

## The Project Gutenberg eBook of One Snowy Night

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ONE SNOWY NIGHT \*\*\*

Emily Sarah Holt  
"One Snowy Night"

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### Preface.

The story of the following pages is one of the least known yet saddest episodes in English history—the first persecution of Christians by Christians in this land. When Boniface went forth from England to evangelise Germany, he was received with welcome, and regarded as a saint: when Gerhardt came from Germany to restore the pure Gospel to England, he was cast out of the vineyard and slain.

The spirit of her who is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus is the same now that it was then. She does not ask if a man agree with the Word of God, but whether he agree with *her*. "When the Church has spoken"—this has been said by exalted ecclesiastical lips quite recently—"we cannot appeal to Scripture against her!"

But we Protestants can—we must—we will. The Church is not God, but man. The Bible is not the word of man, but the Word of God (One Thessalonians, two, verse 13; Ephesians, six, verse 17): therefore it must be paramount and unerring. Let us hold fast this our profession, not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel, nor entangled again with the yoke of bondage, but stablished in the faith, grounded and settled. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

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### Chapter One.

#### Saint Maudlin's Well.

"For men must work, and women must weep,  
And the sooner 'tis over, the sooner to sleep."

Reverend Charles Kingsley.

"Flemild!"

"Yes, Mother."

It was not a cross voice that called, but it sounded like a very tired one. The voice which answered was much more fresh and cheerful.

"Is Romund come in yet?"

"No, Mother."

"Nor Haimet either?"

"I have not seen him, Mother."

"Oh dear, those boys! They are never in the way when they are wanted."

The speaker came forward and showed herself. She was a woman of some forty years or more, looking older than she was, and evidently very weary. She wore a plain untrimmed skirt of dark woollen stuff, short to the ankles, a long linen apron, and a blue hood over her head and shoulders. Resting her worn hands on the half-door, she looked drearily up and down the street, as if in languid hope of catching a glimpse of the boys who should have been there, and were not.

"Well, there's no help for it!" she said at last, "Flemild, child, you must go for the water to-night."

"! O Mother!" The girl's tone was one of manifest reluctance.

"It can't be helped, child. Take Derette with you, and be back as quick as you can, before the dusk comes on. The lads should have been here to spare you, but they only think of their own pleasure. I don't know what the world's coming to, for my part."

"Father Dolfin says it's going to be burnt up," said a third voice—that of a child—from the interior of the house.

"Time it was!" replied the mother bluntly. "There's nought but trouble and sorrow in it—leastwise I've never seen much else. It's just work, work, work, from morning to night, and often no rest to speak of from night to morning. You get up tired than you went to bed, and you may just hold your tongue for all that any body cares, as the saints know. Well, well!—Come, make haste, child, or there'll be a crowd round Saint Martin's Well." (Note 1.)

"O Mother! mayn't I go to Plato's Well?"

"What, and carry your budget four times as far? Nonsense, Flemild!"

"But, Mother, please hear me a minute! It's a quiet enough way, when you are once past the Bayly, and I can step into the lodge and see if Cousin Stephen be at home. If he be, he'll go with me, I know."

"You may go your own way," said the mother, not quite pleasantly. "Young folks are that headstrong! I can't look for my children to be better than other folks'. If they are as good, it's as much as one need expect in this world."

Flemild had been busily tying on a red hood while her mother spoke, and signing to her little sister to do the same. Then the elder girl took from a corner, where it hung on a hook, a budget or pail of boiled leather, a material then much used for many household vessels now made of wood or metal: and the girls went out into the narrow street.

The street was called Kepeharme Lane, and the city was Oxford. This lane ran, in old diction, from the Little Bayly to Fish Street—in modern language, from New Inn Hall Street to Saint Aldate's, slightly south of what is now Queen Street, and was then known as the Great Bayly. The girls turned their backs on Saint Aldate's, and went westwards, taking the way towards the Castle, which in 1159 was not a ruined fortress, but an aristocratic mansion, wherein the great De Veres held almost royal state.

"Why don't you like Saint Martin's Well, Flemild?" demanded the child, with childish curiosity.

"Oh, for lots of reasons," answered her sister evasively.

"Tell me one or two."

"Well, there is always a crowd there towards evening. Then, very often, there are ragamuffins on Penniless Bench (Note 2) that one does not want to come too near. Then—don't you see, we have to pass the Jewry?"

"What would they do to us?" asked the child.

"Don't talk about it!" returned her sister, with a shudder. "Don't you know, Derette, the Jews are very, very wicked people? Hasn't Mother told you so many a time? Never you go near them—now, mind!"

"Are they worse than we are?"

Flemild's conscience pricked her a little as she replied, "Of course they are. Don't you know they crucified our Lord?"

"What, these Jews?" asked Derette with open eyes. "Old Aaron, and Benefei at the corner, and Jurnet the fletcher, and—O Flemild, not, surely not Countess and Regina? They look so nice and kind, I'm sure they never could do any thing like that!"

"No, child, not these people, of course. Why, it was hundreds and hundreds of years ago. But these are just as bad—every one of them. They would do it again if they had the chance."

"Countess wouldn't, / know," persisted the little one. "Why, Flemild, only last week, she caught pussy for me, and gave her to me, and she smiled so prettily. I liked her. If Mother hadn't said I must never speak to any of them, I'd have had a chat with her; but of course I couldn't, then, so I only smiled back again, and nodded for 'thank you.'"

"Derette!" There was genuine terror in the tone of the elder sister. "Don't you know those people are all wicked witches? Regular black witches, in league with the Devil. There isn't one of them would not cast a spell on you as soon as look at you."

"What would it do to me?" inquired the startled child.

"What wouldn't it do? you had better ask. Make you into a horrid black snake, or a pig, or something you would not like to be, I can tell you."

"I shouldn't quite like to be a black snake," said Derette, after a minute's pause for reflection. "But I don't think I should much mind being a pig. Little, tiny pigs are rather pretty things; and when they lie and grunt, they look very comfortable."

"Silly child!—you'd have no soul to be saved!"

"Shouldn't I? But, Flemild, I don't quite see—if / were the pig—would that be me or the pig?"

"Hi, there! Where are you going?"

Flemild was not very sorry to be saved the solution of Derette's difficult problem. She turned to the youth of some fifteen years, who had hailed her from the corner of Castle Street.

"Where you should have gone instead, Haimet—with the budget for water. Do go with me now."

"Where on earth are you going—to Osney?"

"No, stupid boy: to Plato's Well."

"I'm not going there. I don't mind Saint Maudlin's, if you like."

"We are out of the way to Saint Maudlin's, or else I shouldn't have minded—"

"No, my lady, I rather think you wouldn't have minded the chance of a dance in Horsemonger Street. However, I'm not going to Plato's Well. If you go with me, you go to Saint Maudlin's; and if you don't, you may find your way back by yourselves, that's all."

And laying his hands on the budget, Haimet transferred it from his sister's keeping to his own.

Plato's Well stood in Stockwell Street, on the further side of the Castle, and on the south of Gloucester Hall, now Worcester College. Fortified by her brother's presence, Flemild turned after him, and they went up Castle Street, and along North Bayly Street into Bedford Lane, now the northern part of New Inn Hall Street. When they reached the North Gate, they had to wait to go out, for it was just then blocked by a drove of cattle, each of which had to pay the municipal tax of a halfpenny, and they were followed by a cart of sea-fish, which paid fourpence. The gate being clear, they passed through it, Flemild casting rather longing looks down Horsemonger Street (the modern Broad Street), where a bevy of young girls were dancing, while their elders sat at their doors and looked on; but she did not attempt to join them. A little further, just past the Church of Saint Mary Magdalen, they came to a small gothic building over a well. Here, for this was Saint Maudlin's Well, Haimet drew the water, and they set forth on the return journey.

"Want to go after those damsels?" inquired the youth, with a nod in the direction of the dancers, as they passed the end of the street.

"N-o," said Flemild. "Mother bade me haste back. Beside, they won't be out many minutes longer. It isn't worth while."

"Like a woman," retorted Haimet with a satirical grin; "the real reason always comes last."

"What do you know about it?" answered his sister, not ill-humouredly, as they paused again at the North Gate. "O Haimet, what are those?"

A small company of about thirty—men, women, and a few children—were coming slowly down Horsemonger Street. They were attired in rough short tunics, warm sheepskin cloaks, heavy boots which had seen hard service, and felt hats or woollen hoods. Each man carried a long staff, and all looked as though they were ending a wearisome journey. Their faces had a foreign aspect, and most of the men wore beards,—not a very common sight in England at that date, especially with the upper classes. And these men were no serfs, as was shown by the respectability of their appearance, and the absence of the brazen neck-collar which marked the slave.

The man who walked first of the little company, and had a look of intelligence and power, addressed himself to the porter at the gate in excellent French—almost too excellent for comprehension. For though French was at that date the Court tongue in England, as now in Belgium, it was Norman French, scarcely intelligible to a Parisian, and still less so to a Provençal. The porter understood only the general scope of the query—that the speaker wished to know if he and his companions might find lodging in the city.

"Go in," said he bluntly. "As to lodgings, the saints know where you will get them. There are dog-holes somewhere, I dare say."

The leader turned, and said a few words to his friends in an unknown tongue, when they at once followed him through the gate. As he passed close by the girls, they noticed that a book hung down from his girdle—a very rare sight to their eyes. While they were watching the foreigners defile past them, the leader stopped and turned to Haimet, who was a little in advance of his sisters.

"My master," he said, "would you for the love of God tell us strangers where we can find lodging? We seek any honest shelter, and ask no delicate fare. We would offend no man, and would gladly help with any household work."

Haimet hesitated, and gnawed his under lip in doubtful fashion. Flemild pressed forward.

"Master," she said, "if in truth you are content with plain fare and lodging, I think my mother would be willing to give room to one or two of the women among you, if they would pay her by aid in household work: and methinks our next neighbour would maybe do as much. Thinkest thou not so, Haimet?—Will you follow us and see?"

"Most gladly, maiden," was the answer.

"My word, Flemild, you are in for it!" whispered Haimet. "Mother will be right grateful to you for bringing a whole army of strangers upon her, who may be witches for all you know."

"Mother will be glad enough of a woman's arms to help her, and let her rest her own," replied Flemild decidedly; "and I am sure they look quite respectable."

"Well, look out for storms!" said Haimet.

Flemild, who had acted on an impulse of compassionate interest, was herself a little doubtful how her action would be received at home, though she did not choose to confess it. They passed down North Gate Street (now the Corn-market), and crossing High Street, went a few yards further before they readied their own street. On their right hand stood the cooks' shops, and afterwards the vintners', while all along on their left ran the dreaded Jewry, which reached from High Street to what is *now* the chief entrance of Christ Church. The fletchers' and cutlers' stalls stood along this side of the street. Eastwards the Jewry stretched to Oriel Street, and on the south came very near the Cathedral Church of Saint

Frideswide. The (now destroyed) Church of Saint Edward stood in the midst of it.

As our friends turned into their own street, they passed a girl of some seventeen years of age—a very handsome girl, with raven hair and dark brilliant eyes.

She smiled at Derette as she passed, and the child returned the silent salutation, taking care to turn her head so that her sister should not see her. A moment later they came to their own door, over which hung a panel painted with a doubtful object, which charity might accept as the walnut tree for which it was intended. Just as this point was reached, their mother came to the door, carrying a tin basin, from which she threw some dirty water where every body then threw it, into the gutter.

“Saint Benedict be merciful to us!” she cried, nearly dropping the basin. “What on earth is all this ado? And the children here in the midst of it! Holy Virgin, help us! There is nothing but trouble for a poor woman in this world. And me as good as a widow, and worse, too. Haimet! Flemild! whatever are you about?”

“Mother,” said Flemild in politic wise, “I have brought you some help. These good women here seek lodging for the night—any decent kind will serve them—and they offer to pay for it in work. It will be such a rest for you, Mother, if you will take in one or two; and don’t you think Franna would do the same, and old Turguia be glad of the chance?”

Isel stood with the basin in her hand, and a look half vexed, half amused, upon her face.

“Well! what is to be will be,” she said at last. “I suppose you’ve arranged it all. It’ll be grand rest to have every thing smashed in the house. Come in, friends, as many of you as like. Those that can’t find straw to lie on can sit on a budget. Blessed saints, the shiftlessness of girls!”

And with a tone of voice which seemed to be the deeper depth below despair itself, Isel led the way into the house.

Derette had fallen a little back, entranced by a sight which always attracted her. She loved any thing that she could pet, whether a baby or a kitten; and had once, to the horror of her mother’s housekeeping soul, been discovered offering friendly advances to a whole family of mice. In the arms of the woman who immediately followed the leader, lay what seemed to Derette’s eyes a particularly fascinating baby. She now edged her way to her mother’s side, with an imploring whisper of “There’s a baby, Mother!”

“There’s three, child. I counted them,” was the grim reply.

“But, Mother, there’s one particular baby—”

“Then you’d better go and fetch it, before you lose it,” said Isel in the same tone.

Derette, who took the suggestion literally, ran out, and with many smiles and encouraging nods, led in the baby and its mother, with a young girl of about eighteen years, who came after them, and seemed to belong to them.

