the Master, not the servants. And where is the way? It was made on the red rood, thirteen hundred years ago, when ‘one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.’ Over that stream of blood is the way to the Well of Living Water.”

"I do not fully understand you," returned Philippa.

"You look weary, Lady," said the monk, changing his tone.

"I am weary," she answered; "wearier than you—in one sense."

"Ay, wearier than I," he replied; "for I have been to the Well, and have found rest."

"Are you a priest?" asked Philippa suddenly.

The monk nodded.

"Then come in hither and rest, and let me confess to you. I fancy you might tell me what would help me."

The monk silently obeyed, and followed her to the house. An hour later he sat in Philippa's bower, and she knelt before him.

"Father," she said, at the close of her tale, "I have never known rest nor love. All my life I have been a lonely, neglected woman. Is there any balm-tree by your Well for such wounds as mine?—any healing virtue in its waters that could comfort me?"

"Have you never injured or neglected any, daughter?" asked the monk quietly.

"Never!" she said, almost indignantly.

"I cannot hold with you there," he replied.

"Whom have I ever injured?" exclaimed Philippa, half angrily, half amazed.

"Listen," said he, "and I will tell you of One whom all your life you have injured and neglected—God."

Philippa's protestations died on her lips. She had not expected to hear such words as these.

"Nay, heed not my words," he pursued gently. "Your own lips shall bring you in guilty. Have you loved God with all your mind, and heart, and soul, and strength? Hath He been in all your thoughts?"

Philippa felt instinctively that the monk spoke truly. She had not loved God, she had not even wished to love Him. Her conscience cried to her, "Unclean!" yet she was too proud to acknowledge it. She felt angry, not with herself, but with him. She thought he "rubbed the sore, when he should bring the plaster." Comfort she had asked, and condemnation he was giving her instead.

"Father!" she said, in mingled sadness and vexation, "you deal me hard measure."

"My daughter," answered the monk very gently, "the pitcher must be voided ere it can be filled. If you go to the Well with your vessel full of the water of earth, there will be no room there for the Living Water."

"Is it only for saints, then?" she asked in a disappointed tone.

"It is only for sinners," answered he: "and according to your own belief, you are not a sinner. The Living Water is not wasted on pitchers that have been filled already at other cisterns, 'I will give unto him that is athirst'—but to him only—'of the Fountain of the Water of Life, freely.'"

"But tell me, in plain words, what is that Water of Life?"

"The Holy Spirit of God."

Philippa's next question was not so wide of the mark as it seemed.

"Are you a true Dominican?"

"I am one of the Order of Predicant Friars."

"From what house?"

"From Ashridge."

"Who sent you forth to preach?"

"God."

"Ah! yes, but I mean, what bishop or abbot?"

"Is the seal of the servant worth more than that of the Master?"

"I would know, Father," urged Philippa.

The monk smiled. "Archbishop Bradwardine," he said.

"Then Ashridge is a Dominican house? I know not that vicinage."

“Men give us another name,” responded the monk slowly, “which I see you would know. Be it so. They call us—Boni-Homines.”

“But I thought,” said Philippa, looking bewilderedly into his face, “I thought those were very evil men. And Archbishop Bradwardine was a very holy man—almost a saint.”

A faint ironical smile flitted for a moment over the monk’s grave lips. The gravity was again unbroken the next instant.

“A very holy man,” he repeated. “He walked with God; and he is not, for God took him. Ay, took him away from the evil to come, where he should vex his righteous soul no more by unlawful deeds—where the alloyed gold of worldly greatness, which men would needs braid over the pure ermine of his life, should soil and crush it no more.”

He spoke rather to himself than to Philippa: and his eyes had a far-away look in them, as he lifted his head and gazed from the window over the moorland.

“Then what are the Boni-Homines?” inquired Lady Sergeaux.

“A few sinners,” answered the monk, “whose hearts God hath touched, that they have sought and found that Well of the Living Water.”

“But, Father, explain it to me!” she cried anxiously, perhaps even a little querulously. “Put it in plain words, that I can understand it. What is it to drink this Living Water?”

“To come to Christ, my daughter,” replies the monk.

“But I cannot understand you,” she objected, in the same tone. “How can I come? What mean you by coming? He is not here in this chamber, that I can rise and go to Him. Can you not use words more intelligible to me?”

“In the first place, my daughter,” softly replied the monk, “you are under a great mistake. Christ is here in this chamber, and hath heard every word that we have said. And in the second place, I cannot use words that shall be plainer to you. How can the dead understand the living? How shall a man born blind be brought to know the difference of colour between green and blue. Yet the hardship lieth not in the inaptness of the teacher, but in the inability of the taught.”

“But I am not blind, nor dead!” cried Philippa.

“Both,” answered the monk. “So, by nature, be we all.”

Philippa made no reply; she was too vexed to make any. The monk laid his hand gently upon her head.

“Take the best wish that I can make for you:—God show you how blind you are! God put life within you, that you may awake, and arise from the dead, and see the light of Christ! May He grant you that thirst which shall be satisfied with nothing short of the Living Water—which shall lead you to disregard all the roughnesses of the way, and the storms of the journey, so that you may win Christ, and be found in Him! God strip you of your own goodness!—for I fear you are over-well satisfied therewith. And no goodness shall ever have admittance into Heaven save the goodness which is of God.”

“But surely,” exclaimed Philippa, looking up in surprise, “there is grace of congruity?”

“Grace of congruity! grace of condignity!” (see Note) cried the monk fervently. “Grace of sin and gracelessness! It is not all worth so much as one of these rushes upon your floor. If you carry grace of congruity to the gates of Heaven, I warn you it shall never bear you one step beyond. Lay down those miserable rush-staffs, wherein is no pith; and take God’s golden staff held out to you, which is the full and perfected obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. That staff shall not fail you. All the angels at the gate of Paradise know it; and the doors shall fly wide open to whoso smiteth on them with that staff of God. Lord, open her eyes, that she may see!”

The prayer was answered, but not then.

“What shall I call you?” asked Philippa, when the monk rose to depart.

“Men call me Guy of Ashridge,” he said.

“I hope to see you again, Father,” responded Philippa.

“So do I, my daughter,” answered the monk, “in that other land whereinto nothing shall enter that defileth. Nothing but Christ and Christ’s—the Head and the body, the Master and the meynie (household servant). May the Master make you one of the meynie! Farewell.”

And in five minutes more, Guy of Ashridge was gone.

Note. “Condignity implies merit, and of course claims reward on the score of justice. Congruity pretends only to a sort of imperfect qualification for the gifts and reception of God’s grace.”—*Manet’s Church History*, iv. 81.

Mother Joan.

“She hears old footsteps wandering slow
Through the lone chambers of her heart.”

Lowell.

When Guy of Ashridge was fairly gone, Philippa felt at once relieved and vexed to lose him. She had called in a new physician to prescribe for her disease; and she was sure that he had administered a harmful medicine, if he had not also given a wrong diagnosis. Instead of being better, she felt worse; and she resolved to give herself the next dose, in the form of a “retreat” into a convent, to pray and fast, and make her peace with God. Various reasons induced her to select a convent at a distance from home. After a period of indecision, she fixed upon the Abbey of Shaftesbury, and obtained the necessary permission to reside there for a time.

Lady Sergeaux arrived at Shaftesbury towards the close of August. She found the Abbess and nuns kindly-disposed towards her; and her stay was not disagreeable, except for the restless, dissatisfied feelings of her own heart. But she found that her peace was not made, for all her fastings, scourgings, vigils, and prayers. Guy’s words came back to her with every rite, “God strip you of your own goodness!” and she could not wrap herself in its mantle as complacently as before.

In the Abbey of Shaftesbury was one nun who drew Philippa’s attention more than the others. This was a woman of about sixty years of age, whom all the convent called Mother Joan. An upright, white-haired woman, with some remnant of former comeliness; but Mother Joan was blind. Philippa pitied her affliction, and liked her simple, straightforward manner. She had many old memories and tales of forgotten times, which she was ready enough to tell; and these Philippa, as well as the nuns, always liked to hear.

“How old were you, Mother Joan, when you became a nun?” she asked her one day during the recreation-hour.

“Younger than you, Lady,” said Mother Joan. “I was but an hilding (see Note 1) of twenty.”

“And wherefore was it, Mother?” inquired a giddy young nun, whose name was Laura. “Wert thou disappointed in love, or—”

The scorn exhibited on the blind woman’s face stopped her.

“I never was such a fool,” said Mother Joan, bluntly. “I became a nun because my father had decreed it from my cradle, and my mother willed it also. There were but two of us maids, and—ah, well! she would not have more than one to suffer.”

“Had thy sister, then, a woeful story?” asked Sister Laura, settling her wimple, (see note 2), as she thought, becomingly.

“Never woman woefuller,” sadly replied Mother Joan.

The next opportunity she had, Lady Sergeaux asked one of the more discreet nuns who Mother Joan was.

“Eldest daughter of the great house of Le Despenser,” replied Sister Senicula; “of most excellent blood and lineage; daughter unto my noble Lord of Gloucester that was, and the royal Lady Alianora de Clare, his wife, the daughter of a daughter of King Edward. By Mary, Mother and Maiden, she is the noblest nun in all these walls.”

“And what hath been her history?” inquired Philippa.



"Her history, I think, was but little," replied Senicula; "your Ladyship heard her say that she had been professed at twenty years. But I have known her to speak of a sister of hers, who had a very sorrowful story. I have often wished to know what it were, but she will never tell it."

The next recreation-time found Philippa, as usual, seated by Mother Joan. The blind nun passed her hand softly over Philippa's dress.

"That is a damask," (the figured silk made at Damascus) she said. "I used to like damask and baudekyn."

(Note: Baudekyn or baldekyn was the richest silk stuff then known, and also of oriental manufacture.)

"I never wear baudekyn," answered Philippa. "I am but a knight's wife."

"What is the colour?" the blind woman wished to know.

"Red and black, in stripes," said Philippa.

"I remember," said Mother Joan, dreamily, "many years ago, seeing mine aunt, the Lady of Gloucester, at the court of King Edward of Caernarvon, arrayed in a fair baudekyn of rose colour and silver. It was the loveliest stuff I ever saw. And I could see then."

Her voice fell so mournfully that Philippa tried to turn her attention by asking her,—*"Knew you King Edward of Westminster?"* (See note 3.)

"Nay, Lady de Sergeaux, with what years do you credit me?" rejoined the nun, laughing a little. "Edward of Westminster was dead ere I was born. But I have heard of him from them that did remember him well. He was a goodly man, of lofty stature, and royal presence: a wise man, and a cunning (clever)—saving only that he opposed our holy Father the Pope."

"Did he so?" responded Philippa.

"Did he so!" ironically repeated Mother Joan. "Did he not command that no Bull should ever be brought into England? and hanged he not the Prior of Saint John of Jerusalem for reading one to his monks? I can tell you, to brave Edward of Westminster was no laughing matter. He never cared what his anger cost. His own children had need to think twice ere they aroused his ire. Why, on the day of his daughter the Lady Elizabeth's marriage with my noble Lord of Hereford, he, being angered by some word of the bride, snatched her coronet from off her head, and flung it behind the fire. Ay, and a jewel or twain was lost therefrom ere the Lady's Grace had it back."

"And his son, King Edward of Caernarvon—what like was he?" asked Philippa, smiling.

Mother Joan did not answer immediately. At last she said,—*"The blessed Virgin grant that they which have reviled him be no worse than he! He had some strange notions—so had other men, whom I at least am bound to hold in honour. God grant all peace!"*

Philippa wondered who the other men were, and whether Mother Joan alluded to her own ancestors. She knew nothing of the Despencers, except the remembrance that she had never heard them alluded to at Arundel but in a tone of bitter scorn and loathing.

"Maybe," continued the blind woman, in a softer voice, "he was no worse for his strange opinions. Some were not. 'Tis a marvellous matter, surely, that there be that can lead lives of angels, and yet hold views that holy Church condemneth as utterly to be abhorred."

"Whom mean you, Mother?"

"I mean, child," replied the nun, speaking slowly and painfully, "one whom I hope is gone to God. One to whom, and for whom, this world was an ill place; and, therefore, I trust she hath found her rest in a better. God knoweth how and when she died—if she be dead. We never knew."

Mother Joan made the sign of the cross, and a very mournful expression came over her face.

"Ah, holy Virgin!" she said, lifting her sightless eyes, "why is it that such things are permitted? The wicked dwell in peace, and increase their goods; the holy dwell hardly and die poor. Couldst not thou change the lots? There is at this moment one man in the world, clad in cloth of gold, dwelling gloriously, than whom the foul fiend himself is scarcely worse; and there was one woman, like the angels, whose Queen thou art, and only God and thou know what became of her. Blessed Mary must such things always be? I cannot understand it. I suppose thou canst."

It was the old perplexity—as old as Asaph; but he understood it when he went into the sanctuary of God, and Mother Joan had never followed him there.

"Lady de Sergeaux," resumed the blind nun, "there is at times a tone in your voice, which mindeth me strangely of hers—hers, of whom I spake but now. If I offend not in asking it, I pray you tell me who were your elders?"

Philippa gave her such information as she had to give. "I am a daughter of my Lord of Arundel."

"Which Lord?" exclaimed Mother Joan, in a voice as of deep interest suddenly awakened.

"They call him," answered Philippa, "Earl Richard the Copped-Hat." (See Note 4.)

"Ah!" answered Mother Joan, in that deep bass tone which sounds almost like an execration. "That was the man. Like Dives, clad in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day; and his portion shall be with Dives at the last. Your pardon, Dame; I forgot for the nonce that I spake to his daughter. Yet I said but truth."

"That may be," responded Philippa under her breath.

"Then you have not found him a saint?" replied the blind nun, with a bitter little laugh. "Well, I might have guessed that. And you, then, are a daughter of that proud jade Alianora of Lancaster, for whose indwelling the fiend swept the Castle of Arundel clean of God's angels? I do not think she made up for it."

Philippa's own interest was painfully aroused now. Surely Mother Joan knows something of that mysterious history which hitherto she had failed so sadly to discover.

"I cry you mercy, Mother," she said. "But I am not the daughter of the Lady Alianora."

"Whose, then? Quick!" cried Mother Joan, in accents of passionate earnestness.

"Who was my mother," answered Philippa, "I cannot tell you, for I was never told myself. All that I know of her I had but from a poor lavender, that spake well of her, and she called her the Lady Isabel."

"Isabel! Isabel!"

Philippa was deeply touched; for the name, twice repeated, broke in a wail of tender, mournful love, from the lips of the blind nun.

"Mother," she pleaded, "if you know anything of her, for the holy Virgin's love tell it to me, her child. I have missed her and longed for her all my life. Surely I have a right to know her story who gave me that life!"

"Thou shalt know," responded Mother Joan in a choked voice. "But, child, name me Mother Joan no longer. Call me what I am to thee—Aunt. Thy mother was my sister."

And then Philippa knew that she stood upon the threshold of all her long-nursed hopes.

"But tell me first," pursued the nun, "how that upstart treated thee—Alianora."

"She was not unkind to me," answered Philippa hesitatingly. "She did not give me precedence over her daughters, but then she is of the blood royal, and I am not. But—"

"Not royal!" exclaimed Mother Joan in extremely treble tones. "Have they brought thee up so ignorantly as that? Not of the blood royal, quotha! Child, by our Lady's hosen, thou art fifty-three steps nearer the throne than she! We were daughters of Alianora, whose mother was Joan of Acon, (Acre, where Joan was born), daughter of King Edward of Westminster; and she is but the daughter of Henry, the son of Edmund, son of Henry of Winchester." (Henry the Third.)

Philippa was silent from astonishment.

"Go on," said the nun. "What did she do to thee?"

"She did little," said Philippa in a low voice. "She only left undone."

"Ah!" replied Mother Joan. "The one half of the *Confiteor*. The other commonly marcheth apace behind."

"Then," said Philippa, "my mother was—"

"Isabel La Despenser, younger daughter of the Lord Hugh Le Despenser the younger, Earl of Gloucester, and grand-daughter of Hugh the elder, Earl of Winchester. Thou knowest their names well, if not hers."

"I know nothing about them," replied Philippa, shaking her head. "None ever told me. I only remember to have heard them named at Arundel as very wicked persons, and rebels against the King."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Mother Joan. "Rebels!—against which King?"

"I do not know," answered Philippa.

"But I do!" exclaimed the blind woman, bitterly. "Rebels against a rebel! Traitors to a traitress! God reward Isabelle of France for all the shame and ruin that she brought on England! Was the crown that she carried with her worth the price which she cost that carried it? Well, she is dead now—gone before God to answer all that long and black account of hers. Methinks it took some answering. Child, my father did some ill things, and my grandfather did more; but did either ever anything to merit the shame and agony of those two gibbets at Hereford and Bristol? Gibbets for them, that had sat in the King's council, and aided him to rule the realm,—and one of them a white-haired man over sixty years! (See Note 5.) And what had they done save to anger the tigress? God help us all! We be all poor sinners; but there be some, at the least in men's eyes, a deal blacker than others. But thou wouldst know her story, not theirs: yet theirs is the half of hers, and the tale were unfinished if I told it not."

"What was she like?" asked Philippa.

Mother Joan passed her hand slowly over the features of her niece.

"Like, and not like," she said. "Thy features are sharper cut than hers; and though in thy voice there is a sound of hers, it is less soft and low. Hers was like the wind among the strings of an harp hanging on the wall. Thy colouring I cannot see. But if thou be like her, thine hair is glossy, and of chestnut hue; and thine eyes are dark and mournful."

"Tell me about her, Aunt, I pray you," said Philippa.

Joan La Despenser smoothed down her monastic habit, and leaned her head back against the wall. There was evidently some picture of memory's bringing before her sightless eyes, and her voice itself had a lower and softer tone as she spoke of the dead sister. But her first words were not of her.

"Holy Virgin!" she said, "when thou didst create the world, wherefore didst thou make women? For women have but two fates: either they are black-souled, like the tigress Isabelle, and then they prosper and thrive, as she did; or else they are white snowdrops, like our dead darling, and then they are martyrs. A few die in the cradle—those whom thou lovest best; and what fools are we to weep for them! Ah me! things be mostly crooked in this world. Is there another, me wondereth, where they grow straight?—where the black-souled die on the gibbets, and the white-souled wear the crowns? I would like to die, and change to that Golden Land, if there be. Methinks it is far off."

It was a Land "very far off." And over the eyes of Joan La Despenser the blinding film of earth remained; for she had not drunk of the Living Water.

"The founder of our house,"—thus Mother Joan began her narrative,—"*was my grandfather's father, slain, above an hundred years ago, at the battle of Evesham. He left an infant son, not four years old when he died. This was my grandfather, Hugh Le Despenser, Earl of Winchester, who at the age of twenty-five advanced the fortunes of his house by wedding a daughter of Warwick, Isabel, the young widow of the Lord de Chaworth, and the mother's mother of Alianora of Lancaster. Thou and thy father's wife, therefore, are near akin. This Isabel (after whom thy mother was named) was a famed beauty, and brought moreover a very rich dower. My grandfather and she had many children, but I need only speak of one—my hapless father.*

"King Edward of Caernarvon loved my father dearly. In truth, so did Edward of Westminster, who bestowed on him, ere he was fully ten years old, the hand of his grand-daughter, my mother, Alianora de Clare, who brought him in dower the mighty earldom of Gloucester. The eldest of us was Hugh my brother; then came I; next followed my other brothers, Edward, Gilbert, and Philip; and last of all, eight years after me, came Isabel thy mother.

"From her birth this child was mine especial care. I was alway a thoughtful, quiet maiden, more meet for cloister than court; and I well remember, though 'tis fifty years ago, the morrow when my baby-sister was put into mine arms, and I was bidden to have a care of her. Have a care of her! Had she never passed into any worse care than mine—well-a-day! Yet, could I have looked forward into the future, and have read Isabel's coming history, I might have thought that the wisest and kindest course I could take would be to smother her in her cradle.

"Before she was three years old, she passed from me. My Lord of Arundel—Earl Edmund that then was—was very friendly with my father; and he desired that their families should be drawn closer together by the marriage of Richard Fitzalan, his son and heir—a boy of twelve years—with one of my father's daughters. My father, thus appealed unto, gave him our snowdrop.

"'Not Joan,' said he; 'Joan is God's. She shall be the spouse of Christ in Shaftesbury Abbey.'

"So it came that ere my darling was three years old, they twined the bride-wreath for her hair, and let it all down flowing, soft and shining, from beneath her golden fillet. Ah holy Virgin! had it been thy pleasure to give me that cup of gall they mixed that day for her, and to her the draught of pure fresh water thou hast held to me! Perchance I could have drunk it with less pain than she did; and at least it would have saved the pain to her.

"That was in the fourteenth year of Edward of Caernarvon. (1320.) So long as Earl Edmund of Arundel lived, there was little to fear. He, as I said, loved my father, and was a father to Isabel. The Lady of Arundel likewise was then

living, and was careful over her as a mother. Knowest thou that the Lady Griselda, of such fame for her patient endurance, was an ancestress of thy father? It should have been of thy mother. Hers was a like story; only that to her came no reward, no happy close.

“But ere I proceed, I must speak of one woeful matter, which I do believe to have been the ruin of my father. He was never loved by the people—partly, I think, because he gave counsel to the King to rule, as they thought, with too stern a hand; partly because my grandfather loved money too well, nor was he over careful how he came thereby; partly because the Queen hated him, and she was popular; but far above all these for another reason, which was the occasion of his fall, and the ruin of all who loved him.

“Hast thou ever heard of the Boni-Homines? They have other names—Albigenses, Waldenses, Cathari, Men of the Valleys. They are a sect of heretics, dwelling originally in the dominions of the Marquis of Monferrato, toward the borders betwixt France, Italy, and Spain: men condemned by the Church, and holding certain evil opinions touching the holy doctrine of grace of condignity, and free-will, and the like. Yet some of them, I must confess, lead not unholy lives.”

Philippa merely answered that she had heard of these heretics.

“Well,” resumed the blind woman, “my father became entangled with these men. How or wherefore I know not. He might have known that their doctrines had been condemned by the holy Council of Lumbar two hundred years back. But when the Friars Predicants were first set up by the blessed Dominic, under leave of our holy Father the Pope, many of these sectaries crept in among them. A company went forth from Ashridge, and another from Edingdon—the two houses of this brood of serpents. And one of them, named Giles de Edingdon, fell in with my father, and taught him the evil doctrines of these wretches, whom Earl Edmund of Cornwall (of the blood royal), that wedded a daughter of our house, had in his unwisdom brought into this land; for he was a wicked man and an ill liver. (See Note 6.) King Edward of Caernarvon likewise listened to these men, and did but too often according to their counsels.

“Against my grandfather and others, but especially against these men of Edingdon and Ashridge, Dame Isabelle the Queen set herself up. King Edward had himself sent her away on a certain mission touching the homage due to the King of France for Guienne; for he might not adventure to leave the realm at that time. But now this wicked woman gathered together an army, and with Prince Edward, and the King’s brother the Earl of Kent, who were deluded by her enchantments, she came back and landed at Orewell, and thence marched with flying colours to Bristol, men gathering everywhere to her standard as she came.

“We were in Bristol on that awful day. My mother, the King had left in charge of the Tower of London; but in Bristol, with the King, were my grandfather and father my Lord and Lady of Arundel, their son Richard, and Isabel, and myself. I was then a maiden of sixteen years. When Dame Isabelle’s banners floated over the gates of the city, and her trumpets summoned the citizens to surrender, King Edward, who was a timid man, flung himself into the castle for safety, and with him all of us, saving my grandfather, and my Lord of Arundel, who remained without, directing the defence.

“The citizens of Bristol, thus besieged (for she had surrounded the town), sent to ask Dame Isabelle her will, offering to surrender the city on condition that she would spare their lives and property. But she answered by her trumpeter, that she would agree to nothing unless they would first surrender the Earls of Winchester and Arundel; ‘for,’ saith she, ‘I am come purposely to destroy them.’ Then the citizens consulted together, and determined to save their lives and property by the sacrifice of the noblest blood in England, and (as it was shown afterwards) of the blood royal. They opened their gates, and yielded up my grandfather and thine to her will.”

Note 1. Hilding: a word derived from the Anglo-Saxon, and used indiscriminately to denote a young person of either sex.

Note 2. Wimple: the covering for the neck, worn by secular women as well as nuns, and either with or without a veil or hood. It had been in fashion for two centuries or thereabouts, but was now beginning to be generally discarded.

Note 3. In accordance with the custom of the time, by which persons were commonly named from their birth-places, Edward the First, the Second, and the Third are respectively designated Edward of Westminster, of Caernarvon, and of Windsor.

Note 4. The copped-hat was the high-crowned brimless hat then fashionable, the parent of the modern one. An instance of it will be found in the figure of Bolingbroke, plate xvi. of the illustrations to Cretan’s History of Richard the Second, Archaeologia, vol. xx.

Note 5. One historian after another has copied Froissart’s assertion that Hugh Le Despenser the elder at his death was an old man of ninety, and none ever took the trouble to verify the statement; yet the *post-mortem* inquisition of his father is extant, certifying that he was born in the first week in March 1261; so that on October 8, 1326, the day of his execution, he was only sixty-five.

Note 6. It will be understood that this was the light in which the monks regarded Earl Edmund.

Chapter Five.

The story of Isabel.

“O dumb, dumb lips! O crushed, crushed heart!

O grief, past pride, past shame!"

Miss Muloch.

Mother Joan had arrived at the point closing the last chapter, when the sharp ringing of the Abbess' little bell announced the end of the recreation-time; and convent laws being quite as rigid as those of the Medes and Persians, Philippa was obliged to defer the further gratification of her curiosity. When the next recreation-time came, the blind nun resumed her narrative.

"When Dame Isabelle was lodged at her ease, for she saw first to that, she ordered her prisoners to be brought before the Prince her son. She had the decency not to sit as judge herself; but, in outrage of all womanliness, she sat herself in the court, near the Prince's seat. She would have sat in the seat rather than have missed her end. The Prince was wholly governed by his mother; he knew not her true character; and he was but a lad of fourteen years. So, when the prisoners were brought forth, the tigress rose up in her place, and spake openly to the assembled barons (a shameful thing for a woman to do!) that she and her son would see that law and justice were rendered to them, according to their deeds. She! That was the barons' place, not hers. She should have kept to her distaff.

"Then said my grandfather, bowing his white head, 'Ah, Dame! God grant us an upright judge, and a just sentence; and that if we cannot have it in this world, we may find it in another.'

"The charges laid against them were then read by the Marshal; and the barons gave sentence—of course as Dame Isabelle wished. The Lord of Arundel and Surrey, the premier Earl of England, (see Note 1), and the aged white-haired Earl of Winchester, (see Note 2), were doomed to the death of traitors.

"Saint Denis' Day—child, it gives me a shudder to name it! We were within the castle, and they set up the gibbet before our eyes. Before the eyes of the son of the one man, the wife and son of the other! I remember catching up Isabel, and running with her into an inner chamber—any whither to be out of sight of that awful thing. I remember, too, that the Lady of Arundel, having seen all she could bear, fainted away on the rushes, and I laid her gently down, and nursed her back into life. But when she came to herself, she cried—'Is it all over? O cruel Joan, to have made me live! I might have died with my lord.' At last it was all over: over—for that time. And God had taken no notice. He had not opened the heavens and thundered down His great ire. I suppose that must have been on account of some high festival they had in Heaven in honour of Saint Denis, and God was too busy, listening to the angels, to have any time for us.