“I suppose I shall have to go with you, at any rate through this street,” said Haimet, returning after he had set down the bucket. “Our folks here won’t understand much of that lingo of yours. Come along.”

The tone was less rough than the words—it usually was with Haimet,—and the little company followed him down the street, very ready to accept the least attempt at kindness.

Isel and Flemild were somewhat dismayed to discover that their chosen guests could not understand a word they said, and were quite as unintelligible to them. Derette’s mute offer to hold the baby was quickly comprehended; and when Isel, taking the woman and girl up the ladder, showed them a heap of clean straw, on which two thick rough rugs lay folded, they quite understood that their sleeping-place for the night was to be there. Isel led the way down again, placed a bowl of apples before the girl, laid a knife beside it, and beginning to pare one of the apples, soon made known to her what she required. In a similar manner she seated the woman in the chimney-corner, and put into her hands a petticoat which she was making for Derette. Both the strangers smiled and nodded, and went to work with a will, while Isel set on some of the fresh water just brought, and began to prepare supper.

“Well, this is a queer fix as ever I saw!” muttered Isel, as she cleaned her fish ready for boiling. “It’s true enough what my grandmother used to say—you never know, when you first open your eyes of a morning, what they’ll light on afore you shut them at night. If one could talk to these outlandish folks, there’d be more sense in it. Flemild, I wonder if they’ve come across your father.”

“O Mother, couldn’t we ask them?”

“How, child? If I say, ‘Have you seen aught of an Englishman called Manning Brown?’ as like as not they’ll think I’m saying, ‘Come and eat this pie.’”

Flemild laughed. “That first man talks,” she said.

“Ay, and he’s gone with the lot. Just my luck!—always was. My father was sure to be killed in the wars, and my husband was safe to take it into his head to go and fight the Saracens, instead of stopping at home like a decent fellow to help his wife and bring up his children the way they should go. Well!—it can’t be helped, I suppose.”

“Why did Father go to fight the Saracens?” demanded Derette, looking up from the baby.

“Don’t you know, Derette? It is to rescue our Lord’s sepulchre,” said Flemild.

“Does He want it?” replied Derette.

Flemild did not know how to answer. “It is a holy place, and ought not to be left in the hands of wicked people.”

“Are Saracens wicked people?”

"Yes, of course—as bad as Jews. They are a sort of Jews, I believe; at any rate, they worship idols, and weave wicked spells." (Note 3.)

"Is all the world full of wicked people?"

"Pretty nigh, child!" said her mother, with a sigh. "The saints know that well enough."

"I wonder if the saints do know," answered Derette meditatively, rocking the baby in her arms. "I should have thought they'd come and mend things, if they did. Why don't they, Mother?"

"Bless you, child! The saints know their own business best. Come here and watch this pan whilst I make the sauce."

The supper was ready, and was just about to be dished up, when Haimet entered, accompanied by the leader of the foreigners, to the evident delight of the guests.

"Only just in time," murmured Isel. "However, it is as well you've brought somebody to speak to. Where's all the rest of them folks?"

"Got them all housed at last," said Haimet, flinging his hat into a corner. "Most in the town granary, but several down this street. Old Turguia took two women, and Franna a man and wife: and what think you?—if old Benefei did not come forth and offer to take in some."

"Did they go with him?"

"As easy in their minds, so far as looks went, as if it had been my Lord himself. Didn't seem to care half a straw."

"Sweet Saint Frideswide! I do hope they aren't witches themselves," whispered Isel in some perturbation.

To open one's house for the reception of passing strangers was not an unusual thing in that day; but the danger of befriending—and yet more of offending—those who were in league with the Evil One, was an ever-present fear to the minds of men and women in the twelfth century.

The leader overheard the whisper.

"Good friends," he said, addressing Isel, "suffer me to set your minds at rest with a word of explanation. We are strangers, mostly of Teutonic race, that have come over to this land on a mission of good and mercy. Indeed we are not witches, Jews, Saracens, nor any evil thing: only poor harmless peasants that will work for our bread and molest no man, if we may be suffered to abide in your good country for this purpose. This is my wife—" he laid his hand on the shoulder of the baby's mother—"her name is Agnes, and she will soon learn your tongue. This is my young sister, whose name is Ermine; and my infant son is called Rudolph. Mine own name is Gerhardt, at your service. I am a weaver by trade, and shall be pleased to exercise my craft in your behalf, thus to return the kindness you have shown us."

"Well, I want some new clothes ill enough, the saints know," said Isel in answer; "and if you behave decent, and work well, and that, I don't say as I might be altogether sorry for having taken you in. It's right, I suppose, to help folks in trouble—though it's little enough help I ever get that way, saints knows!—and I hope them that's above 'll bear it in mind when things come to be reckoned up like."

That was Isel's religion. It is the practical religion of a sadly large number of people in this professedly Christian land.

Agnes turned and spoke a few words in a low voice to her husband, who smiled in answer.

"My wife wishes me to thank you," he said, "in her name and that of my sister, for your goodness in taking us strangers so generously into your home. She says that she can work hard, and will gladly do so, if, until she can speak your tongue, you will call her attention, and do for a moment what you wish her to do. Ermine says the same."

"Well, that's fair-spoken enough, I can't deny," responded Isel; "and I'm not like to say I shan't be glad of a rest. There's nought but hard work in this world, without it's hard words: and which is the uglier of them I can't say. It'll be done one of these days, I reckon."

"And then, friend?" asked Gerhardt quietly.

"Well, if you know the answer to that, you know more than I do," said Isel, dishing up her salt fish. "Dear saints, where ever is that boy Romund? Draw up the form, Haimet, and let us have our supper. Say grace, boy."

Haimet obeyed, by the short and easy process of making a large cross over the table, and muttering a few unintelligible words, which should have been a Latin formula. The first surprise received from the foreign guests came now. Instead of sitting down to supper, the trio knelt and prayed in silence for some minutes, ere they rose and joined their hosts at the table. Then Gerhardt spoke aloud.

"God, who blessed the five barley loaves and the two fishes before His disciples in the wilderness, bless this table and that which is set on it, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

"Oh, you do say your prayers!" remarked Isel in a tone of satisfaction, as the guests began their supper. "But I confess I'd sooner say mine while the fish isn't getting cold."

"We do, indeed," answered Gerhardt gravely.

"Oh, by the way, tell me if you've ever come across an English traveller called Manning Brown? My husband took the cross, getting on for three years now, and I've never heard another word about him since. Thought you might have chanced on him somewhere or other."

"Whither went he, and which way did he take?"

"Bless you, I don't know! He went to foreign parts: and foreign parts are all one to me."

Gerhardt looked rather amused.

"We come from Almayne," he said; "some of us in past years dwelt in Provence, Toulouse, and Gascony."

"Don't tell me!" said Isel, holding up her hands. "It's all so much gibberish. Have you met with my man?—that's all I want to know."

"I have not," replied Gerhardt. "I will ask my friends, and see if any of them have done so."

Supper over, a second surprise followed. Again Gerhardt offered his special blessing—"God, who has given us bodily food, grant us His spiritual life; and may God be with us, and we always with Him!" Then they once more knelt and silently prayed. Gerhardt drew his wife and sister into a corner of the house, and opening his book, read a short portion, after which they engaged in low-toned conversation.

Derette, with the baby in her arms, had drawn near the group. She was not at all bashful.

"I wish I could understand you," she said. "What are you talking about?"

Gerhardt lifted his cap before answering.

"About our blessed Lord Christ, my maiden," he said.

Derette nodded, with an air of satisfaction at the wide extent of her knowledge. "I know. He's holy Mary's Son."

"Ay, and He is our Saviour," added Flemild.

"Is He thy Saviour, little one?" asked Gerhardt.

"I don't know what you mean," was the answer.

"O Derette! you know well enough that our Lord is called the Saviour!" corrected her sister in rather a shocked tone.

"I know that, but I don't know what it means," persisted the child sturdily.

"Come, be quiet!" said her mother. "I never did see such a child for wanting to get to the bottom of things.—Well, Romund! Folks that want supper should come in time for it. All's done and put by now."

"I have had my supper at the Lodge," responded a tall young man of twenty-two, who had just entered. "Who are those people?"

His mother gave the required explanation. Romund looked rather doubtfully at the guests. Gerhardt, seeing that this was the master of the house, at least under present circumstances, rose, and respectfully raising his cap, apologised for their presence.

"What can you do?" inquired Romund shortly.

"My trade is weaving," replied Gerhardt, "but I can stack wood or cut it, put up shelves, milk cows, or attend to a garden. I shall be glad to do any thing in my power."

"You may nail up the vine over the back door," said Romund, "and I dare say my mother can find you some shelves and hooks to put up. The women can cook and sew. You may stay for a few days, at any rate."

Gerhardt expressed his thanks, and Romund, disappearing outside the back door, returned with some pieces of wood and tools, which he laid down on the form. He was trying to carve a wooden box with a pattern of oak leaves, but he had not progressed far, and his attempts were not of the first order. Haimet noticed Gerhardt's interested glance cast on his brother's work.

"Is that any thing in your line?" he asked with a smile.

"I have done a little in that way," replied Gerhardt modestly. "May I examine it?" he asked of Romund.

The young carver nodded, and Gerhardt took up the box.

"This is an easy pattern," he said.

"Easy, do you call it?" replied Romund. "It is the hardest I have done yet. Those little round inside bits are so difficult to manage."

"May I try?" asked Gerhardt.

It was not very willingly that Romund gave permission, for he almost expected the spoiling of his work: but the carving-tool had not made more than a few cuts in the German's fingers, before Romund saw that his guest was a master in the art. The work so laborious and difficult to him seemed to do itself when Gerhardt took hold of it.

"Why, you are a first-class hand at it!" he cried.

Gerhardt smiled. "I have done the like before, in my own country," he said.

"Will you teach me your way of working?" asked Romund eagerly. "I never had any body to teach me. I should be as

glad as could be to learn of one that really knew."

"Gladly," said Gerhardt. "It will give me pleasure to do any thing for the friends who have been so kind to me."

"Derette, it is your bedtime," came from the other corner—not by any means to Derette's gratification. "Give the baby to its mother, and be off."

Very unwillingly Derette obeyed: but Gerhardt, looking up, requested Isel's permission for his wife and sister to retire with the child. They had had a long journey that day, and were quite worn out. Isel readily assented, and Derette with great satisfaction saw them accompany her up the ladder.

The houses of the common people at that time were extremely poor. This family were small gentlefolks after a fashion, and looked down upon the tradesmen by whom they were surrounded as greatly their inferiors: yet they dwelt in two rooms, one above the other, with a ladder as the only means of communication. Their best bed, on which Isel and Flemild slept, was a rough wooden box filled with straw, on the top of which were a bed and a mattress, covered by coarse quilts and a rug of rabbit-skin. Derette and the boys lay on sacks filled with chaff, with woollen rugs over them.

The baby was already asleep, and Agnes laid it gently on one of the woollen rugs, while she and Ermine, to Derette's amazement, knelt and prayed for some time. Derette herself took scarcely five minutes to her prayers. Why should she require more, when her notion of prayer was not to make request for what she wanted to One who could give it to her, but to gabble over one Creed, six Paternosters, and the doxology, with as much rapidity as she could persuade her lips to utter the words? Then, in another five minutes, after a few rapid motions, Derette drew the woollen rug over her, and very quickly knew nothing more, for that night at least.

The city of Oxford, as then inhabited, was considerably smaller than it is now. The walls ran, roughly speaking, on the north, from the Castle to Holywell Street, on the east a little lower than the end of Merton Street, thence on the south to the other side of the Castle. Beyond the walls the houses extended northwards somewhat further than to Beaumont Street, and southwards about half-way to Friar Bacon's Tower. The oldest church in the city is Saint Peter's in the East, which was originally built in the reign of Alfred; the University sermons used to be delivered in the stone pulpit of this church.

There was a royal palace in Oxford, built by Henry First, who styled it *le Beau Mont*; it stood in Stockwell Street, nearly on the site of the present workhouse. It had not been visited by royalty since 1157, when a baby was born in it, destined to become a mighty man of valour, and to be known to all ages as King Richard Coeur-de-Lion. In 1317 King Edward Second bestowed it on the White Friars, and all that now remains of it is a small portion of the wall built into the workhouse.

The really great man of the city was the Earl of Oxford, at that time Aubrey de Vere, the first holder of the title. He had been married to a lady who was a near relative of King Stephen, but his second and present Countess, though of good family, came from a lower grade.