"But that night, ere the dawn, my father softly entered the chamber where we maidens slept. He had been closeted half the night with the King, taking counsel how to escape the cruel jaws of the tigress; and now he roused us, and bade us farewell. He and the King would set forth in a little boat, and endeavour to reach Wales. They thought us, however, safer in the castle. We watched them embark in the grey dawn, ere men were well astir; and they rowed off toward Wales. Would God they had stayed where they were!—but God had not ended the festival of Saint Denis.

"Twelve days that little boat rode the silver Severn; beaten back, beaten back at every tide, the waves rough, and the wind contrary. And at length Sir Henry Beaumont, the devil whispering to him who were in the boat, set forth in pursuit. (See Note 3.)

"We saw them taken. The Monday after Saint Luke, Edward of Caernarvon, sometime King of England, and Hugh Le Despenser, sometime Earl of Gloucester, were led captives into Bristol, and delivered to the tigress. But we were not to see them die. Perhaps Saint Luke had interceded for us, as it was in his octave. The King was sent to Berkeley Castle. My father they set on the smallest and poorest horse they could find in the army, clad in an emblazoned surcoat such as he was used to wear. From the moment that he was taken, he would touch no food. And when they reached Hereford, he was so weak and ill, that Dame Isabelle began to fear he would escape her hands by a more merciful death than she designed for him. So she stayed her course at Hereford for the Feast of All Saints, and the morrow after she had him brought forth for trial. They had need to bear him into her presence, he was so nearly insensible. Finding that they could not wake him into life by speaking to him and calling him, they twined a crown of nettles and set it on his head. But he was even then too near death to rouse himself. So, lest he should die on the spot, they hurried him forth to execution. He died the death of a traitor; but maybe God was more merciful than they, and snatched his soul away ere he had suffered all they meant he should. I suppose He allowed him to suffer previously, in punishment for his allying himself with the wicked men of Edingdon: but I trust his suffering purified his soul, and that God received him.

"Her vengeance thus satiated, Dame Isabelle set out for London. The Castle of Arundel was forfeited, and the Lady and her son Richard were left homeless. (See Note 4.) We set forth with them, a journey of many weary days, to join my mother. But when we reached London, we found all changed. Dame Isabelle, on her first coming, had summoned my mother to surrender the Tower; and she, being affrighted, had resigned her charge, and was committed to the custody of the Lord de la Zouche. So we homeless ones bent our steps to Sempringham, where were two of my father's sisters, Joan and Alianora; and we prayed the holy nuns there to grant us shelter in their abode of peace. The Lord of Hereford gave an asylum for young Richard.

"Those were peaceful, quiet days we passed at Sempringham; and they were the last Isabel was to know. Meanwhile, the Friars Predicants, and in especial the men of Edingdon and Ashridge, were spreading themselves throughout the land, working well to bring back the King. Working too well; for Dame Isabelle took alarm, and on Saint Maurice's Day, twelve months after her landing, the King died at Berkeley Castle. God knew how: and I think she knew who had sat by his side on the throne, and who was the mother of his children. We only heard at Sempringham, that on that night shrieks of agony rang through the vale of the Severn, and men woke throughout the valley, and whispered a requiem for the hapless soul which was departing in such horrible torment.

"But that opened the eyes of the young King (for the Prince of Wales had been made King; ay, and all the hour of his

crowning, Dame Isabelle stood by, and made believe to weep for her lord): he began to see what a serpent was his mother; and I daresay Brother John de Gaytenby, the Friar Predicant who was his confessor, let not the matter sleep. And no sooner did Edward of Windsor gain his full power, than he shut up the wicked Jezebel his mother in the Castle of Rising. She lived there twenty years: she died there, fourteen years ago.

“So the tide turned. The friends of Dame Isabelle died on the scaffold, four years later, even as *he* had died; and we heard it at Sempringham, and knew that God and the saints and angels had taken up our cause at last. Child, God’s mill grindeth slowly, but it grindeth very small.

“Ere this, Hugh, my brother, had been granted his life by the King, but not our father’s earldom (see Note 5); and when my father had been dead only two years, leaving such awful memories—our mother wedded again. Ah, well! she was our mother. But, child, I have seen a caterpillar, shaken rudely from the fragrant petals of a rose, crawl to the next weed that grew. She was fair and well-dowered; and against the King’s will, she wedded the Lord de la Zouche, in whose custody she was.

“And now for the end of my woeful tale, which is the story of Isabel herself. For, one year later, the Castle of Arundel was given back to Richard Fitzalan; and two years thereafter the Lady of Arundel died. Listen a little longer with patience: for the saddest part of the story is that yet to come.

“When Richard and Isabel went back to the Castle of Arundel, I was a young novice, just admitted. And considering the second marriage of our mother, and the death of the Lady of Arundel, and the extreme youth of Isabel (who was not yet fourteen), I was permitted to reside very much with her. A woeful residence it was; for now began the fourteen terrible years of my darling’s passion.

“For no sooner was his mother’s gentle hand removed, than, even on the very day of her burial, Earl Richard threw off the mask.

“Before that time, I had wonderingly doubted if he loved her. I knew then that he hated her. And I found one other thing, sadder yet—that she loved him. I confess unto thee, by the blessed ankle-bones of Saint Denis, that I never could make out why. I never saw in him anything to love; and had I so done, methinks he had soon had that folly out of me. At first I scarcely understood all. I used to see livid blue bruises on her neck and arms, and ask her wherefore they were there; and she would only flush faintly, and say,—‘It is nothing—I struck myself against something.’ I never knew for months against what she struck. But she never complained—not even to me. She was patient as an angel of God.

“Now and then I used to notice that there came to the castle an aged man, in the garb of the Friars Predicants; unto whom—and to him only—Isabel used to confess. So changed was he from his old self, that I never knew till long after that this was our father’s old confessor, Giles de Edingdon. She only said to me that he taught her good things. If he taught her her saintly endurance, it was good. But I fear he taught her other things as well: to hold in light esteem that blessed doctrine of grace of condignity, whereby man can and doth merit the favour of God. And what he gave her instead thereof I know not. She used to tell me, but I forget now. Only once, in an awful hour, she said unto me, that but for the knowledge he had given her, she could not have borne her life.

“What was that hour?—Ah! it was the hour, when for the first time he threw aside all care, even before me, and struck her senseless on the rushes at my feet. And I never forgave him. She forgave him, poor innocent!—nay, rather, I think she loved him too well to think of forgiveness. I never saw love like hers; it would have borne death itself, and have kissed the murderer’s hand in dying. Some women do love so. I never did, nor could.

“But when this awful hour came, and she fell at my feet, as if dead, by a blow from his hand in anger,—the spirit of my fathers came upon me, and like a prophetess of woe, child, I stood forth and cursed him! I think God spake by me, for words seemed to come from me without my will; and I said that for two generations the heir of his house should die by violence in the flower of his age (See Note 6). Thou mayest see if it be so; but I never shall.

“And what said he?—He said, bowing his head low,—‘Sister Joan La Despenser is a great flatterer. Pray, accept my thanks. Henceforward, she may perhaps find the calm glades of Shaftesbury more pleasant than the bowers of Arundel. At least, I venture to beg that she will make the trial.’ And he went forth, calling to his hounds.

“Ay, went forth, without another word, and left her lying there at my feet—her, to save whom one pang of pain I would have laid down my life. And the portcullis was shut upon me. I was powerless to save her from that man: I was to see her again no more. I did see her again no more for ever. I waited till her sense came back, when she said she was not hurt, and fell to excusing him. I felt as though I could have torn him limb from limb. But that would have pained her.

“And then, when she was restored, I went forth from the Castle of Arundel. I had been dismissed by the master; and dearly as I loved her, I was too proud to be dismissed twice. So we took our farewell. Her soft cheek pressed to mine—for the last time; her dear eyes looking into mine—for the last time; her sweet, low voice blessing me—for the last time.

“And what were her last words, saidst thou? I cannot repeat them tearlessly, even now.

“‘God grant thee the Living Water.’

“Those were they. She had spoken to me oft—though I had not much cared to listen, except to her sweet voice—of something whereof this Giles had told her; some kind of fairy tale, regarding this life as a desert, and of some Well of pure, fresh water, deep down therein. I know not what. I cared for all that came from her, but I cared nought for what came only through her from Giles de Edingdon. But she said God had given her a draught of that Living Water, and she was at rest. I know nothing about it. But I am glad if anything gave her rest from that anguish—even a fairy tale.

"Well, after that I saw her no more again. But now and then, when mine hunger for her could no longer be appeased, I used to come to the Convent of Arundel, and send word to Alina, thy nurse, to come to me thither. And so, from time to time, I had word of her.

"The years passed on, and with them he grew harder and harder. He had hated her, first, I think, from the fancy that my father had been after some manner the cause of his father's violent end; and after that he hated her for herself. And as time passed, and she had no child, he hated her worse than ever. But at last, after many years, God gave her one—thyself. I thought, perchance, if anything would soften him, thy smiles and babyish ways might do it. But—soften him! It had been easier to soften a rock of stone. When he knew that it was only a girl that was born, he hated her worse than ever. Three years more; then the last blow fell. Earl Henry of Lancaster bade him to his castle. As they talked, quoth the Earl,—'I would you had not been a wedded man, my Lord of Arundel; I had gladly given you one of my daughters.'—'Pure foy!' quoth he, 'but that need be no hindrance, nor shall long.' Nor was it. He sent to our holy Father the Pope—with some lie, I trow—and received a divorce, and a dispensation to wed Alianora, his cousin, the young widow of the Lord de Beaumont, son of that Sir Henry that captured the King and my father. All the while he told Isabel nothing. The meanest of her scullions knew of the coming woe before she knew it. The night ere Earl Richard should be re-wedded, he thought proper to dismiss his discarded wife.

"'Dame,' said he to her, as he rose from the supper-table, 'I pray you, give good ear for a moment to what my chaplain is about to read.'

"He was always cruelly courteous before men.

"She stayed and listened. Then she grew faint and white—then she grasped the seat to support her—then she lost hold and sense, and fell down as if dead before him. Poor, miserably-crushed heart! She loved this monster so well!

"He waited till she came to herself. Then he gave the last stroke.

"'I depart now,' said he, 'to fetch home my bride. May I beg that the Lady Isabel La Despenser will quit the castle before she comes. It would be very unpleasant to her otherwise.'

"Unpleasant—to Alianora! And to Isabel, what would it be? Little he recked of that. She had received her dismissal. He had said to her, in effect,—'You are my wife, and Lady of Arundel, no more.'

"She lifted herself up a little, and looked into his face. She knew she was looking upon him for the last time. And once more the fervent, unvalued, long-outraged love broke forth,—once more, for the last time.

"'My lord! my lord!' she wailed. 'Leave me not so, Richard! Give me one kiss for farewell!'

"He did not lift her from the ground; he did not kiss her; but he was not quite silent to that last bitter cry. He held forth his hand—the hand which had been uplifted to strike her so often. She clasped it in hers, and kissed it many times. And that was his farewell.

"When he had drawn his hand from her, and was gone forth, she sat a season like a statue, listening. She hearkened till she heard him ride away—on his way to Alianora. Then, as if some prop that had held her up were suddenly withdrawn, she fell forward, and lay with her face to the rushes. All that awful night she lay there. Alina came to her, and strove to lift her, to give her food, to yield her comfort: but she took no heed of anything. When the dawn came, she arose, and wrapped herself in her mantle. She took no money, no jewels—not an ouche nor a grain of gold. Only she wrapped in silk two locks of hair—his and thine. I should have left the first behind. Then, when she was seated on the horse to depart, the page told her who mounted afore, that his Lord had given him command to take her to a certain place, which was not to be told beforehand.

"Alina said she shivered a little at this; but she only answered, 'Do my lord's will.' Then she asked for thee. Alina lifted thee up to her, and she clasped thee close underneath her veil, and kissed thee tenderly. And that was thy last mother's kiss."

"Then that is what I remember!" broke in Philippa suddenly.

"It is impossible, child!" answered Joan. "Thou wert but a babe of three years old."

"But I do—I am sure I do!" she repeated.

"Have thy way," said Joan. "If thou so thinkest, I will not gainsay thee. Well, she gave thee back in a few minutes; and then she rode away—never pausing to look back—no man knew whither."

"But what became of her?"

"God wotteth. Sometimes I hope he murdered her. One sin more or less would matter little to the black list of sins on his guilty soul; and the little pain of dying by violence would have saved Isabel the greater pain of living through the desolate woe of the future. But I never knew, as I told thee. Nor shall I ever know, till that last day come when the Great Doom shall be, and he and she shall stand together before the bar of God. There shall be an end to her torment then. It is something to think that there shall be no end to his."

So, in a tone of bitter, passionate vindictiveness, Joan La Despenser closed her story.

Philippa sat silent, wondering many things. If Guy of Ashridge knew any thing of this, if Giles de Edingdon were yet living, if Agnes the lavender had ever found out what became of her revered mistress. And when she knelt down to tell her beads that night, a very strange and terrible prayer lingered on her lips the last and most earnestly of all. It was, that she might never again see her father's face. She felt that had she done so, the spirit of the prophetess

might have seized upon her as upon Joan; that, terrified as she had always been of him, she should now have stood up before him and have cursed him to his face.

Note 1. Edmund Fitzalan was premier Earl as Earl of Surrey, which title he acquired by his marriage with Alesia, sister and heir of John de Warrenne, last Earl of Surrey of the original male line.

Note 2. Probably owing to the great mortality among the nobles caused by the French war, a man who survived fifty was regarded as very old in the reign of Edward the Third.

Note 3. This is Froissart's account of the events, and his dates have been mainly followed. Many writers give a varying narrative, stating that the King and Earl did reach Wales, and were taken there in a wood. Their dates are also about a month later. The inquisitions of the Despensers, as is usual in the case of attainted persons, do not give the date of death.

Note 4. The castle was granted to Edmund Earl of Kent, brother of Edward the Second; and there, on his attainder and execution, four years later, his widow and children were arrested.

Note 5. The earldom did not return to the Despenser family until 1397, when it was conferred on the great-grandson of the attainted Earl.