Modern ideas of a castle are often inaccurate. It was not always a single fortified mansion, but consisted quite as frequently of an embattled wall surrounding several houses, and usually including a church. The Castle of Oxford was of the latter type, the Church of Saint George being on its western side. The keep of a castle was occupied by the garrison, though it generally contained two or three special chambers for the use of the owner, should necessity oblige him and his family to take refuge there in a last extremity. The entrance was dexterously contrived, particularly when the fortress consisted of a single house, to present as much difficulty as possible to a besieger. It was always at some height in the wall, and was reached by a winding, or rather rambling, stairway leading from the drawbridge, and often running round a considerable part of the wall. One or more gates in the course of this stair could be closed at pleasure. A large and imposing portal admitted the visitor to a small tower occupied by the guards, through which the real entrance was approached. This stood in the thickness of the outer wall, and was protected by another pair of gates and a portcullis, just inside which was the porter's lodge. On the ground-floor the soldiers were lodged; on the midmost were the state and family apartments, while the uppermost accommodated the household servants and attendants. A special tower was usually reserved for the ladies of the family, and was often accompanied by a tiny garden. In the partition wall a well was dug, which could be reached on every floor; and below the vestibule was a dungeon. The great banqueting-hall was the general sitting-room to which every one in the castle had access; and here it was common for family, servants, and guard to take together their two principal meals—dinner at nine a.m., supper at four or five o'clock. The only distinction observed was that the board and trestles for the family and guests were set up on the *daïs*, for the household and garrison below. The tables were arranged in the form of a horse-shoe, the diners sitting on the outer or larger side, while the servants waited on the inner. The ladies had, beside this, their own private sitting-room, always attached to the bedchamber, and known as the "*bower*," to which strangers were rarely admitted. Here they sat and sang, gossiped, and worked their endless embroidery. The days were scarcely yet over when English needlework bore the palm in Europe and even in the East, while the first illuminators were the monks of Ireland. Ladies were the spinners, weavers, surgeons, and readers of the day; they were great at interpreting dreams, and dearly loved flowers. The gentlemen looked upon reading as an occupation quite as effeminate as sewing, war and hunting being the two main employments of the lords of creation, and gambling the chief amusement. Priests and monks were the exceptions to this rule, until Henry First introduced a taste for somewhat more liberal education. Even more respectful to letters was his grandson Henry Second, who had a fancy for resembling his grandfather in every thing; yet he allowed the education of his sons to be thoroughly neglected.

The popular idea that the University of Oxford is older than King Alfred is scarcely borne out by modern research. That there was some kind of school there in Alfred's day is certain: but nothing like a university arose before the time of Henry First, and the impetus which founded it came from outside. A Frenchman with a Scotch education, and a Jewish Rabbi, are the two men to whom more than any others must be traced the existence of the University of Oxford.

Theodore d'Etampes, a secular priest, and apparently a chaplain of Queen Margaret of Scotland, arrived at Oxford about the year 1116, where he taught classes of scholars from sixty to a hundred in number. But every thing which we call science came there with the Jews, who settled under the shadow of Saint Frideswide shortly after the Conquest. Hebrew, astronomy, astrology, geometry, and mathematics, were taught by them, at their hostels of Lombard Hall, Moses Hall, and Jacob Hall; while law, theology, and the "*humanities*," engaged the attention of the Christian lecturers. Cardinal Pullus, Robert de Cricklade, and the Lombard jurist Vacario, each in his turn made Oxford famous, until King Stephen closed the mouth of "*the Master*" of civil law, and burned at once the law-books and the Jews. Henry Second revived and protected the schools, in the churchyard outside the west door of Saint Mary's Church; the scribes, binders, illuminators, and parchmenters, occupying Schools Street, which ran thence towards the city wall.

The special glory of Oxford, at that time, was not the University, but the shrine of Saint Frideswide. This had existed

from the eighth century, when the royal maiden whom it celebrated, after declining to fulfil a contract of matrimony which her father had made for her (as she was much too holy to be married), had added insult to injury by miraculously inflicting blindness on her disappointed lover when he attempted to pursue her. She had, however, the grace to restore his sight on due apologies being made. Becoming Prioress of the convent which she founded, she died therein on October 14th, 740, which day was afterwards held as a gaudy day. Possibly because her indignant lover was a king, it was held ominous for any monarch to enter the Chapel of Saint Frideswide in her convent church. King John, who was as superstitious on some points as he was profane on others, never dared to pass the threshold.

His father, being gifted with more common sense, was present at the translation of the saint in 1180. The bones of Saint Frideswide still sleep in Christ Church; but at the Reformation they were purposely mingled with those of Katherine Vermilia, wife of Peter Martyr, and on the grave where the two were interred was carved the inscription, "Here lieth Religion with Superstition." Of course the object of this was to prevent any further worship of the relics, as it would be impossible to discern the bones of the saint from those of the heretic. It is not improbable that both were good women according to their light; but the saint was assuredly far the less enlightened. To common sense, apart from tradition and sentiment, it is difficult to understand why a certain group of persons, who lived in an age when education was very limited, superstition and prejudice very rife, spirituality almost dormant, and a taste for childish follies and useless hair-splitting the commonest things in literature, should be singled out for special reverence as "saints," or under the honourable name of "the Fathers," be deemed higher authorities in respect to the interpretation of Holy Writ than the far more intelligent and often far more spiritual writers of later date. If this curious hero-worship were confined to the generation immediately following the Apostles, it would be a little more intelligible; as such men might possibly have derived some of their ideas from apostolic oral teaching. But to those who know the history of the early ages of Christianity, and are not blinded by prejudice, it is simply amazing that the authority of such men as Basil, Cyprian, and Jerome, should be held to override that of the spiritual giants of the Puritan era, and of those who have deeply and reverently studied Scripture in our own times. To appeal to the views held by such men as decisive of the burning questions of the day, is like referring matters of grave import to the judgment of little children, instead of consulting men of ripe experience. We know what followed a similar blunder on the part of King Rehoboam. Yet how often is it repeated! It would seem that not only is "no prophet accepted in his own country," but also in his own day.

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Note 1. Saint Martin's Well stood in the junction of the "four-ways" from which Carfax takes its name.

Note 2. Penniless Bench, which ran along the east end of Carfax Church, was the original of all "penniless benches." It was not always occupied by idle vagrants, for sometimes the scholars of the University used to congregate there, as well as the Corporation of the city.

Note 3. All Christians believed this at that date.

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## Chapter Two.

### Valiant for the Faith.

"As labourers in Thy vineyard,  
Send us out, Christ, to be,  
Content to bear the burden  
Of weariness for Thee.

"We ask no other wages  
When Thou shalt call us Home,  
But to have shared the travail  
Which makes Thy kingdom come."

It is popularly supposed that surnames only came into existence with the reign of King John. This is not quite an accurate assertion. They existed from the Conquest, but were chiefly personal, and apart from the great feudal families, only began at that date to consolidate and crystallise into hereditary names. So far as common people were concerned, in the reign of Henry the Second, a man's surname was usually restricted to himself. He was named either from one of his parents, as John William-son, or John Fitz-mildred; from his habitation, as John by the Brook; from his calling, as John the Tanner; from some peculiarity in his costume, as John Whitehood,—in his person, as John Fairhair,—in his mind, as John Lovegood,—in his tastes, as John Milk-sop,—or in his habits, as John Drinkdregs. If he removed from one place to another, he was likely to change his name, and to become known, say at Winchester, as John de Nottingham; or if his father were a priest who was a well-known person, he would not improbably be styled John Fiz-al-Prester. (Note 1.) It will readily be seen that the majority of these names were not likely to descend to a second generation. The son of John William-son would be Henry John-son, or Henry Alice-son; he might or might not retain the personal name, or the trade-name; but the place-name he probably would inherit. This explains the reason why so large a majority of our modern surnames are place-names, whether in respect of a town, as Nottingham, Debenham, Brentwood: or of a country locality, as Brook, Lane, Hill, etcetera. Now and then a series of Johns in regular descent would fix the name of Johnson on the family; or the son and grandson pursuing the same calling as the father, would turn the line into Tanners. All surnames have arisen in such a manner.

Our friends in Kepeharme Lane knew nothing of surnames otherwise than personal, apart from the great territorial families of Norman immigration, who brought their place-names with them. Manning Brown was so termed from his complexion; his elder son, not being specially remarkable, was known merely as Romund Fitz-Manning; but the younger, in his boyhood of a somewhat impetuous temper, had conferred on him the epithet of Haimet Escorceueille, or Burntown. The elder brother of Manning was dubbed Gilbert Cuntrevent, or Against-the-Wind; and his two sons, of whom one was the head porter, and another a watchman, at the Castle, were called Osbert le Porter and Stephen Esueillechien, or Watchdog,—the last term evidently a rendering of English into *dog-French*. Our forefathers were apt hands at giving nicknames. Their epithets were always direct and graphic, sometimes highly satirical, some very unpleasant, and some very picturesque. Isel, who was recognised as a woman of a complaining spirit, was commonly spoken of as Isel the Sweet; while her next neighbour, who lorded it over a very meek husband, received the pungent appellation of Franna Gillemichel. (Note 2.)

The day after the arrival of the Germans, the porter's wife came down to see her kindred.

"What, you've got some of those queer folks here?" she said in a loud whisper to Isel, though Gerhardt was not present, and his wife and sister could not understand a word she spoke.



"Ay, they seem decentish folks," was the reply, as Isel washed her eel-like lampreys for a pie—the fish which had, according to tradition, proved the death of Henry the First.

"Oh, do they so? You mind what you are after. Osbert says he makes no account of them. He believes they're Jews, if not worse."

"Couldn't be worse," said Isel sententiously. "Nothing of the sort, Anania. They say their prayers oftener than we do."

"Ay, but what to? Just tell me that. Old Turguia has some in her house, and she says they take never a bit of notice of our Lady nor Saint Helen, that she has upstairs and down; they just kneel down and fall a-praying anywhere. What sort of work do you call that?"

"I don't know as I wish to call it anything in particular, without you're very anxious," replied Isel.

"But I am anxious about it, Aunt. These folks are in your house, and if they are witches and such like, it's you and the girls who will suffer."

"Well, do you think it's much matter?" asked Isel, putting aside the lampreys, and taking up a bushel basket of Kentish pearlymains. "If our Lady could hear me in one corner, I reckon she could hear me in another."

"But to turn their backs on them!" remonstrated Anania.

"Well, I turn mine on her, when I'm at work, many a time of a day."

"Work—ay. But not when you're at prayer, I suppose?"

"Oh, it'll be all right at last, I hope," said Isel a little uneasily.

"Hope's poor fare, Aunt. But I tell you, these folks are after no good. Why, only think! five of them got taken in by those rascals of Jews—three in Benefei's house, and two at Jurnet's. *They'd* never have taken them in, depend on it, if they hadn't known they weren't so much better than they should be."

Agnes and Ermine understood none of these words, though they saw readily enough that the looks Anania cast upon them were not friendly. But Derette spoke up for her friends.

"They're much better than you, Cousin Anania!" said that downright young woman.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," replied Anania sharply.

"I'd rather have a true one," was the child's answer; "and I'm not sure they always go together."

"Osbert says," pursued Anania, ignoring Derette, "that he expects there'll be a stir when my Lord comes to hear of them. Much if they don't get turned out, bag and baggage. Serve 'em right, too!"

"They haven't got any bags," said literal Derette. "I don't think they've any of them any clothes but what they wear. Only Gerard's got a book."

"A book! What is it about?" cried Anania. "Is he a priest?—surely not!"

Only a priest or monk, in her eyes, could have any business with a book.

"Oh no, he's no priest; he's a weaver."

"Then what on earth is he doing with a book? You get hold of it, Aunt! I'll warrant you it's some sort of wickedness—safe to be! Black spells to turn you all into ugly toads, or some such naughty stuff—take my word for it!"

"I'd rather not, Cousin Anania, for you haven't seen it, so your word isn't much good," said Derette calmly.

"It's not like to do us much good when we do see it," observed Isel, "because it will be in their own language, no doubt."

"But if it's a witch-book, it's like to have horoscopes and all manner of things in it!" said Anania, returning to the charge.

"Then it is not, for I have seen it," said Flemild. "It is in a foreign language; but all in it beside words is only red lines ruled round the pages."

"He read me a piece out of it," added Derette; "and it was a pretty story about our Lady, and how she carried our Lord away when He was a baby, that the wicked King should not get hold of Him. It wasn't bad at all, Cousin Anania. You are bad, to say such things when you don't know they are true."

"Hush, child!" said her mother.

"I'll hush," responded Derette, marching off to Agnes and the baby: "but it's true, for all that."

"That girl wants teaching manners," commented Anania. "I really think it my duty, Aunt, to tell you that nearly every body that knows you is talking of that child's forward manners and want of respect for her betters. You don't hear such remarks made, but I do. She will be insufferable if the thing is not stopped."

"Oh, well, stop it, then!" said Isel wearily, "only leave me in peace. I'm just that tired!—"

"I beg your pardon, Aunt! Derette is not my child. I have no right to correct her. If I had—"

Anania left it to be understood that the consequences would not be to her little cousin's taste.

"She'll get along well enough, I dare say. I haven't time to bother with her," said Isel.

"She will just be a bye-word in the whole town, Aunt. You don't know how people talk. I've heard it said that you are too idle to take any pains with the child."

"Idle?—me!" cried poor Isel. "I'm up long before you, and I don't get a wink of sleep till the whole town's been snoring for an hour or more: and every minute of the time as full as it can be crammed. I'll tell you what, Anania, I don't believe you know what work means. If you'd just change with me for a week, you'd have an idea or two more in your head at the end of it."

"I see, Aunt, you are vexed at what I told you," replied Anania in a tone of superior virtue. "I am thankful to say I have not my house in the mess yours is, and my children are decently behaved. I thought it only kind to let you know the remarks that are being made: but of course, if you prefer to be left ignorant, I don't need to stay. Good morrow! Pray don't disturb yourself, Flemild—I can let myself out, as you are all so busy. You'll be sorry some day you did not take advice. But I never obtrude my advice; if people don't want it, I shall not trouble them with it. It's a pity, that's all."

"Oh deary, deary!" cried poor Isel, as Anania sailed away with her head held rather higher than usual. "Why ever did she come to plague me, when I've got my hands as full already!—And what on earth does she mean, calling me names, and Derette too? The child's good enough—only a bit thoughtless, as children always are. I do wonder why folks can't let a body alone!"

For three days the Germans rested peacefully in their new quarters. At the end of that time, Gerhardt called on all his little company, and desired them to meet him early on the following morning on a piece of vacant ground, a few miles from the city. They met as agreed, eighteen men and eleven women, of all ages, from young Conrad whose moustache was little more than down, to old Berthold who carried the weight of threescore and fifteen years.

"My friends," said Gerhardt, "let us speak to our God, before we say anything to each other."

All knelt, and Gerhardt poured forth a fervent prayer that God would be with them and aid them in the work which they had undertaken; that He would supply them with bread to eat, and raiment to put on; that He would keep the door of their lips, that they should speak neither guile, discourtesy, nor error, yet open their mouths that with all boldness they might preach His Word; that none of them might be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, nor seek to hide the offence of the cross for the sake of pleasing men. A whole-hearted Amen was the response from the group around him.

They rose, and Gerhardt repeated by heart three Psalms—the fifteenth, the forty-sixth, and the ninetieth—not in Latin, but in sonorous German, many of his compatriots taking up the words and repeating them with him, in a style which made it plain that they were very familiar. Then Gerhardt spoke.

"I will but shortly remind you, my friends," he said, "of the reason for which we are here. Hundreds of years ago, it pleased God to send to us Germans a good English pastor, whose name was Winfrid, when we were poor heathens, serving stocks and stones. He came with intent to deliver us from that gloomy bondage, and to convert us to the faith of Christ. God so blessed his efforts that as their consequence, Germany is Christian at this day; and he, leaving his English name of Winfrid, the Peace-Conqueror (though a truer name he could never have had), is known among us as Boniface, the doer of good deeds. Since his day, four hundred years have passed, and the Church of Christ throughout the world has woefully departed from the pure faith. We are come out, like the Apostles, a little company,—like them, poor and unlearned,—but rich in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord; we are come to tread in their steps, to do the work they did, and to call the world back to the pure truth of the earliest days of Christendom. And we come here, because it is here that our first duty is due. We come to give back to England the precious jewel of the true faith which she gave to us four hundred years ago. Let every one of us clearly understand for what we are to be ready. We tread in our Master's steps, and our Master was not flattered and complimented by the world. He came bringing salvation, and the world would none of it, nor of Him. So, if we find the world hates us, let us be neither surprised nor afraid, but remember that it hated Him, and that as He was, so are we in this world. Let us be prepared to go with Him, if need be, both into prison and to death. If we suffer with Him, we shall reign. Brethren, if we seek to reign, we must make account first to suffer."

"We are ready!" cried at least a dozen voices.

"Will ye who are foremost now, be the foremost in that day?" asked Gerhardt, looking round upon them with a rather compassionate smile. "God grant it may be so! Now, my friends, I must further remind you—not that ye know it not, but that ye may bear its importance in mind—that beyond those beliefs common to all Christians, our faith confesses three great doctrines which ye must teach.

"First, that Holy Scripture alone containeth all things necessary to salvation; and nothing is to be taught as an article of faith but what God has revealed.

"Secondly, the Church of God consists of all who hear and understand the Word of God. All the saved were elect of God before the foundation of the world; all who are justified by Christ go into life eternal. Therefore it follows that there is no Purgatory, and all masses are damnable, especially those for the dead. And whosoever upholds free will—namely, man's capacity to turn to God as and when he will—denies predestination and the grace of God. Man is by nature utterly depraved; and all the evil that he doth proceeds from his own depravity.

"Thirdly, we acknowledge one God and one Mediator—the Lord Jesus Christ; and reject the invocation of saints or angels. We own two Sacraments—baptism and the Supper of the Lord; but all Church observances not ordained by Christ and the Apostles, we reject as idle superstitions and vain traditions of men. (Note 3.)

"This is our faith. Brethren, do ye all stand banded together in this faith?"

Up went every right arm, some quietly, some impetuously.

"Furthermore," continued the leader, "as to conduct. It is incumbent upon us to honour all secular powers, with subjection, obedience, promptitude, and payment of tribute. On the Sabbath, cease ye from all worldly labours, abstain

from sin, do good works, and pay your devotions to God. Remember, to pray much is to be fervent in prayer, not to use many words nor much time. Be orderly in all things; in attire, so far as lies in your power, avoid all appearance of either pride or squalor. We enter no trade, that we may be free from falsehood: we live by the labour of our hands, and are content with necessaries, not seeking to amass wealth. Be ye all chaste, temperate, sober, meek: owe no man anything; give no reason for complaint. Avoid taverns and dancing, as occasions of evil. The women among you I charge to be modest in manners and apparel, to keep themselves free from foolish jesting and levity of the world, especially in respect of falsehood and oaths. Keep your maidens, and see that they wander not; beware of suffering them to deck and adorn themselves. 'We serve the Lord Christ.' 'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong!' Read the Scriptures, serve God in humility, be poor in spirit. Remember that Antichrist is all that opposeth Christ. 'Love not the world, neither the things of the world.' 'Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,' and bear in mind that ye are sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, as under-shepherds to seek for His strayed sheep. Beware that ye glorify not yourselves, but Him.

"Berthold, Arnulph, and Guelph, ye tarry in this city with me, going forth to preach in the surrounding villages, as the Lord shall grant us opportunity. Heinrich, Otho, Conrad, and Magnus, ye go northward to evangelise in like manner. Friedrich, Dietbold, Sighard, and Leopold, ye to the south; Albrecht, Johann, and Hermann, ye to the east; Wilhelm, Philipp, and Ludwig, ye to the west. Every man shall take with him wife and children that hath them. The elder women among us—Cunegonde, Helena, Luitgarde, Elisabeth, and Margarethe—I especially exhort to instruct the young women, as the Apostle bids, and to evangelise in such manner as women may, by modest and quiet talking with other women. Once in the year let us meet here, to compare experiences, resolve difficulties, and to comfort and edify one another in our work. And now I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace. Go ye forth, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, always abounding in the work of the Lord, teaching all to observe whatsoever He has commanded. For lo! He is with us always, even unto the end of the world."

Another fervent prayer followed the address. Then each of the little company came up in turn to Gerhard, who laid his hand upon the head of every one, blessing them in the name of the Lord. As each thus took leave, he set out in the direction which he had been bidden to take, eight accompanied by their wives, and three by children. Then Gerhard, with Agnes and Ermine, turned back into the town; Berthold, with his wife Luitgarde, and his daughter Adelheid, followed; while Arnulph and Guelph, who were young unmarried men, went off to begin their preaching tour in the villages.

The day afterwards, the priest of Saint Aldate's rapped at the door of the Walnut Tree. It was opened by Flemild, who made a low reverence when she saw him. With hand uplifted in blessing, and—"Christ save all here!"—he walked into the house, where Isel received him with an equally respectful courtesy.

"So I hear, my daughter, you have friends come to see you?"

"Well, they aren't friends exactly," said Isel: "leastwise not yet. May be, in time—hope they will."

"Whence come they, then, if they be strangers?"

"Well," replied Isel, who generally began her sentences with that convenient adverb, "to tell truth, Father, it beats me to say. They've come over-sea, from foreign parts; but I can't get them outlandish names round my tongue."

"Do they speak French or English?"

"One of 'em speaks French, after a fashion, but it's a queer fashion. As to English, I haven't tried 'em."

The Reverend Dolfin (he had no surname) considered the question.

"They are Christians, of course?"

"That they are, Father, and good too. Why, they say their prayers several times a day."

The priest did not think that item of evidence so satisfactory as Isel did. But he had not come with any intention of ferreting out doubtful characters or suspicious facts. He was no ardent heretic-hunter, but a quiet, peaceable man, as inoffensive as a priest could be.

"Decent and well-behaved?" he asked.

"As quiet and sensible as any living creature in this street," Isel assured him. "The women are good workers, and none of them's a talker, and that's no small blessing!"

"Truly, thou art right there, my daughter," said the priest, who, knowing nothing about women, was under the impression that they rarely did any thing but talk, and perform a little desultory housework in the intervals between the paragraphs. "So far, good. I trust they will continue equally well-behaved, and will give no scandal to their neighbours."

"I'll go surety for that," answered Isel rather warmly; "more than I will for their neighbours giving them none. Father, I'd give a silver penny you'd take my niece Anania in hand; she'll be the death of me if she goes on. Do give her a good talking-to, and I'll thank you all the days of my life!"

"With what does she go on?" asked the priest, resting both hands on his silver-headed staff.

"Words!" groaned poor Isel. "And they bain't pretty words, Father—not by no manner of means. She's for ever and the day after interfering with every mortal thing one does. And her own house is just right-down slatternly, and her children are coming up any how. If she'd just spend the time a-scouring as she spends a-chattering, her house 'd be the cleanest place in Oxfordshire. But as for the poor children, I'm that sorry! Whatever they do, or don't do, they get a slap for it; and then she turns round on me because I don't treat mine the same. Why, there's nothing spoils children's tempers like everlasting scolding and slapping of 'em. I declare I don't know which to be sorriest for, them that never gets no bringing up at all, or them that's slapped from morning to night."

"Does her husband allow all that?"

"Bless you, Father, he's that easy a man, if she slapped *him*, he'd only laugh and give it back. It's true, when he's right put out he'll take the whip to her; but he'll stand a deal first that he'd better not. Biggest worry I have, she is!"

"Be thankful, my daughter, if thy biggest worry be outside thine own door."

"That I would, Father, if I could keep her outside, but she's always a-coming in."

The priest laughed.

"I will speak to my brother Vincent about her," he said. "You know the Castle is not in my parish."

"Well, I pray you, Father, do tell Father Vincent to give it her strong. She's one o' them that won't do with it weak. It'll just run off her like water on a duck's back. Father, do you think my poor man 'll ever come back?"

The priest grew grave when asked that question.

"I cannot tell, my daughter. Bethink thee, that if he fall in that holy conflict, he is assured of Heaven. How long is it since his departing?"

"It's two years good, Father—going in three: and I'm glad enough he should be sure of Heaven, but saving your presence, I want him here on earth. It's hard work for a lone woman to bring up four children, never name boys, that's as rampageous as young colts, and about as easy to catch. And the younger and sillier they are, the surer they are to think they know better than their own mother."

"That is a standing grievance, daughter," said the priest with a smile, as he rose to take leave. "Well, I am glad to hear so good a report of these strangers. So long as they conduct themselves well, and come to church, and give no offence to any, there can be no harm in your giving them hospitality. But remember that if they give any occasion of scandal, your duty will be to let me know, that I may deal with them. The saints keep you!"

No occasion of scandal required that duty from Isel. Every now and then Gerhardt absented himself—for what purpose she did not know; but he left Agnes and Ermine behind, and they never told the object of his journeys. At home he lived quietly enough, generally following his trade of weaving, but always ready to do any thing required by his hostess. Isel came to congratulate herself highly on the presence of her quiet, kindly, helpful guests. In a house where the whole upper floor formed a single bedchamber, divided only by curtains stretched across, and the whole ground-floor was parlour and kitchen in one, a few inmates more or less, so long as they were pleasant and peaceable, were of small moment. Outwardly, the Germans conducted themselves in no way pointedly different from their English hosts. They indulged in rather longer prayers, but this only increased the respect in which they were held. They went to church like other people; and if they omitted the usual reverences paid to the images, they did it so unobtrusively that it struck and shocked no one.

The Roman Church, in 1160, was yet far from filling the measure of her iniquity. The mass was in Latin, but transubstantiation was only a "pious opinion;" there were invocation of saints and worship of images, prayers for the dead, and holy water; but dispensations and indulgences were uninvented, the Inquisition was unknown, numbers of the clergy were married men, and that organ of tyranny and sin, termed auricular confession, had not yet been set up to grind the consciences and torment the hearts of those who sought to please God according to the light they enjoyed. Without that, it was far harder to persecute; for how could a man be indicted for the belief in his heart, if he chose to keep the door of his lips?

The winter passed quietly away, and Isel was—for her—well pleased with her new departure. The priest, having once satisfied himself that the foreign visitors were nominal Christians, and gave no scandal to their neighbours, ceased to trouble himself about them. Anania continued to make disagreeable remarks at times, but gradually even she became more callous on the question, and nobody else ever said any thing.

"I do wonder if Father Vincent have given her a word or two," said Isel. "She hasn't took much of it, if he have. If she isn't at me for one thing, she's at me for another. If it were to please the saints to make Osbert the Lord King's door-keeper, so as he'd go and live at London or Windsor, I shouldn't wonder if I could get over it!"

"Ah, 'the tongue can no man tame,'" observed Gerhardt with a smile.

"I don't so much object to tongues when they've been in salt," said Isel. "It's fresh I don't like 'em, and with a live temper behind of 'em. They don't agree with me then."