Note 6. Earl Richard, his son, was beheaded in London, in the spring of 1397; Earl Thomas, his grandson, fell at Agincourt, October 13, 1415.

Chapter Six.

Elaine.

"No has visto un niño, que viene
A dar un doblon que tiene,
Porque le den una flor?"

Lope de Vega.

Philippa determined to return home by way of Sempringham. She could not have given any very cogent reason, except that she wished to see the place where the only peaceful days of her mother's life had been passed. Perhaps peace might there come to her also; and she was far enough from it now. It would have been strange indeed if peace had dwelt in a heart where was neither "glory to God" nor "good-will to men." And while her veneration for her mother's memory was heightened by her aunt's narrative, her feeling towards her father, originally a shrinking timidity, had changed now into active hatred. Had she at that moment been summoned to his deathbed, she would either have refused to go near him at all, or have gone with positive pleasure.

But beside all this, Philippa could not avoid the conclusion that her salvation was as far from being accomplished as it had been when she reached Shaftesbury. She felt further off it than ever; it appeared to recede from her at every approach. Very uneasily she remembered Guy's farewell words,—“God strip you of your own goodness!” The Living Water seemed as distant as before; but the thirst grew more intense. And yet, like Hagar in the wilderness, the Well was beside her all the time; but until the Angel of the Lord should open her eyes, she could not see it.

She reached Sempringham, and took up her abode for the night in the convent, uncertain how long she would remain there. An apparently trivial incident decided that question for her.

As Philippa stood at the convent gate, in a mild winter morning, she heard a soft, sweet voice singing, and set herself to discover whence the sound proceeded. The vocalist was readily found,—a little girl of ten years old, who was sitting on a bank a few yards from the gate, with a quantity of snowdrops in her lap, which she was trying with partial success to weave into a wreath. Philippa—weary of idleness, Books of Hours, and embroidery—drew near to talk with her.

"What is thy name?" she asked, by way of opening negotiations.

"Elaine," said the child, lifting a pair of timid blue eyes to her questioner's face.

"And where dwellest thou?"

"Down yonder glade, Lady: my father is Wilfred the convent woodcutter."

"And who taught thee to speak French?"

"The holy sisters, Lady."

"What wert thou singing a minute since?"

The child drooped her head shyly.

"Do not be afraid," said Philippa gently. "I like to hear singing. Wilt thou sing it again to me?"

Elaine hesitated a moment; but another glance at Philippa's smiling face seemed to reassure her, and she sang, in a

low voice, to a sweet, weird tune:—

““Quy de cette eaw boyra
Ancor soyf aura;
Mays quy de l’eaw boyra
Que moy luy donneray,
Jamays soyf n’aura
A l’éternité.””

“This must be very widely known,” thought Philippa.—“Who taught thee that—the holy sisters?” she asked of the child.

“No,” answered Elaine, shaking her head. “The Grey Lady.”

“And who is the Grey Lady?”

The look with which Elaine replied, showed Philippa that not to know the Grey Lady was to augur herself unknown, at least in the Vale of Sempringham.

“Know you not the Grey Lady? All in the Vale know her.”

“Where dwelleth she?”

“Up yonder”—but to Philippa’s eyes, Elaine merely pointed to a cluster of leafless trees on the hill-side.

“And is she one of the holy sisters?”

On this point Elaine was evidently doubtful. The Grey Lady did not dwell in the convent, nor in any convent; she lived all alone, therefore it was plain that she was not a sister. But she was always habited in grey wherefore men called her the Grey Lady. No—she had no other name.

“A recluse, manifestly,” said Philippa to herself; “the child does not understand. But is she an anchoritess or an eremitess?—Does she ever leave her cell?” (See Note 1.)

“Lady, she tendeth all the sick hereabout. She is a friend of every woman in the Vale. My mother saith, an’ it like you, that where there is any wound to heal, or heart to comfort, there is the Grey Lady. And she saith she hath a wonderful power of healing, as well for mind as body. When Edeline our neighbour lost all her four children by fever between the two Saint Agneses, (see Note 2), nobody could comfort her till the Grey Lady came. And when Ida my playmate lay dying, and very fearful of death, she said even the holy priest did her not so much good as the Grey Lady. I think,” ended Elaine softly, “she must be an angel in disguise.”

The child evidently spoke her thought literally.

“I will wait and see this Grey Lady,” thought Philippa. “Let me see if she can teach and comfort me. Ever since Guy of Ashridge visited Kilquyt, I seem to have been going further from comfort every day.—Canst thou lead me to the Grey Lady’s cell?”

“I could; but she is not now there, Lady.”

“When will she be there?”

“To-morrow, when the shadow beginneth to lengthen,” replied Elaine, who was evidently well acquainted with the Grey Lady’s proceedings.

“Then to-morrow, when the shadow beginneth to lengthen, thou shalt come to the convent gate, and I will meet with thee. Will thy mother give thee leave?”

“Ay. She alway giveth me leave to visit the Grey Lady.”

The appointment was made, and Philippa turned back to the convent.

“I was searching you, Lady de Sergeaux,” said the portress, when Philippa re-entered the gate. “During your absence, there came to the priory close by a messenger from Arundel on his road toward Hereford; and hearing that the Lady de Sergeaux was with us, he sent word through a lay-brother that he would gladly have speech of you.”

“A messenger from Arundel! What can he want with me?”

Philippa felt that all messengers from Arundel would be very unwelcome to her. She added, rather ungraciously, that “perhaps she had better see him.” She passed into the guest-chamber, whither in a few minutes the messenger came to her. He was a page, habited in deep mourning; and Philippa recognised him at once as the personal “varlet” attendant on the Countess. The thought rose to her mind that the Earl might have fallen in Gascony.

“God keep thee, good Hubert!” she said. “Be thy tidings evil?”

“As evil as they might be, Lady,” answered the page sadly. “Two days before the feast of Saint Hilary, our Lady the Countess Alianora was commanded to God.”

A tumult of conflicting feelings went surging through Philippa’s heart and brain.

“Was thy Lord at home?”

She inwardly hoped that he was not. It was only fitting, said the vindictive hatred which had usurped the place of her conscience, that Alianora of Lancaster should feel something of that to which she had helped to doom Isabel La Despenser.

“Lady, no. Our Lord abideth in Gascony, with the Duke of Lancaster.”

Philippa was not sorry to hear it; for her heart was full of “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.”

When the shadow began to lengthen on the following day, Philippa wrapped her mantle around her, and called to her damsel to follow. Her varlet followed also, at a little distance behind. She found Elaine and a younger child waiting for her outside the gate. Elaine introduced her companion as her sister Annora. Annora proved much less shy than Elaine, and far more ready with her communications. But she was not asked many questions; for as they turned away from the convent gate, they were met by a monk in the Dominican habit, and Philippa knew directly the face of Guy of Ashridge.

“Christ save you, Father,” said she.

“And you, daughter,” he answered. “Are you yet seeking comfort, or have you found it?”

“I am further from it than ever,” she replied, rather petulantly.

“No wonder,” said Guy. “For comfort hath another name, which is—Christ. Who is a stranger to the One shall needs be a stranger to the other.”

“I have tried hard to make my salvation,” responded Philippa more sadly; “but as yet I cannot do it.”

“Nor will you, though you could try a thousand years,” answered Guy. “That is a manufacture beyond saints and angels, and how then shall you do it?”

“Who then can do it?”

“God,” said Guy, solemnly.

“God hates me,” replied Philippa, under her breath. “He hateth all mine house. For nigh fifty years, He hath sent us sorrow upon sorrow, and hath crushed us down into the dust of death.”

“Poor blindling! is that a proof that He hateth you?” answered Guy more gently. “Well, it is true at times, when the father sendeth a varlet in haste to save the child from falling over a precipice, the child—whose heart is set on some fair flower on the rock below—doth think it cruel. You are that child; and your trouble is the varlet God hath sent after you.”

“He hath sent His whole meynie, then,” said Philippa bitterly.

“Then the child will not come to the Father?” said Guy, softly.

Philippa was silent.

“Is the flower so fair, that you will risk life for it?” pursued the monk. “Nay, not risk—that is a word implying doubt, and here is none. So fair, then, that you will throw life away for it? And is the Father not fair and precious in your eyes, that you are in so little haste to come to Him? Daughter, what shall it profit you, if you gain the whole world—and lose your own soul?”

“Father, you are too hard upon me!” cried Philippa in a pained tone, and resisting with some difficulty a strong inclination to shed tears. “I would come to God, but I know not how, nor do you tell me. God is afar off, and hath no leisure nor will to think on me; nor can I presume to approach Him without the holy saints to intercede for me. I have sought their intercession hundreds of times. It is not I that am unwilling to be saved; and you speak to me as if you thought it so. It is God that will not save me. I have done all I can.”

“O fool, and slow of heart to believe!” earnestly answered Guy. “Can it be God, when He cared so much for you that He sent His blessed Son down from Heaven to die for your salvation? Beware how you accuse the Lord. I tell you again, it is not His will that opposeth itself to your happiness, but your own. You have built up a wall of your own excellencies that you cannot see God; and then you cry, ‘He hath hidden Himself from me.’ Pull down your miserable mud walls, and let the light of Heaven shine in upon you. Christ will save you with no half nor quarter salvation. He will not let you lay the foundation whereon He shall build. He will not tear His fair shining robe of righteousness to patch your worthless rags. With Him, either not at all, or all in all.”

“But what would you have me do?” said Philippa, in a vexed tone.

“Believe,” replied Guy.

“Believe what?” said she.

““Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.””

“The easiest thing in the world,” answered Philippa, a little contemptuously.

"Is it so?" responded the monk, with a pitying smile. "It seems to me that you have found it since last June the hardest thing in the world. Whither go you now?" he asked, suddenly changing his tone.

"I go," she rejoined, "with this child, to the cell of an eremitess of whom she hath told me, 'that hath,' quoth she, 'great power of comforting the sorrowful.' All about here seem to know her. They call her the Grey Lady."

Guy looked on her long and earnestly, an expression creeping over his face which Philippa could not understand.

"Be it so," he said at last. "'I will lead the blind by a way that they know not.' Let my voice be silent when He speaketh. Verily"—and his voice fell to a softer tone—"I never passed through the deep waters wherein she has waded; nor, perchance, where you have. Let God speak to you through her. Go your way."

"But who is she—this Grey Lady?"

Philippa asked in vain. Guy either did not hear her, or would not answer. He walked rapidly down the hill, with only "Farewell!" as he passed her; and she went her way, to meet her fate—rather, to meet God's providence—in the cell of the Grey Lady.

Note 1. Anchorites never left their cells, though they received visitors within them, and sometimes taught children; hermits wandered about freely.

Note 2. Saint Agnes' Day is January 21; but the 28th, instead of the octave of Saint Agnes, was commonly called Saint Agnes the second.

Chapter Seven.

In the cell of the Grey Lady.

"Blood must be my body's balmer,—
While my soule, like peaceful palmer,
Travelleth toward the Land of Heaven,
Other balm will not be given."

Sir Walter Raleigh.

Elaine tapped softly on the weatherbeaten door of the cell. It was merely hollowed out in the rock, and built up in front, with a low door and a very little window.

"Who is it?" asked a soft voice from within.

"Elaine and Annora," replied the little girl.

"Come in, my children."

Motioning Philippa to wait for her an instant, Elaine lifted the latch and entered, half closing the door behind her. Some low-toned conversation followed within the cell; and then Elaine opened the door, and asked Philippa to enter. The Grey Lady stood before her.

What she saw was a tall, slender, delicate figure, attired in dark grey. The figure alone was visible, for over the face the veil was drawn down. But Philippa's own knowledge of aristocratic life told her in an instant that the reverence with which she was received was that of a high-born lady. It was plain that the eremitess was no peasant.

Elaine seemed to know that she was no longer wanted, and she drew Annora away. The children went dancing through the wood, and Philippa, desiring Lena and Oliver to await her pleasure, shut the door of the cell.

"Mother," she began—for recluses were addressed as professed nuns, and were indeed regarded as the holiest of all celibates—"I desire your help."

"For body or soul?" was the reply.

"For the soul—for the life," said Philippa.

"Ay," replied the eremitess; "the soul is the life."

"Know you Guy of Ashridge?" asked Philippa.

The Grey Lady bowed her head.

"I have confessed to him, and he hath dealt hardly with me. He saith I will not be saved; and I wish to be saved. He tells me to come to Christ, and I know not how to come, and he saith he cannot make me understand how. He saith God loveth me, because He hath given me a very desolate and unhappy life; and I think He hateth me by that token. In short, Father Guy tells me to do what I cannot do, and then he saith I will not do it. Will you teach me, and comfort me, if you can? The monk only makes me more unhappy. And I do not want to be unhappy. I want comfort—I want rest—I want peace. Tell me how to obtain it!"

"No one wishes to be unhappy," said the eremitess, in her gentle accents; "but sometimes we mistake the medicine

we need. Before I can give you medicine, I must know your disease.”

“My disease is weariness and sorrow,” answered Philippa. “I love none, and none loveth me. None hath ever loved me. I hate all men.”

“And God?”

“I do not know God,” she said, her voice sinking. “He is afar off, and will come no nearer.”

“Or you are afar off, and will go no nearer? Which is it?”

“I think it is the first,” she answered; “Guy of Ashridge will have it to be the second. I cannot get at God—that is all I know. And it is not for want of praying. I have begged the intercession of my patron, the holy Apostle Saint Philip, hundreds of times.”

“Do you know why you cannot get at God?”

“No. If you can guess, tell me why it is.”

“Because you have gone the wrong way. You have not found the door. You are trying to break through over the wall. And ‘he that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.’”

“Explain to me what you mean, Mother, an’ it like you.”

“You know how Adam sinned in Paradise?” asked the Grey Lady.

“When he and Eva disobeyed God, and ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree? Yes, I have heard that.”

“He built up a terrible wall between him and God. Every man, as born into this world, is on the hither side of that wall. He knoweth not God, he loveth not God, he careth not for God.”