"It is the live temper behind, or rather the evil heart, which is the thing to blame. 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts,' which grow into evil words and deeds. Set the heart right, and the tongue will soon follow."

"I reckon that's a bit above either you or me," replied Isel with a sigh.

"A man's thoughts are his own," interposed Haimet rather warmly. "Nobody has a right to curb them."

"No man can curb them," said Gerhardt, "unless the thinker put a curb on himself. He that can rule his own thoughts is king of himself: he that never attempts it is 'a reed driven with the wind and tossed.'"

"Oh, there you fly too high for me," said Haimet. "If my acts and words are inoffensive, I have a right to my thoughts."

"Has any man a right to evil thoughts?" asked Gerhardt.

"What, you are one of those precise folks who make conscience of their thoughts? I call that all stuff and nonsense," replied Haimet, throwing down the hammer he was using.

"If I make no conscience of my thoughts, of what am I to make conscience?" was the answer. "Thought is the seed, act the flower. If you do not wish for the flower, the surest way is not to sow the seed. Sow it, and the flower will blossom, whether you will or no."

"That sort of thing may suit you," said Haimet rather in an irritated tone. "I could never get along, if I had to be always measuring my thoughts with an ell-wand in that fashion."

"Do you prefer the consequences?" asked Gerhardt.

"Consequences!—what consequences?"

"Rather awkward ones, sometimes. Thoughts of hatred, for instance, may issue in murder, and that may lead to your own death. If the thoughts had been curbed in the first instance, the miserable results would have been spared to all the sufferers. And 'no man liveth to himself': it is very seldom that you can bring suffering on one person only. It is almost sure to run over to two or three more. And as the troubles of every one of them will run over to another two or three, like circles in the water, the sorrow keeps ever widening, so that the consequences of one small act or word for evil are incalculable. It takes God to reckon them."

"Eh, don't you, now!" said Isel with a shudder. "Makes me go all creepy like, that does. I shouldn't dare to do a thing all the days of my life, if I looked at every thing that way."

"Friend," said Gerhardt gravely, "these things *are*. It does not destroy them to look away from them. It is not given to us to choose whether we will act, but only how we will act. In some manner, for good or for ill, act we must."

"I declare I won't listen to you, Gerard. I'm going creepy-crawly this minute. Oh deary me! you do make things look just awful."

"Rubbish!" said Haimet, driving a nail into the wall with unnecessary vehemence.

"It is the saying of a wise man, friends," remarked Gerhardt, "that 'he that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.' And with equal wisdom he saith again, 'Be not confident in a plain way.'" (Note 5.)

"But it is all nonsense to say 'we must act,'" resumed Haimet. "We need not act in any way unless we choose. How am I acting if I sit here and do nothing?"

"Unless you are resting after work is done, you are setting an example of idleness or indecision. Not to do, is sometimes to do in a most effectual way. Not to hinder the doing of evil, when it lies in your power, is equivalent to doing it."

Haimet stared at Gerhardt for a moment.

"What a wicked lot of folks you would make us out to be!"

"So we are," said Gerhardt with a quiet smile.

"Oh, I see!—that's how you come by your queer notions of every man's heart being bad. Well, you are consistent, I must admit."

"I come by that notion, because I have seen into my own. I think I have most thoroughly realised my own folly by noting in how many cases, if I were endued with the power of God, I should not do what He does: and in like manner, I most realise my own wickedness by seeing the frequent instances wherein my will raises itself up in opposition to the will of God."

"But how is it, then, that I never see such things in myself?"

"Your eyes are shut, for one thing. Moreover, you set up your own will as the standard to be followed, without seeking to ascertain the will of God. Therefore you do not see the opposition between them."

"Oh, I don't consider myself a saint or an angel. I have done foolish things, of course, and I dare say, some things that were not exactly right. We are all sinners, I suppose, and I am much like other people. But taking one thing with another, I think I am a very decent fellow. I can't worry over my 'depravity,' as you do. I am not depraved. I know several men much worse than I am in every way."

"Is that the ell-wand by which God will measure you? He will not hold you up against those men, but against the burning snow-white light of His own holiness. What will you look like then?"

"Is that the way you are going to be measured, too?"

"I thank God, no. Christ our Lord will be measured for me, and He has fulfilled the whole Law."

"And why not for me?" said Haimet fiercely. "Am I not a baptised Christian, just as much as you?"

"Friend, you will not be asked in that day whether you were a baptised Christian, but whether you were a believing Christian. Sins that are laid on Christ are gone—they exist no longer. But sins that are not so destroyed have to be borne by the sinner himself."

"Well, I call that cowardice," said Haimet, drawing a red herring across the track, "to want to burden somebody else with your sins. Why not have the manliness to bear them yourself?"

"If you are so manly," answered Gerhardt with another of his quiet smiles, "will you oblige me, Haimet, by taking up the Castle, and setting it down on Presthey?"

"What are you talking about now? How could I?"

"Much more easily than you could atone for one sin. What do you call a man who proposes to do the impossible?"

"A fool."

"And what would you call the bondman whose master had generously paid his debt, and who refused to accept that

generosity, but insisted on working it out himself, though the debt was more than he could discharge by the work of a thousand years?"

"Call him what you like," said Haimet, not wishing to go too deeply into the question.

"I will leave you to choose the correct epithet," said Gerhardt, and went on with his carving in silence.

The carving was beginning to bring in what Isel called "a pretty penny." Gerhardt's skill soon became known, and the Countess of Oxford employed him to make coffers, and once sent for him to the Castle to carve wreaths on a set of oak panels. He took the work as it came, and in the intervals, or on the summer evenings, he preached on the village greens in the neighbourhood. His audiences were often small, but his doctrines spread quietly and beneath the surface. Not one came forward to join him openly, but many went away with thoughts that they had never had before. Looked on from the outside, Gerhardt's work seemed of no value, and blessed with no success. Yet it is possible that its inward progress was not little. There may have been silent souls that lived saintly lives in that long past century, who owed their first awakening or their gradual edification to some word of his; it may be that the sturdy resistance of England to Papal aggression in the subsequent century had received its impetus from his unseen hand. Who shall say that he achieved nothing? The world wrote "unsuccessful" upon his work: did God write "blessed"? One thing at least I think he must have written—"Thou hast been faithful in a few things." And while the measure of faithfulness is not that of success, it is that of the ultimate reward, in that Land where many that were first shall be last, and the last first. "They that are with" the Conqueror in the last great battle, are not the successful upon earth, but the "called and chosen and faithful."

"If any man serve Me, let him follow Me,"—and what work ever had less the appearance of success than that which seemed to close on Calvary?

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Note 1. "William, son of the fat priest," occurs on the Pipe Roll for 1176, Unless "Grossus" is to be taken as a Christian name.

Note 2. Servant or slave of Michael. The Scottish *gillie* comes from the same root.

Note 3. These are the tenets of the ancient Waldensian Church, with which, so far as they are known, those of the German mission agreed. (They are exactly those of the Church of England, set forth in her Sixth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Twentieth, Twenty-Second, Twenty-Fifth, and Thirty-First Articles of Religion.) She accepted two of our three Creeds, excluding the Nicene.

Note 4. Ecclesiasticus nineteen 1, and thirty-two 21. The Waldensian Church regarded the Apocrypha as the Church of England does—not as inspired Scripture, but as a good book to be read "for example of life and instruction of manners."

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## Chapter Three.

### The Jewish Maiden's Vow.

"To thine own self be true!  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Shakespeare.

"There's the Mayor sent orders for the streets to be swept clean, and all the mud carted out of the way. You'd best sweep afore your own door, and then maybe you'll have less rate to pay, Aunt Isel."

It was Stephen the Watchdog who looked in over the half-door to give this piece of information.

"What's that for?" asked Isel, stopping in the work of mopping the brick floor.

"The Lady Queen comes through on her way to Woodstock."

"To-day?" said Flemild and Derette together.

"Or to-morrow. A running footman came in an hour ago, to say she was at Abingdon, and bid my Lord hold himself in readiness to meet her at the East Gate. The vintners have had orders to send in two tuns of Gascon and Poitou wine; and Henry the Mason tells me a new cellar and chimney were made last week in the Queen's chamber at Woodstock. Geoffrey the Sumpter was in town yesterday, buying budgets, coffers, and bottles. So if you girls want to see her, you had better make haste and get your work done, and tidy yourselves up, and be at the East Gate by noon or soon after."

"Get their work done! Don't you know better than that, Stephen? A woman's work never is done. It's you lazy loons of men that stop working and take your pleasure when night comes. Work done, indeed!"

"But, Isel, I will finish de work for you. Go you and take your pleasure to see de Queen, meine friend. You have not much de pleasure."

"You're a good soul, Agnes, and it was a fine day for me when I took you in last winter. But as for pleasure, it and me parted company a smart little while ago. Nay, let the maids go; I'll tarry at home. You can go if you will.—Stephen! are you bound elsewhere, or can you come and look after the girls?"

"I can't, Aunt Isel; I'm on duty in the Bayly in half an hour, and when I shall be free again you must ask my Lord or Master Mayor."

"Never mind: the boys are safe to be there. Catch them missing a show! Now, Flemild, child, drop that washing; and leave the gavache (Note 1), Ermine, and get yourselves ready. It's only once in three or four years at most that you're

like to see such a sight. Make haste, girls."

There was little need to tell the girls to make haste. Flemild hastily wrung out the apron she was washing, and pinned it on the line; Ermine drew the thread from her needle—the entire household owned but one of those useful and costly articles—and put it carefully away; while Derette tumbled up the ladder at imminent risk to her limbs, to fling back the lid of the great coffer at the bed-foot, and institute a search, which left every thing in wild confusion, for her sister's best kerchief and her own. Just as the trio were ready to start, Gerhardt came in.

"Saint Frideswide be our aid! wherever are them boys?" demanded Isel of nobody in particular.

"One on the top of the East Gate," said Gerhardt, "and the other playing at quarter-staff in Pary's Mead."

Pary's Mead lay between Holywell Church and the East Gate, on the north of the present Magdalen College.

"Lack-a-daisy! but however are the girls to get down to the gate? I daren't let 'em go by themselves."

The girls looked blank: and two big tears filled Derette's eyes, ready to fall.

"If all you need is an escort, friend, here am I," said Gerhardt; "but why should the girls go alone? I would fain take you and Agnes too."

"Take Agnes and welcome," said Isel with a sigh; "but I'm too old, I reckon, and poor company at best."

A little friendly altercation followed, ended by Gerhardt's decided assertion that Agnes should not go without her hostess.

"But who's to see to Baby?" said Derette dolefully.

"We will lock up the house, and leave Baby with old Turguia," suggested Isel.

"Nay, she tramped off to see the show an hour ago."

"Never mind! I'll stop with Baby," said Derette with heroic self-abnegation.

"Indeed you shall not," said Ermine.

A second war of amiability seemed likely to follow, when a voice said at the door—

"Do you all want to go out? I am not going to the show. Will you trust me with the child?"

Isel turned and stared in amazement at the questioner.

"I would not hurt it," pleaded the Jewish maiden in a tremulous voice. "Do trust me! I know you reckon us bad people; but indeed we are not so black as you think us. My baby brother died last summer; and my aims are so cold and empty since. Let me have a little child in them once more!"

"But—you will want to see the show," responded Isel, rather as an excuse to decline the offered help than for any more considerate reason.

"No—I do not care for the show. I care far more for the child. I have stood at the corner and watched you with him, so often, and have longed so to touch him, if it might be but with one finger. Won't you let me?"

Agnes was looking from the girl to Gerhardt, as if she knew not what to do.

"Will you keep him from harm, and bring him back as soon as we return, if you take him?" asked Gerhardt. "Remember, the God in whom we both believe hears and records your words."

"Let Him do so to me and more also," answered Countess solemnly, "if I bring not the child to you unhurt."

Gerhardt lifted little Rudolph from his mother's arms and placed him in those of the dark-eyed maiden.

"The Lord watch over thee and him!" he said.

"Amen!" And as Countess carried away the baby close pressed to her bosom, they saw her stoop down and kiss it almost passionately.

"Holy Virgin! what have you done, Gerard?" cried Isel in horror. "Don't you know there is poison in a Jew's breath? They'll as sure cast a spell upon that baby as my name's Isel."

"No, I don't," said Gerhardt a little drily. "I only know that some men say so. I have placed my child in the hands of the Lord; and He, not I, has laid it in that maiden's. It may be that this little kindness is a link in the chain of Providence, whereby He designs to bring her soul to Him. Who am I, if so, that I should put my boy or myself athwart His purpose?"

"Well, you're mighty pious, I know," said Isel. "Seems to me you should have been a monk, by rights. However, what's done is done. Let's be going, for there's no time to waste."

They went a little way down Fish Street, passing the Jewish synagogue, which stood about where the northernmost tower of Christ Church is now, turned to the left along Civil School Lane—at the south end of Tom Quad, coming out about Canterbury Gate—pursued their way along Saint John Baptist Street, now Merton Street, and turning again to the left where it ended, skirted the wall till they reached the East Gate. Here a heterogeneous crowd was assembled, about the gate, and on the top were perched a number of adventurous youths, among whom Haimet was descried.

"Anything coming?" Gerhardt called to him.

"Yes, a drove of pigs," Haimet shouted back.

The pigs came grunting in, to be sarcastically greeted by the crowd, who immediately styled the old sow and her progeny by the illustrious names of Queen Eleonore and the royal children. Her Majesty was not very popular, the rather since she lived but little in England, and was known greatly to prefer her native province of Aquitaine. Still, a show was always a show, and the British public is rarely indifferent to it.

The pigs having grunted themselves up Cat Street—running from the east end of Saint Mary's to Broad Street—a further half-hour of waiting ensued, beguiled by rough joking on the part of the crowd. Then Haimet called down to his friends—

"Here comes Prester John, in his robes of estate!"

The next minute, a running footman in the royal livery—red and gold—bearing a long wand decorated at the top with coloured ribbons, sped in at the gate, and up High Street on his way to the Castle. In ten minutes more, a stir was perceptible at the west end of High Street, and down to the gate, on richly caparisoned horses, came the Earl and Countess of Oxford, followed by a brilliant crowd of splendidly-dressed officials. It was evident that the Queen must be close at hand.

All eyes were now fixed on the London Road, up which the royal cavalcade was quickly seen approaching. First marched a division of the guard of honour, followed by the officials of the household, on horseback; then came the Queen in her char, followed by another bearing her ladies. The remainder of the guard brought up the rear.

The char was not much better than a handsomely-painted cart. It had no springs, and travelling in it must have been a trying process. But the horses bore superb silken housings, and the very bits were gilt. (Note 2.) Ten strong men in the royal livery walked, five on each side of the char; and their office, which was to keep it upright in the miry tracks—roads they were not—was by no means a sinecure.

The royal lady, seated on a Gothic chair which made the permanent seat of the char, being fixed to it, was one of the most remarkable women who have ever reigned in England. If a passage of Scripture illustrative of the life and character were to be selected to append to the statue of each of our kings and queens, there would be little difficulty in the choice to be made for Eleonore of Aquitaine. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." She sowed the wind, and she reaped the whirlwind. A youth of the wildest giddiness was succeeded by a middle life of suffering and hardship, and both ended in an old age of desolation.

But when Eleonore rode in that spring noon-day at the East Gate of Oxford, the reaping-time was not yet. The headstrong giddiness was a little toned down, but the terrible retribution had not begun.

The Queen's contemporaries are eloquent as to her wondrous loveliness and her marvellous accomplishments. "Beauty possessed both her mind and body," says one writer who lived in the days of her grandson, while another expatiates on her "*clairs et verds yeux*," and a third on her "exquisite mouth, and the most splendid eyes in the world." Her Majesty was attired with equal stateliness and simplicity, for that was not an era of superb or extravagant dress. A close gown with tight sleeves was surmounted by a pelisse, the sleeves of which were very wide and full, and the fur trimming showed the high rank of the wearer. A long white veil came over her head, and fell around her, kept in its place by a jewelled fillet. The gemmed collar of gold at the neck, and the thick leather gloves (with no partitions for the fingers) heavily embroidered on the back, were also indicative of regal rank.

The Queen's char stopped just within the gate, so that our friends had an excellent view of her. She greeted the Earl and Countess of Oxford with a genial grace, which she well knew how to assume; gave her hand to be kissed to a small selection of the highest officials, and then the char passed on, and the sight was over.

Isel and her friends turned homewards, not waiting for the after portion of the entertainment. There was to be a bull-baiting in the afternoon on Presthey—Christ Church Meadow—and a magnificent bonfire at night in Gloucester Meadows—Jericho; but these enjoyments they left to the boys. There would be plenty of women, however, at the bull-baiting; as many as at a Spanish *corrida*. The idea of its being a cruel pastime, or even of cruelty being at all objectionable or demoralising, with very few exceptions, had not then dawned on the minds of men.

They returned by the meadows outside the city, entering at the South Gate. As they came up Fish Street, they could see Countess on a low seat at her father's door, with little Rudolph on her knee, both parties looking very well content with their position. On their reaching the corner, she rose and came to meet them.

"Here is the baby," she said, smiling rather sadly. "See, I have not done him any harm! And it has done me good. You will let me have him again some day?—some time when you all want to go out, and it will be a convenience to you. Farewell, my pretty bird!"

And she held out the boy to Agnes. Little Rudolph had shown signs of pleasure at the sight of his mother; but it soon appeared that he was not pleased by any means at the prospect of parting with his new friend. Countess had kept him well amused, and he had no inclination to see an abrupt end put to his amusement. He struggled and at last screamed his disapprobation, until it became necessary for Gerhardt to interfere, and show the young gentleman decidedly that he must not always expect to have his own way.

"I t'ank you"—Agnes began to say, in her best English, which was still imperfect, though Ermine spoke it fluently now. But Countess stopped her, rather to her surprise, by a few hurried words in her own tongue.

"Do not thank me," she said, with a flash of the black eyes. "It is I who should thank you."

And running quickly across Fish Street, the Jewish maiden disappeared inside her father's door.

All European nations at that date disliked and despised the hapless sons of Israel: but the little company to whom Gerhardt and Agnes belonged were perhaps a shade less averse to them than others. They were to some extent companions in misfortune, being themselves equally despised and detested by many; and they were much too familiar with the Word of God not to recognise that His blessing still rested on the seed of Abraham His friend, hidden "for a little



moment" by a cloud, but one day to burst into a refulgence of heavenly sunlight. When, therefore, Flemild asked Ermine, as they were laying aside their out-door garb—"Don't you hate those horrid creatures?" it was not surprising that Ermine paused before replying.

"Don't you?" repeated Flemild.

"No," said Ermine, "I do not think I do."

"*Don't* you?" echoed Flemild for the third time, and with emphasis. "Why, Ermine, they crucified our Lord."

"So did you and I, Flemild; and He bids us love one another."

Flemild stood struck with astonishment, her kerchief half off her head.

"I crucified our Lord!" she exclaimed. "Ermine, what can you mean?"

"Sin crucified Him," said Ermine quietly; "your sins and mine, was it not? If He died not for our sins, we shall have to bear them ourselves. And did He not die for Countess too?"

"I thought He died for those who are in holy Church; and Countess is a wicked heathen Jew."

"Yes, for holy Church, which means those whom God has chosen out of the world. How can you know that Countess is not some day to be a member of holy Church?"

"Ermine, they are regular wicked people!"

"We are all wicked people, till God renews us by His Holy Spirit."

"I'm not!" cried Flemild indignantly; "and I don't believe you are either."

"Ah, Flemild, that is because you are blind. Sin has darkened our eyes; we cannot see ourselves."

"Ermine, do you mean to say that you see me a wicked creature like a Jew?"

"By nature, I am as blind as you, Flemild."

"By nature"! What do you mean? *Do* you see me so?"

"Flemild, dear friend, what if God sees it?"

Ermine had spoken very softly and tenderly, but Flemild was not in a mood to appreciate the tenderness.

"Well!" she said in a hard tone. "If we are so dreadfully wicked, I wonder you like to associate with us."

"But if I am equally wicked?" suggested Ermine with a smile.

"I wonder how you can hold such an opinion of yourself. I should not like to think myself so bad. I could not bear it."

Flemild entertained the curious opinion—it is astonishing how many people unwittingly hold it—that a fact becomes annihilated by a man shutting his eyes to it. Ermine regarded her with a look of slight amusement.

"What difference would it make if I did not think so?" she asked.

Flemild laughed, only then realising the absurdity of her own remark. It augured well for her good sense that she could recognise the absurdity when it was pointed out to her.

Coming down the ladder, they found Anania seated below.

"Well, girls! did you see the Queen?"

"Oh, we had a charming view of her," said Flemild.

"Folks say she's not so charming, seen a bit nearer. You know Veka, the wife of Chembel? She told me she'd heard Dame Ediva de Gathacra say the Queen's a perfect fury when she has her back up. Some of the scenes that are to be seen by nows and thens in Westminster Palace are enough to set your hair on end. And her extravagance! Will you believe it, Dame Ediva said, this last year she gave over twenty pounds for one robe. How many gowns would that buy you and me, Aunt Isel?"

At the present value of money, Her Majesty's robe cost rather more than 500.

"Bless you, I don't know," was Isel's answer. "Might be worth cracking my head over, if I were to have one of 'em when I'd done. But there's poor chance of that, I reckon; so I'll let it be."

"They say she sings superbly," said Flemild.

"Oh, very like. Folks may well sing that can afford to give twenty pound for a gown. If she'd her living to earn, and couldn't put a bit of bread in her mouth, nor in her children's, till she'd worked for it, she'd sing o' t'other side her mouth, most likely."

"Anania, don't talk so unseemly. I'm sure you've a good enough place."

"Oh, are you? I dress in samite, like the Queen, don't I?—and eat sturgeon and peacocks to my dinner?—and drive of a gilt char when I come to see folks? I should just like to know why she must have all the good things in life, and I must put up with the hard ones? I'm as good a woman as she is, I'm sure of that."

"Cousin Anania," said Derette in a scandalised tone, "you should not tell us you're a good woman; you should wait till we tell you."

"Then why didn't you tell me?" snapped Anania.

"I didn't tell you so because I don't think so," replied Derette with severity, "if you say such things of the Queen."

"Much anybody cares what you think, child. Why, just look!—tuns and tuns of Gascon wine are sent to Woodstock for her: and here must I make shift with small ale and thin mead that's half sour. She's only to ask and have."

"Well, I don't know," said Isel. "I wouldn't give my quiet home for a sup of Gascon wine—more by reason I don't like it. 'Scenes at Westminster Palace' are not things I covet. My poor Manning was peaceable enough, and took a many steps to save me, and I doubt if King Henry does even to it. Eh dear! if I did but know what had come of my poor man! I should have thought all them Saracens 'd have been dead and buried by now, when you think what lots of folks has gone off to kill 'em. And as to 'asking and having'—well, that hangs on what you ask for. There's a many folks asks for the moon, but I never heard tell as any of 'em had it."

"Why do folks go to kill the Saracens?" demanded Derette, still unsatisfied on that point.

"Saints know!" said her mother, using her favourite comfortable expletive. "I wish *he* hadn't ha' gone—I do so!"

"It's a good work, child," explained Anania.

"Wouldn't it have been a good work for Father to stay at home, and save steps for Mother?"

"I think it would, my child," said Gerhardt; "but God knoweth best, and He let thy father go. Sometimes what seems to us the best work is not the work God has appointed for us."

Had Gerhardt wished to drive away Anania, he could not have taken a surer method than by words which savoured of piety. She resembled a good many people in the present day, who find the Bread of Life very dry eating, and if they must swallow a little of it, can only be persuaded to do so by a thick coating of worldly butter. They may be coaxed to visit the church where the finest anthem is sung, but that where the purest Gospel is preached has no attraction for them. The porter's wife, therefore, suddenly discovered that she had plenty to do at home, and took her departure, much to the relief of the friends on whom she inflicted herself. She had not been gone many minutes when Stephen looked in.

"Lads not come in yet?" said he. "Well, have you seen the grand sight? The Queen's gone again; she only stayed for supper at the Castle, and then off to Woodstock. She'll not be there above a month, they say. She never tarries long in England at once. But the King's coming back this autumn—so they say."

"Who say?" asked Gerhardt.

"Oh, every body," said Stephen with a laugh, as he leaned over the half-door.

"*Every* body?" inquired Gerhardt drily.

"Oh, come, you drive things too fine for me. Every body, that is anybody."

"I thought every body was somebody."

"Not in this country: maybe in yours," responded Stephen, still laughing. "But I'm forgetting what I came for. Aunt Isel, do you want either a sheep or a pig?"

"Have you got 'em in that wallet on your back?"

"Not at present, but I can bring you either if you want it."

"What's the price, and who's selling them?"

"Our neighbour Veka wants to sell three or four bacon pigs and half-a-dozen young porkers; Martin le bon Fermier, brother of Henry the Mason, has a couple of hundred sheep to sell."

"But what's the cost? Veka's none so cheap to deal with, though she feeds her pigs well, I know."

"Well, she wants two shillings a-piece for the bacons, and four for the six porkers."

"Ay, I knew she'd clap the money on! No, thank you; I'm not made of gold marks, nor silver pennies neither."

"Well, but the sheep are cheap enough; he only asks twopence halfpenny each."

"That's not out of the way. We might salt one or two. I'll think about it. Not in a hurry to a day or two, is he?"

"Oh, no; I shouldn't think so."

"Has he any flour or beans to sell, think you? I could do with both those, if they were reasonable."

"Ay, he has. Beans a shilling a quarter, and flour fourteen pence a load. (Note 3.) Very good flour, he says it is."

"Should be, at that price. Well, I'll see: maybe I shall walk over one of these days and chaffer with him. Any way, I'm obliged to you, Stephen, for letting me know of it."

"Very good, Aunt Isel; Martin will be glad to see you, and I'll give Bretta a hint to be at home when you come, if you'll let me know the day before."

This was a mischievous suggestion on Stephen's part, as he well knew that Martin's wife was not much to his aunt's liking.

"Don't, for mercy's sake!" cried Isel. "She's a tongue as long as a yard measure, and there isn't a scrap of gossip for ten miles on every side of her that she doesn't hand on to the first comer. She'd know all I had on afore I'd been there one Paternoster, and every body else 'd know it too, afore the day was out."