“But that is not the case with me,” objected Philippa; “for I do wish for Him. I want some one to love me; and I should not mind if it were God. Even He were better than none.”

The Grey Lady’s veil trembled a little, as Philippa thought; but she sat meditating for an instant.

“Before I answer your last remark,” she said, “will you tell me a little of your life? I might know better how to reply. You are a married woman, of course, for your dress is not that of a nun, nor of a widow. Have you children? Are your parents living?”

“I have no child,” said Philippa: and the Grey Lady’s penetration must have been obtuse if she were unable to detect a tone of deep sadness underlying the words. “And parents—living—did you ask me? By Mary, Mother and Maiden, I have but one living, and I hate—I hate him!” The passionate energy with which the last words were spoken told its own tale.

“Then it is no marvel,” answered the Grey Lady, in a very different tone from Philippa’s, “that you come to me with a tale of sorrow. Where there is hatred there can be no peace; and without peace there can be no hope.”

“Hope!” exclaimed Philippa, bitterly. “What is there for me to hope? Who ever cared for me? Who ever asked me if I were happy? Nobody loves me—why should I love anybody?”

“‘God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’”

The words fell like cooling water on the hot fire of Philippa’s bitterness; but she made no answer.

“Had God waited for us to love Him,” resumed the eremitess, “where had we been now? ‘We love Him, because He first loved us.’”

“He never loved me,” answered Philippa, mournfully.

“He loved me so much,” said the Grey Lady, softly, “that He made the way rough, that He might help me over it; He made the waters deep, that He might carry me through them; He caused the rain to fall heavily, that I might run to Him for shelter; He made ‘mine earthly house of this tabernacle’ dreary and cold, that I might find the rest, and light, and warmth of His home above so much the sweeter. Yea, He made me friendless, that I might seek and find in Jesu Christ the one Friend who would never forsake me, the one love that would never weary nor wax cold.”

Philippa shook her head. She had never looked at her troubles in this light “But if the way be thus rough, and yet you will walk in it alone, though your feet be bleeding; if the waters be deep, and yet you will strive to ford them unaided; if the house be drear and lonely, and yet you will not rise up and go home—is it any wonder that you are sorrowful, or that you do not know Him whose love you put thus away from you? And you tell me that God’s love were better to you than none! Better than none!—better than any, better than all! Man’s love can save from some afflictions, I grant: but from how many it can not! Can human love keep you from sickness?—from sorrow?—from poverty?—from death? Yet the love of Christ can take the sting from all these,—can keep you calm and peaceful through them all. They will remain, and you will feel them; but the sting will be gone. There will be an underlying calm; the wind may ruffle the surface, but it cannot reach beneath. The lamb is safe in the arms of the Shepherd, but it does not hold itself there. He who shed His blood for us on the rood keepeth us safe, and none shall be able to pluck us out of His hand. O Lady, if ‘thou knewest the gift of God, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee Living

Water.”

“They tell me of that Living Water, one and all; and I would fain drink thereof; but I am in the desert, and the Well is afar off, and I know not where to find it.” Philippa spoke not angrily now, but very sorrowfully.

“And ‘thou hast nothing to draw with, and the Well is deep.’”

“That is just what I feel,” said Philippa, earnestly.

“Yet it is close beside you,” answered the Grey Lady. “The water is drawn, and ready. All that is needed is your outstretched hand to take it. Christ giveth the Living Water; Christ is the Door by which, if any man enter in, he shall be saved; Christ is our peace with God. You have not to make peace; for them that take Christ’s salvation, peace is made. You can never make peace: it took Christ to make it. Your salvation—if you be saved at all—was finished thirteen hundred years ago. God hath provided this salvation for you, and all your life He hath been holding it forth to you—hath been calling you by all these your sorrows to come and take it. So many years as you have lived in this world, so many years you have grieved Him by turning a deaf ear and a cold heart towards His great heart and open hand held forth to you—towards His loving voice bidding you come to Him. Oh grieve Him no longer! Let your own works, your own goodness, your own sufferings, drop from you as the cast-off rags of a beggar, and wrap yourself in the fair white robe of righteousness which the King giveth you—which He hath wrought Himself on purpose for you,—for which He asks no price from you, for He paid the price Himself in His own blood. He came not to live, and work, and suffer, for Himself, but for you. You complain that none loveth you: all these years there hath been love unutterable waiting for you, and you will not take it.”

It seemed to Philippa a very fair picture. Never before had the Garden of God looked so beautiful, to her who stood waiting without the gate. But there appeared to be barriers between it and her, which she could not pass: and in especial one loomed up before her, dark and insuperable.

“But—must I forgive my father?”

“You must come to Christ ere you do any thing. After that—when He hath given you His forgiving Spirit, and His strength to forgive—certainly you must forgive your father.”

“Whatever he hath done?”

“Whatever he hath done.”

“I can never do that,” replied Philippa, yet rather regretfully than angrily. “What he did to me I might; but—”

“I know,” said the Grey Lady quietly, when Philippa paused. “It *is* easier to forgive one’s own wrongs than those of others. I think your heart is not quite so loveless as you would persuade yourself.”

“To the dead—no,” said Philippa huskily. “But to any who could love me in return—” and she paused again, leaving her sentence unended as before. “No, I never could forgive him.”

“Never, of yourself,” was the answer. “But whoso taketh Christ for his Priest to atone, taketh Christ also for his King to govern. In him God worketh, bringing forth from his soul graces which He Himself hath first put there—graces which the natural heart never can bring forth. Faith is the first of these; then love; and then obedience. And both love and obedience teach forgiveness. ‘If ye forgive not men their trespasses, how then shall your Father which is in Heaven forgive your trespasses?’”

“Then,” said Philippa, after a minute’s silence, during which she was deeply meditating, “what we give to God is these graces of which you speak?—we give Him faith, and love, and obedience?”

“Assuredly—when He hath first implanted all within us.”

“But what do we give of ourselves?” asked Philippa in a puzzled tone.

“We give *ourselves*.”

“This giving of ourselves, then,” pursued Philippa slowly, “maketh the grace of condignity?”

“We give to God,” replied the low voice of the eremitess, “ourselves, and our sins. The last He purgeth away, and casteth them into the depths of the sea. Is there grace of condignity in them? And for us, when our sins are forgiven, and our souls cleansed, we are for ever committing further sin, for ever needing fresh cleansing and renewed pardon. Is there grace of condignity, then, in us?”

“But where do you allow the grace of condignity?”

“I allow it not at all.”

Philippa shrank back a little. In her eyes, this was heresy.

“You love not that,” said the Grey Lady gently. “But can you find any other way of salvation that will stand with the dignity of God? If man save himself, then is Christ no Saviour; if man take the first step towards God, then is Christ no Author, but only the Finisher of faith.”

“It seems to me,” answered Philippa rather coldly, “that such a view as yours detracts from the dignity of man.”

She could not see the smile that crossed the lips of the eremitess.

"Most certainly it does," said she.

"And God made man," objected Philippa. "To injure the dignity of man, therefore, is to affront the dignity of God."

"Dignity fell with Adam," said the Grey Lady. "Satan fatally injured the dignity of man, when he crept into Eden. Man hath none left now, but only as he returneth unto God. And do you think there be any grace of condignity in a beggar, when he holdeth forth his hand to receive a garment in the convent dole? Is it such a condescension in him to accept the coat given to him, that he thereby earneth it of merit? Yet this, and less than this, is all that man can do toward God."

"Are you one of the Boni-Homines?" asked Philippa suddenly.

She was beginning to recognise their doctrines now.

"The family of God are one," answered the Grey Lady, rather evasively. "He teacheth not different things to divers of His people, though He lead them by varying ways to the knowledge of the one truth."

"But are you one of the Boni-Homines?" Philippa repeated.

"By birth—no."

"No," echoed Philippa, "I should think not, by birth. Your accent and your manners show you high-born; and they are low-born varlets—common people."

"The common people," answered the Grey Lady, "are usually those who hear Christ the most gladly. 'Not many noble are called;' yet, thank God, a few. But do you, then, count Archbishop Bradwardine, or Bishop Grosteste, or William de Edington, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England,—among the common people?"

"They were not among *them*?" exclaimed Philippa in contemptuous surprise.

"Trust me, but they were,—two of them at least; and the third preached their doctrines, though he went not out from them."

"I could not have believed it!"

"The wind bloweth where it listeth," said the Grey Lady, softly: but she hardly spoke to her visitor.

Philippa rose. "I thank you for your counsel," she said.

"And you mean, *not* to follow it?" was the gentle response.

"I do not know what I mean to do," she said honestly. "I want to do right; but I cannot believe it right to deny the grace of condignity. It is so blessed a doctrine! How else shall men merit the favour of God? And I do not perceive, by your view, how men approach God at all."

"By God approaching them," said the eremitess. "'Whosoever will, let him take the Water of Life freely.' But God provideth the water; man only receiveth it; and the will to receive it is of God, not of man's own deed and effort. 'It is God that worketh in us.' Salvation is 'not of works, lest any man should boast.'"

"That is not the doctrine of holy Church," answered Philippa, somewhat offended.

"It is the doctrine of Saint Paul," was the quiet rejoinder, "for the words I have just spoken are not mine, but his."

"Are you certain of that, Mother?"

"Quite certain."



“Who told you them?”

The Grey Lady turned, and took from a rough shelf or ledge, scooped out in the rocky wall of the little cavern, a small brown-covered volume.

“I know not if you can read,” she said, offering the book to Lady Sergeaux; “but there are the words.”

The little volume was no continuous Book of Scripture, but consisted of passages extracted almost at random, of varying lengths, apparently just as certain paragraphs had attracted her when she heard or read them.

“Yes, I can read. My nurse taught me,” said Philippa, taking the little book from her hand.

But her eyes lighted, the first thing, upon a passage which enchained them; and she read no further.

“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.”

Chapter Eight.

The Veil uplifted.

“Household names, that used to flutter
Through your laughter unawares,—
God’s Divine Name ye can utter
With less trembling, in your prayers.”

Elizabeth B. Browning.

Philippa sat down again with the book in her hand. Her mood had changed suddenly at the sight of the text, which she instantly guessed to be the original of her well-remembered device.

“I need not go yet,” she said, “unless I weary you, Mother.”

“I am never wearied of the Master’s work,” answered the low voice.

Lady Sergeaux opened the door of the cell.

“Lena and Oliver,” she called, “you can return to the convent, and come hither for me again ere the dusk falleth. I shall abide a season with this holy Mother.”

“But your Ladyship will ere that be faint for hunger,” objected Lena.

“No,—I will take care of that,” replied the Grey Lady, ere Philippa could answer.

Lena louted, and departed with Oliver, and her mistress again closed the door of the cell. The Grey Lady set bread before her, and honey, with a cup of milk, bidding her eat.

“Thank you, Mother, but I am not hungry yet,” said Philippa.

"You ought to be. You had better eat," was the quiet answer.

And quiet as the voice was, it had a tone of authority which Philippa involuntarily and unconsciously obeyed. And while she ate, her hostess in her turn became the questioner.

"Are you a knight's wife?"

"I am the wife of Sir Richard Sergeaux, a knight of Cornwall," said Philippa. "My lord is away in Gascony, in the train of the Earl of Arundel, who accompanies the Duke of Lancaster, at present Governor of those parts. While he is absent, I hope to be able to make my salvation in retreat, and to quiet my conscience."

The Grey Lady made no reply. Philippa almost expected her to ask if her conscience were quiet, or how much of her salvation she had made. Guy of Ashridge, she thought, would have preached a sermon on that text. But no answer came from the veiled figure, only her head drooped upon her hand as if she were tired.

"Now I am wearying you," said Philippa reproachfully. "I ought to have gone when I first thought thereof."

"No," said the Grey Lady.

Her voice, if possible, was even softer than before, but Philippa could not avoid detecting in it a cadence of pain so intense that she began to wonder if she were ill, or what portion of her speech could possibly have caused it.

"Are you ill, Mother?" she asked compassionately.

The eremitess lifted her head; and her voice was again calm.

"I thank you,—no. Let us not speak of ourselves, but of God."

"Mother, I wish to ask you something," said Philippa rather doubtfully, for she did not wish to pain her again, yet she deemed her coming question necessary.

"Ask what you will, Lady de Sergeaux."

There was no sad cadence now in the gentle voice.

"I desire to know—for so only can you really help me—if you know yourself what it is to be unloved."

Once more Philippa saw the grey veil tremble.

"I know it—well." But the words were uttered scarcely above a whisper.

"I meant to ask you that at first, and we name upon another subject. But I am satisfied if you know it. And now tell me, how may any be content under such a trial? How may a weary, thirsting heart, come to drink of that water which he that drinketh shall thirst no more? Mother, all my life I have been drinking of many wells, but I never yet came to this Well. 'Ancor soyf j'ay:' tell me how I must labour, where I must go, to find that Well whereof the drinker

"'Jamays soyf n'aura
A l'éternité?'"

"Who taught you those lines?" asked the eremitess quickly.

"I found them in the device of a jewel," replied Philippa.

"Strange!" said the recluse; but she did not explain why she thought it so. "Lady, the Living Water is the gift of God; or rather, it is God. And the heart of man was never meant to be satisfied with anything beneath God."

"But the heart of woman, at least," said Philippa, "for I am not a man—is often satisfied with things beneath God."

"It often rests in them," said the Grey Lady; "but I doubt whether it is satisfied. That is a strong word. Are you?"

"I am most unsatisfied," answered Philippa; "otherwise I had not come to you. I want rest."

"And yet Christ hath been saying all your life, to you, as to others,—'Come unto Me, all ye that travail and are weary laden, and I will give you rest.'"

"He never gave it me."

"Because you never came for it."

"I wonder if He can give it," said Philippa, sighing.

"Trust me that He can. I never knew it till I came to Him."

"But are you at rest? You scarcely looked so just now."

"At rest," said the Grey Lady, "except when a breeze of earth stirs the soul which should be soaring above earth—when the dreams of earth come like a thick curtain between that soul and the hope of that Heaven—as it was just now."