The space of time required to repeat the Lord's Prayer—of course as fast as possible—was a measure in common use at that day.

"Best put on your holiday clothes, then," said Stephen with a laugh, and whistling for his dog, which was engaged in the pointing of Countess's kitten, he turned down Fish Street on his way to the East Gate.

Stephen's progress was arrested, as he came to the end of Kepeharme Lane, by a long and picturesque procession which issued from the western door of Saint Frideswide. Eight priests, fully robed, bore under a canopy the beautifully-carved coffer which held the venerated body of the royal saint, and they were accompanied by the officials of the Cathedral, the choir chanting a litany, and a long string of nuns bringing up the rear. Saint Frideswide was on her way to the bedside of a paralysed rich man, who had paid an immense sum for her visit, in the hope that he might be restored to the use of his faculties by a touch of her miracle-working relics. As the procession passed up the street, a door opened in the Jewry, and out came a young Jew named Dieulecresse (Note 4), who at once set himself to make fun of Saint Frideswide. Limping up the street as though he could scarcely stir, he suddenly drew himself erect and walked down with a free step; clenching his hands as if they were rigid, he then flung his arms open and worked his fingers rapidly.

"O ye men of Oxford, bring me your oblations!" he cried. "See ye not that I am a doer of wonders, like your saint, and that my miracles are quite as good and real as hers?"

The procession passed on, taking no notice of the mockery. But when, the next day, it was known that Dieulecresse had committed suicide in the night, the priests did not spare the publication of the fact, with the comment that Saint Frideswide had taken vengeance on her enemy, and that her honour was fully vindicated from his aspersions.

"Ah!" said Gerhardt softly, "'those eighteen, on whom the tower in Siloam fell!' How ready men are to account them sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem! Yet it may be that they who thus judge are the worse sinners of the two, in God's eyes, however high they stand in the world's sight."

"Well, I don't set up to be better than other folks," said Stephen lightly. He had brought the news. "I reckon I shall pass muster, if I'm as good."

"That would not satisfy me," said Gerhardt. "I should want to be as good as I could be. I could not pass beyond that. But even then—"

"That's too much trouble for me," laughed Stephen. "When you've done your work, hand me over the goodness you don't want."

"I shall not have any, for it won't be enough."

"That's a poor lookout!"

"It would be, if I had to rely on my own goodness."

Stephen stared. "Why, whose goodness are you going to rely on?"

Gerhardt lifted his cap. "'There is none good but One,—that is, God.'"

"I reckon that's aiming a bit too high," said Stephen, with a shake of his head. "Can't tell how you're going to get hold of that."

"Nor could I, unless the Lord had first laid hold of me. '*He* hath covered me with the robe of righteousness'—I do not put it on myself."

Gerhardt never made long speeches on religious topics. He said what he had to say, generally, in one pithy sentence, and then left it to carry its own weight.

"I say, Gerard, I've wondered more than once—"

"Well, Stephen?"

"No offence, friend?"

"Certainly not: pray say all you wish."

"Whether you were an unfrocked priest."

"No, I assure you."

"Can't tell how you come by all your notions!" said Stephen, scratching his head.

"Notions of all kinds have but two sources," was the reply: "the Word of God, and the corruption of man's heart."

"Come, now, that won't do!" objected Stephen. "You've built your door a mile too narrow. I've a notion that grass is green, and another that my new boots don't fit me: whence come they?"

"The first," said Gerhardt drily, "from the Gospel of Saint Mark; the second from the Fourteenth Psalm."

"The Fourteenth Psalm makes mention of my boots!"

"Not in detail. It saith, 'There is none that doeth good,—no, not one.'"

"What on earth has that to do with it?"

"This: that if sin had never entered the world, both fraud and suffering would have tarried outside with it."

"Well, I always did reckon Father Adam a sorry fellow, that he had no more sense than to give in to his wife."

"I rather think he gave in to his own inclination, at least as much. If he had not wanted to taste the apple, she might have coaxed till now."

"Hold hard there, man! You are taking the woman's side."

"I thought I was taking the side of truth. If that be not one's own, it is quite as well to find it out."

Stephen laughed as he turned away from the door of the Walnut Tree.

"You're too good for me," said he. "I'll go home before I'm infected with the complaint."

"I'd stop and take it if I were you," retorted Isel. "You're off the better end, I'll admit, but you'd do with a bit more, may be."

"I'll leave it for you, Aunt Isel," said Stephen mischievously. "One shouldn't want all the good things for one's self, you know."

The Queen did not remain for even a month at Woodstock. In less than three weeks she returned to London, this time without passing through Oxford, and took her journey to Harfleur, the passage across the Channel costing the usual price of 7 pounds, 10 shillings equivalent in modern times to 187 pounds, 10 shillings.

Travelling seems to have been an appalling item of expense at that time. The carriage of fish from Yarmouth to London cost 9 shillings (11 pounds, 5 shillings); of hay from London to Woodstock, 60 shillings (75 pounds); and of the Queen's robes from Winchester to Oxford, 8 shillings (10 pounds). Yet the Royal Family were perpetually journeying; the hams were fetched from Yorkshire, the cheeses from Wiltshire, and the pearmain apples from Kent. Exeter was famous for metal and corn; Worcester and London for wheat; Winchester for wine—there were vineyards in England then; Hertford for cattle, and Salisbury for game; York for wood; while the speciality of Oxford was knives.

An old Jew, writing to a younger some thirty years later, in the reign of Henry Second, and giving him warning as to what he would find in the chief towns of southern England, thus describes such as he had visited: "London much displeases me; Canterbury is a collection of lost souls and idle pilgrims; Rochester and Chichester are but small villages; Oxford scarcely (I say not satisfies, but) sustains its clerks; Exeter refreshes men and beasts with corn; Bath, in a thick air and sulphurous vapour, lies at the gates of Gehenna!"

But if travelling were far more costly than in these days, there were much fewer objects on which money could be squandered. Chairs were almost as scarce as thrones, being used for little else, and chimneys were not more common. (Note 5.) Diamonds were unknown; lace, velvet, and satin had no existence, samite and silk being the costly fabrics; and the regal ermine is not mentioned. Dress, as has been said, was not extravagant, save in the item of jewellery, or of very costly embroidery; cookery was much simpler than a hundred years later. Plate, it is true, was rich and expensive, but it was only in the hands of the nobles and church dignitaries. On the other hand, fines were among the commonest things in existence. Not only had every breach of law its appropriate fine, but breaches of etiquette were expiated in a similar manner. False news was hardly treated: 13 shillings 4 pence was exacted for that (Pipe Roll, 12 Henry Third) and perjury (Ibidem, 16 ib) alike, while wounding an uncle cost a sovereign, and a priest might be slain for the easy price of 4 shillings 9 pence (Ibidem, 27 ib). The Prior of Newburgh was charged three marks for excess of state; and poor Stephen de Mereplet had to pay 26 shillings 8 pence for "making a stupid reply to the King's Treasurer"! (Pipe Roll, 16 Henry Third) It was reserved for King John to carry this exaction to a ridiculous excess, by taking bribes to hold his tongue on inconvenient topics, and fining his courtiers for not having reminded him of points which he happened to forget. (Misae Roll, I John.)

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Note 1. A long undergarment then worn by men and women alike.

Note 2. "For gilding the King's bit (*frenum*), 56 shillings." (Pipe Roll, 31 Henry First.)

Note 3. Reckoned according to modern value, these prices stand about thus:—Bacon pig, 2 pounds, 10 shillings; porkers, 5 pounds; sheep, 5 shillings 3 pence; quarter of beans, 25 shillings; load of flour, 30 shillings.

Note 4. "*Dieu L'encroisse*," a translation of Gedaliah, and a very common name among the English Jews at that time. This incident really occurred about twenty-five years later.

Note 5. Some writers deny the existence of chimneys at this date; but an entry, on the Pipe Roll for 1160, of money expended on "the Queen's chamber and chimney and cellar," leaves no doubt on the matter.

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## Chapter Four.

## The Fair of Saint Frideswide.

"That's what I always say - if you wish a thing to be well done, You must do it yourself, you must not leave it to others."

Longfellow.

The month of May was the liveliest and gayest of the year at Oxford, for not only were the May Day games common to the whole country, but another special attraction lay in Saint Frideswide's Fair, held on Gloucester Green early in that month. Oxford was a privileged town, in respect of the provision trade, the royal purveyors being forbidden to come within twenty miles of that city. In those good old times, the King was first served, then the nobility, lay and clerical, then the gentry, and the poor had to be content with what was left. It was not unusual, when a report of anything particularly nice reached the monarch—such as an import of wine, a haul of fish, or any other dainty,—for the Sheriff of that place to receive a mandate, bidding him seize for the royal use a portion or the whole thereof. Prices, too, were often regulated by proclamation, so that tradesmen not unfrequently found it hard to live. If a few of our discontented and idle agitators (I do not mean those who would work and cannot) could spend a month or two in the olden time, their next speeches on Tower Hill might be somewhat differently flavoured.

Saint Frideswide's Fair was a sight to see. For several days before it was held, a multitude of carpenters were employed in putting up wooden booths and stalls, and Gloucester Green became a very lively place. Fairs in the present day, when they are held at all, are very different exhibitions from what they were seven hundred years ago. The stalls then were practically shops, fully stocked with goods of solid value. There was a butcher's row, a baker's row, a silversmith's row, and a mercer's row—ironmongers, saddlers, shoemakers, vintners, coopers, pelters (furriers), potters, hosiers, fishmongers, and cooks (confectioners)—all had their several streets of stalls. The Green—larger than now—became a town within a town. As the fair was held by licence of Saint Frideswide, and was under her especial protection, the Canons of that church exacted certain dues both from the Crown and the stall-holders, which were duly paid. From the Crown they received 25 shillings per annum. It was deemed a point of honour to keep the best of everything for the fair; and those buyers who wished to obtain good value for their money put off their purchases when it grew near fair time. When the third of May came, they all turned out in holiday costume to lay in necessaries, so far as possible, for the year—meat excepted, which could be purchased again at the cattle fair in the following September.

There was one serious inconvenience in shopping at that time, of which we know nothing at the present day. With the exception of the penny and still smaller coins (all silver) there was no money. The pound, though it appears on paper, was not a coin, but simply a pound weight of pence; the mark was two-thirds, and the noble (if used so early) one-third of that amount. When a woman went out to buy articles of any value, she required to carry with her an enormous weight of small silver cash. Purses were not therefore the toys we use, but large bags of heavy leather, attached to the girdle on the left side; and the aim of a pickpocket was to cut the leather bag away from its metal fastening—hence the term *cut-purse*.

Every woman in Kepeharme Lane—and it might be added, in Oxford—appeared in the street with a basket on her arm as soon as daylight had well dawned. The men went at their own time and convenience. For many of them a visit to the fair was merely amusement; but the ladies were on business. Even Derette followed her mother, armed with a smaller basket than the rest. Little Rudolph was left with Countess, who preferred him to the fair; and such is the power of habit that our friends had now become quite accustomed to this, and would give a nod and a smile to Countess when they met, just as they did to any other neighbour. This does not mean that they entertained an atom less of prejudice against Jews in general; they had merely got over their prejudice in the case of that one Jewish girl in particular.

Isel's business was heavy enough. She wanted a pig, half an ox, twenty ells of dark blue cloth, a cloak for herself and capes for her daughters, thirty pairs of slippers—a very moderate allowance for three women, for slippers were laid in by the dozen pairs in common—fifty cheeses (an equally moderate reckoning) (Note 1), a load of flour, another of oatmeal, two quarters of cabbage for salting, six bushels of beans, five hundred herrings, a barrel of ale, two woollen rugs for bedclothes, a wooden coffer, and a hundred nails. She had already bought and salted two sheep from Martin, so mutton was not needed.

"Now, Agnes, what do you want?" she asked.

Agnes, who was following with another basket, replied that she wanted some stuff for a dress, some flannel for Rudolph, and a few pairs of shoes. Shoes must have worn only a very short time, considering the enormous quantity of them usually bought at once.

"And you, Ermine?"

"Nothing but a hood, Mother Isel."

"You're easily satisfied. Well, I'll go first after my pig."

They turned into the Butcher's Row, where in a minute they could scarcely hear each other speak. The whole air seemed vocal with grunts, lowing, and bleating, and, the poulterers' booths lying close behind, crowing and cackling also.

"How much for a good bacon pig?" screamed Isel to a fat butcher, who was polishing a knife upon a wooden block.

"Hertford kids? I have none."

"Bacon pig!" screamed Isel a little louder.

"Oh! Well, look you, there's a nice one—twenty pence; there's a rare fine one—twenty-two; there's a—"

"Bless thee, man! dost thou think I'm made of money?"

"Shouldn't wonder if you'd a pot laid by somewhere," said the butcher with a knowing wink. He was an old acquaintance.

"Well, I haven't, then: and what's more, I've plenty to do with the few marks I have. Come now, I'll give you sixteen pence for that biggest fellow."

The butcher intimated, half in a shout and half by pantomime, that he could not think of such a thing.

"Well, eighteen, then."

The butcher shook his head.