"Then you are not exempt from that?"

"In coming to Christ for rest, we do not leave our human hearts and our human infirmities behind us—assuredly not."

"Then do you think it wrong to desire to beloved?"

"Not wrong to desire Christ's love."

"But to desire the love of some human being, or of any human being?"

The eremitess paused an instant before she answered.

"I should condemn myself if I said so," she replied in a low tone, the sad cadence returning to her voice. "I must leave that with God. He hath undertaken to purge me from sin, and He knows what is sin. If that be so, He will purge me from it. I have put myself in His hands, to be dealt with as pleaseth Him; and my Physician will give me the medicines which He seeth me to need. Let me counsel you to do the same."

"Yet what pleaseth Him might not please me."

"It would be strange if it did."

"Why?" said Philippa.

"Because it is your nature to love sin, and it is His nature to love holiness. And what we love, we become. He that loveth sin must needs be a sinner."

"I do not think I love sin," rejoined Philippa, rather offended.

"That is because you cannot see yourself."

Just what Guy of Ashridge had told her; but not more palatable now than it had been then.

"What is sin?" asked the Grey Lady.

Philippa was ready with a list—of sins which she felt certain she had not committed.

"Give me leave to add one," said the eremitess. "Pride is sin; nay, it is the abominable sin which God hateth. And is there no pride in you, Lady de Sergeaux? You tell me you cannot forgive your own father. Now I know nothing of you, nor of him; but if you could see yourself as you stand in God's sight—whatever it be that he hath done—you would know yourself to be as black a sinner as he. Where, then, is your superiority? You have as much need to be forgiven."

"But I have *not!*" cried Philippa, in no dulcet tones, her annoyance getting the better of her civility. "I never was a murderer! I never turned coldly away from one that loved me—for none ever did love me. I never crushed a loving, faithful heart down into the dust. I never brought a child up like a stranger. I never—stay, I will go no further into the catalogue. But I know I am not such a sinner as he—nay, I am not to be compared to him."

"And have you," asked the Grey Lady, very gently, "turned no cold ear to the loving voice of Christ? Have you not kept far away from the heavenly Father? Have you not grieved the Holy Spirit of God? May it not be said to you, as our Lord said to the Jews of old time,—'Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life?'"

It was only what Guy of Ashridge had said before. But this time there seemed to be a power with the words which had not gone with his. Philippa was silent. She had no answer to make.

"You are right," she said after a long pause. "I have done all this; but I never saw it before. Mother, the next time you are at the holy mass, will you pray for me?"

"Why wait till then?" was the rejoinder. "Let us tell Him so now."

And, surprised as she was at the proposal, Philippa knelt down.

"Thank you, and the holy saints bless you," she said, as she rose. "Now I must go; and I hear Lena's voice without. But ere I depart, may I ask you one thing?"

"Anything."

"What could I possibly have said that pained you? For that something did pain you I am sure. I am sorry for it, whatever it may have been."

The soft voice resumed its troubled tone.

"It was only," said the Grey Lady, "that you uttered a name which has not been named in mine hearing for twenty-seven years: you told me where, and doing what, was one of whom and of whose doings I had thought never to hear any more. One, of whom I try never to think, save when I am praying for him, or in the night when I am alone with God, and can ask Him to pardon me if I sin."

"But whom did I name?" said Philippa, in an astonished tone. "Have I spoken of any but of my husband? Do you know him?"

"I have never heard of him before to-day, nor of you."

"I think I did mention the Duke of Lancaster."

A shake of the head negated this suggestion.

"Well, I named none else," pursued Philippa, "saving the Earl of Arundel; and you cannot know him."

Even then she felt an intense repugnance to saying, "My father." But, much to her surprise, the Grey Lady slowly bowed her head.

"And in what manner," began Philippa, "can you know—"



—Mother! mine own mother! I am Philippa Fitzalan. —Page 138.

But before she uttered another word, a suspicion which almost terrified her began to steal over her. She threw herself on her knees at the feet of the Grey Lady, and grasped her arm tightly.

"All the holy saints have mercy upon us!—are you Isabel La Despenser?"

It seemed an hour to Philippa ere the answer came. And it came in a tone so low and quivering that she only just heard it.

"I was."

And then a great cry of mingled joy and anguish rang through the lonely cell.

"Mother! mine own mother! I am Philippa Fitzalan!"

There was no cry from Isabel. She only held out her arms; and in an embrace as close and tender as that with which they had parted, the long-separated mother and daughter met.

Chapter Nine.

Together.

"Woe to the eye that sheds no tears -
No tears for God to wipe away!"

"G.E.M."

"And is it so hard to forgive?" asked the soft voice of Isabel.

"I will try, but it seems impossible," responded Philippa. "How can any forgive injuries that reach down to the very root of the heart and life?"

"My child," said Isabel, "he that injureth followeth after Satan; but he that forgiveth followeth after God. It is because our great debt to God is too mighty for our bounded sight, and we cannot reach to the ends thereof, that we are so ready to require of our fellow-debtors the small and sorry sum owed to ourselves. 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' And can any love and yet not forgive?"

"It is sometimes easier to love one ere he be seen than after," said Philippa, sarcastically.

Isabel smiled rather sadly, for the latent thought in her daughter's mind was only too apparent to her. Had Philippa known as little of her father as of her mother, her feeling towards him would have been far less bitter. But there was

no other answer. Even though twenty-seven years lay between that day and the June morning on which she had quitted Arundel, Isabel could not trust herself to speak of Richard Fitzalan. She dared not run the risk of re-opening the wound, by looking to see whether it had healed.

"Mother," said Philippa suddenly, "thou wilt come with me to Kilquyt?"

"For a time," answered Isabel, "if thine husband assent thereto."

"I shall not ask him," said Philippa, with a slight pout.

"Then I shall not go," replied Isabel quietly. "I will not enter his house without his permission."

Philippa's surprise and disappointment were legible in her face.

"But, mother, thou knowest not my lord," she interposed. "There is not in all the world a man more wearisome to dwell withal. Every thing I do, he dislikes; and every thing I wish to do, he forbids. I am thankful for his absence, for when he is at home, from dawn to dusk he doth nought save to find fault with me."

But, notwithstanding her remonstrance, Philippa had fathomed her mother's motive in thus answering. Sir Richard possessed little of his own; he was almost wholly dependent on the Earl her father; and had it pleased that gentleman to revoke his grant of manors to herself and her husband, they would have been almost ruined. And Philippa knew quite enough of Earl Richard the Copped-Hat to be aware that few tidings would be so unwelcome at Arundel as those which conveyed the fact of Isabel's presence at Kilquyt. Her mother's uplifted hand stopped her from saying more.

"Hush, my daughter!" said the low voice. "Repay not thou by finding fault in return. 'What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.'"

"I am not so patient as you, mother," answered Philippa, shaking her head. "Perhaps it were better for me if I were. But dost thou mean that I must really ask my lord's leave ere thou wilt come with me?"

"I do mean it."

"And thou sayest, 'for a time'—wilt thou not dwell with me?"

"The vows of the Lord are upon me," replied Isabel, gravely. "I cannot forsake the place wherein He hath set me, the work which He hath given me to do. I will visit thee, and my sister also; but that done, I must return hither."

"But dost thou mean to live and die in yonder cell?"

It was in the recreation-room of the Convent that they were conversing.

"Even so, my daughter." (See Note 1.)

Philippa's countenance fell. It seemed very hard to part again when they had but just found each other. If this were religion, it must be difficult work to be religious. Yet she was more disappointed than surprised, especially when the first momentary annoyance was past.

"My child," said Isabel softly, seeing her disappointment, "if I err in thus speaking, I pray God to pardon me. I can but follow what I see right; and 'to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.' How can I forsake the hearts that look to me for help throughout this valley? And if thou have need of me, thou canst always come, or send for me."

This gentle, apologetic explanation touched Philippa the more, because she felt that in the like case, she could not herself have condescended to make it.

The next thing to be done was to write to Sir Richard. This Philippa was unable to do personally, since the art of handling the pen had formed no part of her education. Her mother did it for her; for Isabel had been solidly and elaborately instructed by Giles de Edingdon, under the superintendence of the King's Confessor, Luke de Wodeford, also a Predicant Friar. The letter had to be directed very much at random,—to "Sir Richard Sergeaux, of the Duke of Lancaster's following, at Bordeaux, or wherever he may be found." Fortunately for Philippa, the Prior of the neighbouring monastery was just despatching his cellarer to London on conventual business: and he undertook to convey her letter to the Savoy Palace, whence it would be forwarded with the next despatches sent to John of Gaunt. Philippa, in whose name the letter was written, requested her husband to reply to her at Shaftesbury, whither she and Isabel meant to proceed at once.

The spring was in its full beauty when they reached Shaftesbury. Philippa had not found an opportunity to let the Abbess know of her coming, but she was very cordially welcomed by that good-natured dame. The recreation-bell sounded while they were conversing, and at Philippa's desire the Abbess sent for Mother Joan to the guest-chamber. Sister Senicula led her in.

"How is it with you, Aunt?" said Philippa affectionately. "I have returned hither, as you may hear."

"Ah! Is it thou, child?" said the blind nun in answer. "I fare reasonably well, as a blind woman may. I am glad thou hast come hither again."

It evidently cost Isabel much to make herself known to the sister from whom she had parted in such painful

circumstances, thirty-seven years before. For a few moments longer, she did not speak, and Philippa waited for her. At last Isabel said in a choked voice—"Sister Joan!"

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed the blind woman; "who called me that?"

"One that thou knewest once," answered Isabel's quivering voice.

"From Heaven?" cried Joan almost wildly. "Can the dead come back again?" And she stretched forth her hands in the direction from which the sound of her sister's voice had come.

"No, but the living may," said Isabel, kneeling down by her, and clasping her arms around her.

"Isabel!" And Joan's trembling hands were passed over her face, as if to assure herself that her ears had not deceived her. "It can be no voice but thine. Holy Virgin, I thank thee!"

The Abbess broke in, in a manner which, though well-meant, was exceedingly ill-timed and in bad taste. She was kindly-disposed, but had not the faintest trace of that delicate perception of others' feelings, and consideration for them, which constitutes the real difference between Nature's ladies and such as are not ladies.

"Verily, to think that this holy Mother and our Mother Joan be sisters!" cried she, "I remember somewhat of your history, my holy Sister: are you not she that was sometime Countess of Arundel?"

Philippa saw how Isabel trembled from head to foot; but she knew not what to say. Joan La Despenser was equal to the emergency.

"Holy Mother," she said quietly, "would it please you, of your great goodness, to permit me to remain here during the recreation-hour with my sister? I am assured we shall have much to say each to other, if we may have your blessed allowance to speak freely after this manner."

"Be it so, Sister," said the Abbess, smiling genially; "I will see to our sisters in the recreation-chamber."

A long conversation followed the departure of the Abbess. Joan took up the history where she had parted from Isabel, and told what had been her own lot since then; and Isabel in her turn recounted her story—neither a long nor an eventful one; for it told only how she had been taken to Sempringham by the page, and had there settled herself, in the hermit's cell which happened to be vacant.

When Philippa was lying awake that night, her thoughts were troublous ones. Not only did she very much doubt Sir Richard's consent to her mother's visit to Kilquyt; but another question was puzzling her exceedingly. How far was it desirable to inform Isabel of the death of Alianora? She had noticed how the unfortunate remark of the Abbess had agitated her mother; and she also observed that when Joan came to speak to Isabel herself, she was totally silent concerning Earl Richard. The uncomplimentary adjectives which she had not spared in speaking to Philippa were utterly discarded now. Would it not do at least as much harm as good to revive the old memories of pain by telling her this? Philippa decided to remain silent.

The summer was passing away, and the autumn hues were slowly creeping over the forest, when Sir Richard's answer arrived at Shaftesbury. It was not a pleasing missive; but it would have cost Philippa more tears if it had made her less angry. That gentleman had not written in a good temper; but he was not without excuse, for he had suffered something himself. He had not dared to reply to Philippa's entreaty, without seeking in his turn the permission of the Earl of Arundel, in whose hands his fortune lay to make or mar. And, by one of those uncomfortable coincidences which have led to the proverb that "Misfortunes never come single," it so happened that the news of the Countess's death had reached the Earl on the very morning whereon Sir Richard laid Philippa's letter before him. The result was that there broke on the devoted head of Sir Richard a tempest of ungovernable rage, so extremely unpleasant in character that he might be excused for his anxiety to avoid provoking a second edition of it. The Earl was grieved—so far as a nature like his could entertain grief—to lose his second wife; but to find that the first wife had been discovered, and by her daughter, possessed the additional character of insult. That the occurrence was accidental did not alter matters. Words would not content the aggrieved mourner: his hand sought the hilt of his sword, and Sir Richard, thinking discretion the better part of valour, made his way, as quickly as the laws of matter and space allowed him, out of the terrible presence whereinto he had rashly ventured. Feeling himself wholly innocent of any provocation, it was not surprising that he should proceed to dictate a letter to his wife, scarcely calculated to gratify her feelings. Thus ran the offending document:—

"Dame,—Your epistle hath reached mine hands, (see Note 2) wherein it hath pleased you to give me to know of your finding of the Lady Isabel La Despenser, your fair mother, (see Note 3) and likewise of your desire that she should visit you at my Manor of Kilquyt. Know therefore, that I can in no wise assent to the same. For I am assured that it should provoke, and that in no small degree, the wrath of your fair father, my gracious Lord of Arundel: and I hereby charge you, on your obedience, so soon as you shall receive this my letter, that you return home, and tarry no longer at Shaftesbury nor Sempringham. Know that I fare reasonably well, and Eustace my squire; and your fair father likewise, saving that he hath showed much anger towards you and me. And thus, praying God and our blessed Lady, and Saint Peter and Saint Paul, to keep you. I rest.

"R. Sergeaux."

The entire epistle was written by a scribe, for Sir Richard was as innocent of the art of calligraphy as Philippa herself; and the appending of his seal was the only part of the letter achieved by his own hand.

Philippa read the note three times before she communicated its contents to any one. The first time, it was with

feelings of bitter anger towards both her father and her husband; the second, her view of her father's conduct remained unchanged, but she began to see that Sir Richard, from his own point of view, was not without reasonable excuse for his refusal, and that considering the annoyance he had himself suffered, his letter was moderate and even tolerably kind,—kind, that is, for him. After the third perusal, Philippa carried the letter to Joan, and read it to her—in Isabel's presence.

"What a fool wert thou, child," said Joan, with her usual bluntness, "to send to thy lord concerning this matter! Well, what is done, is done. I had looked for no better had I known of it."

Philippa did not read the letter to her mother. She merely told her the substance; that Sir Richard would not permit her to receive her at Kilquyt, and that he had ordered her home without delay. Isabel's lip quivered a moment, but the next instant she smiled.

"I am not surprised, my child," she said. "Take heed, and obey." It was hard work to obey. Hard, to part with Joan; harder yet, to leave Isabel in her lonely cell at Sempringham, and to go forward on the as lonely journey to Kilquyt. Perhaps hardest of all was the last night in the recreation-room at Sempringham. Isabel and Philippa sat by themselves in a corner, the hand of the eremitess clasped in that of her daughter.

"But how do you account for all the sorrow that is in the world?" Philippa had been saying. "Take my life, for instance, or your own, mother. God could have given us very pleasant lives, if it had pleased Him; why did He not do so? How can it augur love, to take out of our way all things loved or loving?"

"My daughter," answered Isabel, "I am assured—and the longer I live the more assured I am—that the way which God marketh out for each one of His chosen is the right way, the best way, and for that one the only way. Every pang given to us, if we be Christ's, is a pang that could not be spared. 'As He was, so are we in this world;' and with us, as with Him, 'thus it *must* be.' All our Lord's followers wear His crown of thorns; but theirs, under His loving hand, bud and flower; which His never did, till He could cry upon the rood, 'It is finished.'"

"But could not God," said Philippa, a little timidly, "have given us more grace to avoid sinning, rather than have needed thus to burn our sins out of us with hot irons?"

"Thou art soaring up into the seventh Heaven of God's purposes, my child," answered Isabel with a smile; "I have no wings to follow thee so far."

"Thou thinkest, then, mother," replied Philippa with a sigh, "that we cannot understand the matter at all."

"We can understand only what is revealed to us," replied Isabel; "and that, I grant, is but little; yet it is enough. 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' 'What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?' How could it be otherwise? He were no wise father nor loving, who should teach his son nothing, or should forbear to rebuke him for such folly as might hereafter be his ruin."

Isabel was silent, and Philippa's memory went back to those old loveless days at Arundel, when for her there had been no chastening, no rebuke, only cold, lifeless apathy. That was not love. And she thought also of her half-sister Alesia, whom she had visited once since her marriage, and who brought up her children on the principle of no contradiction and unlimited indulgence; and remembering how discontented and hard to please this discipline had made them, she began to see that was not love either.

"Thou hast wrought arras, my daughter," said Isabel again. "Thou knowest, therefore, that to turn the arras the backward way showeth not the pattern. The colours are all mixed out of proportion, as the fastenings run in and out. So our life is in this world. The arras shall only be turned the right way above, when the angels of God shall see it, and marvel at the fair proportions and beauteous colours of that which looked so rough and misshapen here below.

"Moreover, we are thus tried, methinks, not only for our own good. We are sent into this world to serve: to serve God first, and after to serve man for God's sake. And every blow of the chisel on the stone doth but dress it for its place. God's chisel never falleth on the wrong place, and never giveth a stroke too much. Every pang fitteth us for more service; and I think thou shouldst find, in most instances, that the higher and greater the service to which the varlet is called, the deeper the previous suffering which fitteth him therefor. And God's greatnesses are not ours. In His eyes, a poor serving-maiden may have a loftier and more difficult task than a lord of the King's Council, or a Marshal of the army.

"And after all, every sorrow and perplexity, be it large or small, doth but give God's child an errand to his Father. Nothing is too little to bear to His ear, if it be not too little to distress and perplex His servant. To Him all things pertaining to this life are small—the cloth of estate no less than the blade of grass; and all things pertaining to that other and better life in His blessed Home, are great and mighty. Yet we think the first great, and the last little. And therefore things become great that belong to the first life, just in proportion as they bear upon the second. Nothing is small that becomes to thee an occasion of sin; nothing, that can be made an incentive to holiness."

"O mother, mother!" said Philippa, with a sudden sharp shoot of pain, "to-morrow I shall be far away from you, and none will teach me any more!"

"God will teach thee Himself, my child," said Isabel tenderly. "He can teach far better than I. Only be thou not weary of His lessons; nor refuse to learn them. Maybe thou canst not see the use of many of them till they are learned; but 'thou shalt know hereafter.' Thou shalt find many a thorn in the way; but remember, it is not set there in anger, if thou be Christ's; and many a flower shall spring up under thy feet, when thou art not looking for it. Only do thou never loose thine hold on Him, who has promised never to loose His on thee. Not that thou shouldst be lost in so doing; He will have a care of that: but thou mightest find thyself in the dark, and so far as thou couldst see, alone. It is sin that hides God from man; but nothing can hide man from God."

And Philippa, drawing closer to her, whispered,—“Mother, pray for me.”

A very loving smile broke over Isabel’s lips, as she pressed them fondly upon Philippa’s cheek.

“Mine own Philippa,” she said, in the softest accent of her soft voice, “dost thou think I have waited thirty years for that?”

Note 1. I am aware that this resolution will appear inconsistent with Isabel’s character; yet any other would have been inconsistent with her times. The vows of recluses were held very sacred; and the opinions of the Boni-Homines on the monastic question were little in advance of those of the Church of Rome.

Note 2. Had Sir Richard been a peer, he would have said “*our* hands.” This style, now exclusively royal, was in 1372 employed by all the nobles.

Note 3. This adjective also was peculiar to the peerage and the Royal Family. It was given to every relation except between husband and wife: and the French *beau-pere* for *father-in-law* is doubtless derived from it. Nay, it was conferred on the Deity; and “Fair Father Jesu Christ” was by no means an uncommon title used in prayer. In like manner, Saint Louis, when he prayed, said, “*Sire Dieu*,” the title of knighthood. Quaint and almost profane as this usage sounds to modern ears, I think their instinct was right: they addressed God in the highest and most reverential terms they knew.

Chapter Ten.

Four years later.

“When the shore is won at last,
Who will count the billows past?”

Keble.

It was winter again; and the winds blew harshly and wailingly around the Castle of Arundel. In the stateliest chamber of that Castle, where the hangings were of cramoisie paned with cloth of gold, the evening tapers were burning low, and a black-robed priest knelt beside the bed where an old man lay dying.

“I can think of nothing more, Father,” faintly whispered the penitent. “I have confessed every sin that I have ever



And lifting his hands in blessing, he pronounced the unholy incantation,
“*Absolve te!*”—Page 116.

sinned, so far as my memory serveth: and many men have been worse sinners than I. I never robbed a church in all my wars. I have bequeathed rents and lands to the Priory of God and Saint Pancras at Lewes, for two monks to celebrate day by day masses of our Lady and of the Holy Ghost,—two hundred pounds; and for matins and requiem masses in my chapel here, a thousand marks; and four hundred marks to purchase rent lands for the poor; and all my debts I have had a care to pay. Can I perform any other good work? Will that do, Father?”

“Thou canst do nought else, my son,” answered the priest. “Thou hast right nobly purchased the favour of God, and thine own salvation. Thy soul shall pass, white and pure, through the flames of Purgatory, to be triumphantly acquitted at the bar of God.”

And lifting his hands in blessing, he pronounced the unholy incantation,—“*Absolve te!*”

“Thank the saints, and our dear Lady!” feebly responded the dying man. “I am clean and sinless.”

Before the morrow dawned on the Conversion of Saint Paul, that old man knew, as he had never known on earth, whether he stood clean and sinless before God or not. There were no bands in that death. The river did not look dark to him; it did not feel cold as his feet touched it. But on the other side what angels met him? and what entrance was accorded, to that sin-defiled and uncleansed soul, into that Land wherein there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth?

And so Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, passed away.

Two months later,—by a scribe's letter, written in the name of her half-brother, the young, brave, joyous man upon whose head the old coronet had descended,—the news of the Earl's death reached Philippa Sergeaux at Kilquyt. Very differently it affected her from the manner in which she would have received it four years before. And very differently from the manner in which it was received by the daughters of Alianora, to whom (though they did not put it into audible words) the real thought of the heart was—"Is the old man really gone at last? Well, it was time he should. Now I shall receive the coronet he left to me, and the two, or three, thousand marks." For thus he had remembered Joan and Alesia; and thus they remembered him. To Mary he left nothing; a sure sign of offence, but how incurred history remains silent. But to the eldest daughter, whose name was equally unnamed with hers—whose ears heard the news so far away—whose head had never known the fall of his hand in blessing—whose cheek had never been touched by loving lips of his—to Philippa Sergeaux the black serge for which she exchanged her damask robes was real mourning.

She did not say now, "I can never forgive my father." It is not when we are lying low in the dust before the feet of the Great King, oppressed with the intolerable burden of our ten thousand talents, that we feel disposed to rise and take our fellow-servant by the throat, with the pitiless, "Pay me that thou owest." The offensive "Stand by,—I am holier than thou!" falls only from unholy lips. When the woman that was a sinner went out, washed and forgiven, from that sinless Presence, with the shards of the broken alabaster box in her hand, she was less likely than at any previous time in her life to reproach the fellow-sinners whom she met on her journey home. So, when Philippa Sergeaux's eyes were opened, and she came to see how much God had forgiven her, the little that she had to forgive her father seemed less than nothing in comparison. She could distinguish now, as previously she could not—but as God does always—between the sin and the sinner; she was able to keep her hatred and loathing for the first, and to regard the second with the deepest pity. And when she thought of the sleep into which she could have little doubt that his soul had been lulled,—of the black awakening "on the brink of the pit,"—there was no room in her heart for any feeling but that of unutterable anguish.

They had not sent for her to Arundel. Until she heard that the end was reached, she never knew he was near the end at all.

It is not Christianity, but Pharisaism, which would shut up the kingdom of heaven against all but itself. To those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, it is something more than mere privilege to summon him that is athirst to come. "Necessity is upon them—yea, woe is unto them if they preach not the gospel!" Though no Christian is a priest, every Christian must be a preacher. Ay, and that whether he will or not. He may impose silence upon his lips, but his life must be eloquent in spite of himself. And what a terrible thought is this, when we look on our poor, unworthy, miserable lives rendered unto the Lord, for all His benefits toward us! When the world sees us vacillating between right and wrong—questioning how near we may go to the edge of the precipice and yet be safe—can it realise that we believe that right and wrong to be a matter of life and death? Or when it hears us murmuring continually over trifling vexations, can it believe that we honestly think ourselves those to whom it is promised that all shall work for good—that all things are ours—that we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ?

O Lord, pardon the iniquities of our holy things! Verily, without Thee we can do nothing.

On the morning that this news reached Kilquyt, an old man in the garb of the Dominican Order was slowly mounting the ascent which led from the Vale of Sempringham. The valley was just waking into spring life. In the trees above his head the thrushes and chaffinches were singing; and just before him, diminished to a mere speck in the boundless blue, a lark poured forth his "flood of delirious music." The Dominican paused and rested on his staff while he listened.

"Sing, happy birds!" he said, when at length the lark's song was over, and the bird had come down to earth again. "For you there are no vain regrets over yesterday, no woeful anticipations of to-morrow. But what kind of song can *she* sing when she hath heard the news I bring her?"

"Father Guy!" said a voice beside him.

It was a child of ten years old who stood in his path—a copy of Elaine four years before.

"Ah, maid, art thou there?" answered Guy. "Run on, Annora, and say to the Grey Lady that I will be at her cell in less than an hour. Thy feet are swifter than mine."

Annora ran blithely forward. Guy of Ashridge pursued his weary road, for he was manifestly very weary. At length he rather suddenly halted, and sat down on a bank where primroses grew by the way-side.

"I can go no further without resting," said he. "Ten is one thing, and threescore and ten is another. If I could turn back and go no further!—Is the child here again already?"

"Father Guy," said Annora, running up and throwing herself down on the primrose bank, "I have been to the cell, but I have not given your message."

"Is the Lady not there?" asked Guy, a sudden feeling of relief coming over him.

"Oh yes, she is there," replied the child; "but she was kneeling at prayer, and I thought you would not have me disturb her."

"Right," answered the monk. "But lest she should leave the cell ere I reach it, go back, Annora, and keep watch. Tell her, if she come forth, that I must speak with her to-day."

Once more away fled the light-footed Annora, and Guy, rising, resumed his journey.

"If it must be, it may as well be now," he said to himself, with a sigh.

So, plodding and resting by turns, he at length arrived at the door of the cell. The door was closed, and the child sat on the step before it, singing softly to herself, and playing with a lapful of wild flowers—just as her sister had been doing when Philippa Sergeaux first made her acquaintance.

"Is she come forth yet?" asked Guy.

Annora shook her flaxen curls. Guy went to the little window, and glanced within. The grey figure was plainly visible, kneeling in prayer, with the head bent low, and resting against a ledge of the rock which formed the walls of the little dwelling. The monk sat down on a piece of rock outside the cell, and soon so completely lost himself in thought that Annora grew weary of her amusement before he spoke again. She did not, however, leave him; but when she had thrown away her flowers, and had spent some minutes in a vain search for a four-leaved clover, fairly tired out, she came and stood before him.

"The shadow is nearly straight, Father Guy. Will she be much longer, do you think?"

Guy started suddenly when Annora spoke.

"There is something amiss," he replied, in a tone of apprehension. "I never knew her so long before. Has she heard my news already?"

He looked in again. The grey veiled figure had not changed its position. After a moment's irresolution, Guy laid his hand upon the latch. The monk and the child entered together,—Guy with a face of resolute endurance, as though something which would cost him much pain must nevertheless be done; Annora with one of innocent wonder, not unmingled with awe.

Guy took one step forward, and stopped suddenly.

"O Father Guy!" said Annora in a whisper, "the Grey Lady is not praying,—she is asleep."

"Yes, she is asleep," replied Guy in a constrained voice. "'So He giveth His beloved sleep.' He knew how terribly the news would pain her; and He would let none tell it to her but Himself. 'I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth!'"

"But how strangely she sleeps!" cried Annora, still under her breath. "How white she is! and she looks so cold! Father Guy, won't you awake her? She is not having nice dreams, I am afraid."

"The angels must awake her," said Guy, solemnly. "Sweeter dreams than hers could no man have; for far above, in the Holy Land, she seeth the King's face. Child, this is not sleep—it is death."

Ay, in the attitude of prayer, her head pillowed in its last sleep on that ledge of the rock, knelt all that was mortal of Isabel La Despenser. With her had been no priest to absolve—save the High Priest; no hand had smoothed her pathway to the grave but the Lord's own hand, who had carried her so tenderly through the valley of the shadow of death. Painlessly the dark river was forded, silently the pearl-gates were thrown open; and now she stood within the veil, in the innermost sanctuary of the Temple of God. The arras of her life, wrought with such hard labour and bitter tears, was complete now. All the strange chequerings of the pattern were made plain, the fair proportions no longer hidden: the perfected work shone out in its finished beauty, and she grudged neither the labour nor the tears now.

Guy of Ashridge could see this; but to Annora it was incomprehensible. She had been told by her mother that the Grey Lady had passed a life of much suffering before she came to Sempringham; for silent as she was concerning the details of that life, Isabel had never tried to conceal the fact that it had been one of suffering. And the child's childish idea was the old notion of poetical justice—of the good being rewarded, and the evil punished, openly and unmistakably, in this world; a state of affairs frequently to be found in novels, but only now and then in reality. Had some splendid litter been borne to the door of the little cell, and had noblemen decked in velvet robes, shining with jewels, and riding on richly caparisoned horses, told her that they were come to make the Grey Lady a queen, Annora would have been fully satisfied. But here the heavenly chariot was invisible, and had come noiselessly; the white and glistening raiment of the angels had shone with no perceptible lustre, had swept by with no audible sound. The child wept bitterly.

"What troubleth thee, Annora?" said Guy of Ashridge, laying his hand gently upon her head.

"Oh!" sobbed Annora, "God hath given her nothing after all!"

"Hath He given her nothing?" responded Guy. "I would thou couldst ask her, and see what she would answer."

"But I thought," said the child, vainly endeavouring to stop crying, "I thought He had such beautiful things to give to people He loved. She used to say so. But He gave her nothing beautiful—only this cell and those grey garments. I thought He would have clad her in golden baudekyn (see Note 1), and set gems in her hair, and given her a horse to ride,—like the Lady de Chartreux had when she came to the Convent last year to visit her daughter, Sister Egidia. Her

fingers were all sparkling with rings, and her gown had beautiful strings of pearl down the front, with perry-work (see Note 2) at the wrists. Why did not God give the Grey Lady such fair things as these? Was she not quite as good as the Lady de Chartreux?"

"Because He loved her too well," said Guy softly. "He had better and fairer things than such poor gauds for her. The Lady de Chartreux must die one day, and leave all her pearls and perry-work behind her. But to the Lady Isabel that here lieth dead, He gave length of days for ever and ever; He gave her to drink of the Living Water, after which she never thirsted any more."

"Oh, but I wish He would have given her something that I could see!" sobbed Annora again.

"Little maid," said Guy, his hand again falling lightly on the little flaxen head, "God grant that when thy few and evil days of this lower life be over, thou mayest both see and share what He hath given her!"

And slowly he turned back to "her who lay so silent."

"Farewell, Isabel, Countess of Arundel!" he said almost tenderly. "For the corruptible coronet whereof man deprived thee, God hath given thee an incorruptible crown. For the golden baudekyn that was too mean to clothe thee,—the robes that are washed white, the pure bright stone (see Note 3) whereof the angels' robes are fashioned. For the stately barbs which were not worthy to bear thee,—a chariot and horses of fire. And for the delicate cates of royal tables, which were not sweet enough for thee,—the Bread of Life, which whosoever eateth shall never hunger, the Water of Life, which whosoever drinketh shall never thirst.

*"O retributio! stat brevis actio, vita perennis;
O retributio! caelica mansio stat lue plenis."*

See Note 4 for a translation.

"How blessed an exchange, how grand a reward! I trust God, but thou seest Him. I believe He hath done well, with thee, as with me, but thou knowest it."

*"Jamais soyf n'auras
A l'éternité!"*

Note 1. Baudekyn, the richest variety of this rich silk, in which threads of gold were probably intermingled.

Note 2. Perry-work: goldsmiths' work, often set with precious stones.

Note 3. In Revelations xv. 6, the most ancient MSS., instead of "pure and white linen," read "a pure bright stone."

Note 4:

*"O happy retribution!
Short toil, eternal rest;
For mortals and for sinners
A mansion with the blest!"*

Neals's Translation.

Appendix.

Some readers of this tale may desire to know on what historical foundation it rests, and in what points the fiction departs from truth.

The Order of Predicant Friars was instituted by Dominic in 1215, with the avowed object of maintaining Roman doctrine and supremacy, and of opposing and superseding the wandering preachers sent out by the Waldensian Church into all parts of Europe, and known chiefly as *Boni-Homines*, or *Poor Men of Lyons*. But the Waldensian Church was acute enough to take advantage of this movement; and no sooner had the Order been founded than an army of "Gospellers" (as even thus early they were called), issued forth under its shelter. It appears probable that at an early period of their preaching, a very large percentage of the Predicant Friars were Gospellers. It is, moreover, an historical fact, that during the struggle between Edward the Second and his wretched Queen, the Predicant Friars ranged themselves on the side of the King, who had always been their friend, and whose own confessor, Luke de Wodeford, was of their Order. (*Rot. Ex., Pasc.* 2 Ed. III.) That the Despensers also patronised them is rather an inference founded upon fact, yet on such facts as very decidedly point to this conclusion. It should not be forgotten, that all accounts of the reign and character of Edward the Second which have come down to us were written by monks, or by persons educated in the opinions of the monks; and the Church of Rome has never, at any period of her history, hesitated to accuse of the vilest crimes any who endeavoured to escape from her toils into the pure light of the Gospel of Christ.

That Hugh Le Despenser the Elder was an unprincipled and avaricious man, there can be little question. With him, if he embraced the principles of the *Boni-Homines* at all, it was evidently a mere matter of intellectual opinion. Much less evidence can be found against his son, whose chief crime seems to have been that he aroused the hatred of the "she-wolf of France." Joan La Despenser (the ladies of the family are always distinguished as *La* Despenser in contemporary records) lived to a good age, for she was probably born about 1310, and she died in her nunnery of Shaftesbury, November 8, 1384 (I.P.M. 8 Ric. II., 14).

Richard Earl of Arundel, surnamed *Copped-Hat*, the elder of the two sons of Earl Edmund and Alesia, heiress of Surrey, was born about 1308, and died January 24, 1376. (Arundel MS. 51, fol. 18.) His father was beheaded with Hugh Le Despenser the Elder, October 8 or 27, 1326; his mother died before May 23, 1338. (Froissart's Chronicles, Book I., chapter xi.; *Rot. Pat.* 12 Ed. III., Part 2.) His first marriage was before February 2, 1321 (*ib.* 14 Ed. II., Pt. 2); and his baby Countess was probably not more than three years old at that time. Her divorce immediately preceded the second marriage, and it was apparently just before June 24, 1345. On that day, "Isabel La Despenser, and Alianora daughter of Henry Earl of Lancaster," are returned among the tenants of Richard Earl of Arundel (*ib.*, 19 Ed. III., Pt. 1): the designation showing that on that day neither was Countess of Arundel, but that the marriage-settlements of Alianora were already executed. After this date all trace of Isabel disappears, until we meet with the name of "Dame Isabel, daughter of Sir Hugh Spencer," among the persons buried in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey. (Harl. MS. 544, fol. 78.) The Countess Alianora, at the time of her marriage, was the widow of John Lord Beaumont, and the mother of two infant children; she had only just returned from a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint James of Compostella. (*Rot. Pat.* 18 Ed. III., Pt. 1.) She died January 11, 1372 and was buried at Lewes. (Reg. Lewes, fol. 108.) Her second family consisted of three sons and three daughters—Richard, John, Thomas, Joan, Alesia, and Alianora. The last-named died in childhood; all the rest survived their parents.—Richard, a well-meaning and brave, but passionate and narrow-minded man, was governed by his stronger-minded brother Thomas, and under his evil influence entered upon a treasonable conspiracy, for which he paid the penalty on Tower Hill in the spring of 1397.—John is chiefly remarkable for having married the heiress of Maltravers, and becoming eventually the root of the family.—Thomas became Bishop of Ely and Archbishop of Canterbury—the persecuting Archbishop Arundel who will perhaps be remembered by the readers of "Mistress Margery"—and after suffering for his treasonable practices a richly-deserved banishment, was at once recalled and restored by his friend and fellow-conspirator, Henry the Fourth. He died in 1413. That the House of Arundel had no "Gospel" sympathies is shown by more evidences than one; though the Archbishop himself had at one time pretended friendship towards the Lollards. It did not last long; he would scarcely have been a true Arundel had it done so.—Joan Fitzalan was a woman of intense energy and terrible passions. She did not live happily with her husband, Humphrey Earl of Hereford, as appears from a curious and unique entry on the Patent Rolls (33 Ed. III., Pt. 3), providing that Humphrey should not divorce Joan on any pretence of precontract. The Earl, however, died at the early age of thirty-one, and Joan, whose two daughters were married to Princes (Alianora to Thomas Duke of Gloucester, Mary to Henry the Fourth), became a very powerful and wealthy widow. One anecdote will show what her character was better than volumes of description. She presided in person at the execution of John Duke of Exeter (brother of her sister Alesia's husband), he being loyal to his half-brother, King Richard, while Joan was a vehement partisan of her son-in-law, Henry the Fourth. When no one came forward, in answer to her appeal, as the Duke's executioner, Joan exclaimed, "Cursed be you villains! are none of you bold enough to kill a man?" A squire volunteered to officiate, but when he had seen and heard the man whom he was to slay, he shrank from the terrible task. "Madam," was his remonstrance to the Countess, "for all the gold in the world, I cannot kill such a Lord!" "Thou shalt do what thou hast promised," said Joan, "or I will cut thy head off." And, probably knowing that she was likely to "do what she had promised," the squire preferred the fall of the Duke's head to his own. (*Lystoire de la Traison et Mort du Roy Richart*, pp. 98-9.) This strong-minded woman died April 7, 1419, and was buried at Walden, having previously been admitted a sister of the Grey Friars in her brother's Cathedral of Canterbury. (I.P.M. 7 H.V., 59:—Arundel MS. 51, fol. 18:— *ib.* 68, fol. 51, b.) Of Alesia, Countess of Kent, little personal is known. She left no mark on her time, though the members of her numerous family were very prominent characters. She died March 17, 1416 (I.P.M. 4 H.V., 51).

By all genealogists who have hitherto written on the Arundel family, two more daughters are ascribed to Earl Richard the Copped-Hat. These are Philippa Sergeaux, the heroine of the tale; and Mary L'Estrange. At the time when this story was written, I was misled to follow this supposition, though I had already seen that in that case, Isabel, and not Alianora, must have been the mother of Philippa. Some months after the story was first published, I began to suspect that this was also the case with regard to Mary L'Estrange. But I was not prepared for the discovery, made only last May, that Philippa Sergeaux was not the daughter of Earl Richard at all! In two charters recorded on a Close Roll for 20 Ric. II., she distinctly styles herself "daughter of Sir Edmund of Arundel, Knight," This was a younger brother of Earl Richard; and his wife was Sybil Montacute, a daughter of the Lollard House of Salisbury. It is probable, though no certainty has yet been found, that Mary L'Estrange was also a daughter of Sir Edmund, since dates conclusively show that she cannot have been the daughter of Alianora of Lancaster. She died August 29, 1396, leaving an only child, Ankaretta Talbot. (I.P.M. 20 Ric. II., 48).

As early, therefore, as I have the opportunity of doing it, I make the *amende honorable* to my readers for having unwittingly misled them on this point. It is scarcely a discredit not to have known a fact which was known to none. The tale must therefore be regarded as pure fiction, so far as Philippa is concerned; for Isabel La Despenser apparently had no child. The facts remain the same as regards other persons, where their history is not affected by the discovery.

Philippa Sergeaux is represented in the opening of the story as a child of three years old. It is more than probable that she was about ten years younger. The date of her marriage is not on record. She was eventually the mother of five children, though all were born subsequent to the period at which my story closes. They were—Richard, born December 21, 1376, and died issueless, June 24, 1396; Elizabeth, born 1379, wife of Sir William Marny; Philippa, born 1381, wife of Robert Passele; Alice, born at Kilquyt, September 1, 1384, wife of Guy de Saint Albino; Joan, born 1393, died February 21, 1400. Philippa became a widow, September 30, 1393, and died September 13, 1399. (I.P.M., 17 Ric. II., 53; 21 Ric. II., 50; 1 H. IV., 14, 23, 24.)

Some of the Christian names may strike the reader as having a very modern sound. I may therefore note that not one name occurs in the story which is not authenticated by its appearance in the state papers of the time.

It only remains to be added, that the fictitious characters of the tale are Giles de Edingdon and Guy of Ashridge, the nurse Alina, Agnes the lavender, the nuns Laura and Senicula, and the woodcutter's children Elaine and Annora. The details given of Earl Richard's will are true; but the presence of the Earl and Sir Richard Sergeaux in the train of John of Gaunt in Guienne, has been assumed for the purposes of the story.

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