"Nineteen! Now, that's as high as I'll go."

"Not that one," shouted the butcher; "I'll take nineteen for the other."

Isel had to execute a gymnastic feat before she could answer, to save herself from the horns of an inquisitive cow which was being driven up the row; while a fat pig on the other side was driving Flemild nearly out of the row altogether.

"Well! I'll agree to that," said Isel, when she had settled with the cow.

A similar process having been gone through for the half ox, for which Isel had to pay seventeen pence (Salted cow was much cheaper, being only 2 shillings each.)—a shameful price, as she assured her companions—the ladies next made their way to Drapers' Row. The draper, then and for some centuries later, was the manufacturer of cloth, not the retail dealer only: but he sold retail as well as wholesale. Isel found some cloth to her mind, but the price was not to her mind at all, being eighteen pence per ell.

"Gramercy, man! wouldst thou ruin me?" she demanded.

A second battle followed with the draper, from which Isel this time emerged victorious, having paid only 1 shilling 5 pence per ell. They then went to the clothier's, where she secured a cloak for a mark (13 shillings 4 pence) and capes for the girls at 6 shillings 8 pence each. At the shoemaker's she laid in her slippers for 6 pence per pair, with three pairs of boots at a shilling. The cheeses were dear, being a halfpenny each; the load of flour cost 14 pence, and of meal 2 shillings; the beans were 1 shilling 8 pence, the cabbage 1 shilling 2 pence, the herrings 2 shillings. The coffer came to 5 shillings, the nails to 2 shillings 4 pence. (Note 2.) Isel looked ruefully at her purse.

"We must brew at home," she said, easily dismissing that item; "but how shall I do for the rugs?"

Rugs were costly articles. There was no woollen manufacture in England, nor was there to be such for another hundred years. A thick, serviceable coverlet, such as Isel desired, was not to be bought much under two pounds.

"We must do without them," she said, with a shake of her head. "Girls, you'll have to spread your cloaks on the bed. We must eat, but we needn't lie warm if we can't afford it."

"Isel, have you de one pound? Look, here is one," said Agnes timidly, holding out her hand.

"But you want that, my dear."

"No, I can do widout. I will de gown up-mend dat I have now. Take you de money; I have left for de shoes and flannel."

She did not add that the flannel would have to be cut down, as well as the new dress resigned.

"And I can do very well without a hood," added Ermine quickly. "We must help Mother Isel all we can."

"My dears, I don't half like taking it."

"We have taken more from you," said Ermine.

Thus urged, Isel somewhat reluctantly took the money, and bought one rug, for which she beat down the clothier to two marks and a half, and departed triumphant, this being her best bargain for the day. It was then in England, as it yet is in Eastern lands, an understood thing that all tradesmen asked extortionate prices, and must be offered less as a matter of course: a fact which helps to the comprehension of the Waldensian objection to trade as involving falsehood.

Isel returned to Agnes the change which remained out of her pound, which enabled her to get all the flannel she needed. Their baskets being now well filled, Isel and her party turned homewards, sauntering slowly through the fair, partly because the crowd prevented straightforward walking, but partly also because they wished to see as much as they could. Haimet was to bring a hand-cart for the meat and other heavy purchases at a later hour.

Derette, who for safety's sake was foremost of the girls, directly following her mother and Agnes, trudged along with her basket full of slippers, and her head full of profound meditation. Had Isel known the nature of those meditations, she certainly would never have lingered at the silversmiths' stalls in a comfortable frame of mind, pointing out to her companions various pretty things which took her fancy. But she had not the remotest idea of her youngest daughter's private thoughts, and she turned away from Gloucester Green at last, quite ignorant of the fashion wherein her feelings of all sorts were about to be outraged.

Derette was determined to obtain a dress for Agnes. She had silently watched the kindly manner in which the good-natured German gave up the thing she really needed: for poor Agnes had but the one dress she wore, and Derette well knew that no amount of mending would carry it through another winter. But how was a penniless child to procure another for her? If Derette had not been a young person of original ideas and very independent spirit, the audacious notion which she was now entertaining would never have visited her mind.

This was no less than a visit to the Castle, to beg one of the cast-off gowns of the women of the household. Dresses wore long in the Middle Ages, and ladies of rank were accustomed to make presents of half-worn ones to each other. Derette was not quite so presumptuous as to think of addressing the Countess—that, even in her eyes, seemed a preposterous impossibility; but surely one of her waiting-women might be reached. How was she to accomplish her purpose?

That she must slip away unseen was the first step to be taken. Her mother would never dream of allowing such an

errand, as Derette well knew; but she comforted herself, as others have done beside her, with the reflection that the excellence of her motive quite compensated for the unsatisfactory details of her conduct. Wedged as she was in the midst of the family group, and encumbered with her basket, she could not hope to get away before they reached home; but she thought she saw her chance directly afterwards, when the baskets should have been discharged of their contents, and every body was busy inspecting, talking about, and putting away, the various purchases that had been made.

Young girls were never permitted to go out alone at that time. It was considered less dangerous in town than country, and a mere run into a neighbouring house might possibly have been allowed; but usually, when not accompanied by some responsible person, they were sent in groups of three or four at once. Derette's journey must be taken alone, and it involved a few yards of Milk Street, as far as Saint Ebbe's, then a run to Castle Street and up to the Castle. That was the best way, for it was both the shortest and comparatively the quietest. But Derette determined not to go in at the entrance gate, where she would meet Osbert and probably Anania, but to make for the Osney Gate to the left, where she hoped to fall into the kinder hands of her cousin Stephen. The danger underlying this item was that Stephen might have gone to the fair, in which case she would have to encounter either the rough joking of Orme, or the rough crustiness of Wandregisil, his fellow-watchmen. That must be risked. The opportunity had to be bought, and Derette made up her mind to pay the necessary price.

The Walnut Tree was reached, the baskets laid down, and while Agnes was divesting herself of her cloak, and Isel reiterating her frequent assertion that she was "that tired," Derette snatched her chance, and every body's back being turned for the moment, slipped out of the door, and sped up Kepeharme Lane with the speed of a fawn. Her heart beat wildly, and until she reached Milk Street, she expected every instant to be followed and taken back. If she could only get her work done, she told herself, the scolding and probable whipping to follow would be easily borne.

Owing to its peculiar municipal laws, throughout the Middle Ages, Oxford had the proud distinction of being the cleanest city in England. That is to say, it was not quite so appallingly smothered in mire and filth as others were. Down the midst of every narrow street ran a gutter, which after rain was apt to become a brook, and into which dirt of every sort was emptied by every householder. There were no causeways; and there were frequent holes of uncertain depth, filled with thick mud. Ownerless dogs, and owned but equally free-spoken pigs, roamed the streets at their own sweet will, and were not wont to make way for the human passengers; while if a cart were met in the narrow street, it was necessary for the pedestrian to squeeze himself into the smallest compass possible against the wall, if he wished to preserve his limbs in good working order. Such were the delights of taking a walk in the good old times. It may reasonably be surmised that unnecessary walks were not frequently taken.

Kepeharme Lane left behind, where the topography of the holes was tolerably familiar, Derette had to walk more guardedly. After getting pretty well splashed, and dodging a too attentive pig which was intent on charging her for venturing on his beat, Derette at last found herself at the Osney Gate. She felt now that half her task was over.

"Who goes there?" demanded the welcome voice of Stephen, when Derette rapped at the gate.

"It's me, Stephen,—Derette: do let me in."

The gate stood open in a moment, and Stephen's pleasant face appeared behind it, with a look of something like consternation thereon.

"Derette!—alone!—whatever is the matter?"

"Nothing, Stephen; oh, nothing's the matter. I only came alone because I knew Mother wouldn't let me if I asked her."

"Hoity-toity!—that's a nice confession, young woman! And pray what are you after, now you have come?"

"Stephen—dear, good Stephen, will you do me a favour?"

"Hold off, you coaxing sinner!"

"Oh, but I want it so much! You see, she gave it up because Mother wanted a rug, and she let her have the money—and I know it won't mend up to wear any thing like through the winter—and I do want so to get her another—a nice soft one, that will be comfortable, and—You'll help me, won't you, Steenie?"

And Derette's small arms came coaxingly round her cousin's wrist.

"I'm a heathen Jew if I have the shadow of a notion what I'm wanted to help! 'A nice soft one!' Is it a kitten, or a bed-quilt, or a sack of meal, you're after?"

"O Stephen!—what queer things you guess! It's a gown—"

"I don't keep gowns, young woman."

"No, but, Steenie, you might help me to get at somebody that does. One of the Lady's women, you know. I'm sure you could, if you would."

Steenie whistled. "Well, upon my word! *You'll* not lose cakes for want of asking for. Why don't you go to Anania?"

"You know she'd only be cross."

"How do you know I sha'n't be cross?" asked Stephen, knitting his brows, and pouting out his lips, till he looked formidable.

"Oh, because you never are. You'll only laugh at me, and you won't do that in an ugly way like some people. Now, Steenie, you *will* help me to get a gown for Agnes?"

"Agnes, is it? I thought you meant Flemild."

"No, it's Agnes; and Ermine gave up her hood to help: but Agnes wants the gown worse than Ermine does a hood. You like them, you know, Steenie."

"Who told you that, my Lady Impertinence? Dear, dear, what pests these children are!"

"Now, Stephen, you know you don't think any thing of the sort, and you are going to help me this minute."

"How am I to help, I should like to know? I can't leave my gate."

"You can call somebody. Now do, Steenie, there's a darling cousin!—and I'll ask Mother to make you some of those little pies you like so much. I will, really."

"You outrageous wheedler! I suppose I shall have no peace till I get rid of you.—Henry!"

A lad of about twelve years old, who was crossing the court-yard at the other side, turned and came up at the call.

"Will you take this maid in, and get her speech of Cumina? She's very good-natured, and if you tell her your story, Derette, I shouldn't wonder if she helps you."

"Oh, thank you, Steenie, so much!"

Derette followed Henry, who made faces at her, but gave her no further annoyance, into the servants' offices at the Castle, where he turned her unceremoniously over to the first person he met—a cook in a white cap and apron—with the short and not too civil information that—

"She wants Cumina."

The cook glanced carelessly at Derette.

"Go straight along the passage, and up the stairs to the left," he said, and then went on about his own business.

Never before had Derette seen a house which contained above four rooms at the utmost. She felt in utter confusion amid stairs, doors, and corridors. But she managed to find the winding staircase at the end of the passage, and to mount it, wishing much that so convenient a mode of access could replace the ladder in her mother's house. She went up till she could go no further, when she found herself on the top landing of a round tower, without a human creature to be seen. There were two doors, however; and after rapping vainly at both, she ventured to open one. It led to the leads of the tower. Derette closed this, and tried the other. She found it to open on a dark fathomless abyss,—the Castle well (Note 3), had she known it—and shut it quickly with a sensation of horror. After a moment's reflection, she went down stairs to the next landing.

Here there were four doors, and from one came the welcome sound of human voices. Derette rapped timidly on this. It was opened by a girl about the age of Flemild.

"Please," said Derette, "I was to ask for Cumina."

"Oh, you must go to the still-room," answered the girl, and would have shut the door without further parley, had not Derette intercepted her with a request to be shown where the still-room was.

With an impatient gesture, the girl came out, led Derette a little way along the corridor running from the tower, and pointed to a door on the left hand.

Derette's hopes rose again. She was one of those persons whom delays and difficulties do not weary out or render timid, but rather inspire to fresh and stronger action.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the pleasant-faced young woman who answered Derette's rap. "Please, is there somebody here called Cumina?"

"I rather think there is," was the smiling answer. "Is it you?"

"Ay. Come in, and say what you wish." Derette obeyed, and poured out her story, rather more lucidly than she had done to Stephen. Cumina listened with a smile.

"Well, my dear, I would give you a gown for your friend if I had it," she said good-humouredly; "but I have just sent the only one I can spare to my mother. I wonder who there is, now—Are you afraid of folks that speak crossly?"

"No," said Derette. "I only want to shake them." Cumina laughed. "You'll do!" she said. "Come, then, I'll take you to Hagena. She's not very pleasant-spoken, but if any body can help you, she can. The only doubt is whether she will."

Derette followed Cumina through what seemed to her endless corridors opening into further and further corridors, till at last she asked in a tone of astonishment—

"How can you ever find your way?"

"Oh, you learn to do that very soon," said Cumina, laughing, as she opened the door of a long, low chamber. "Now, you must tread softly here, and speak very respectfully."

Derette nodded acquiescence, and they went in.

The room was lined with presses from floor to ceiling. On benches which stood back to back in its midst, several lengths of rich silken stuffs were spread out; and on other benches near the windows sat two or three girls busily at work. Several elder ladies were moving about the room, and one of them, a rather stout, hard-featured woman, was examining the girls' work. Cumina went up to her.



"If you please, Hagena," she said, "is there any where an old gown which it would please you to bestow on this girl, who has asked the boon?"

Hagena straightened herself up and looked at Derette.

"Is she the child of one of my Lord's tenants?"

"No," answered Derette. "My mother's house is her own."

"Well, if ever I heard such assurance! Perchance, Madam, you would like a golden necklace to go with it?"

If Derette had not been on her good behaviour, Hagena would have received as much as she gave. But knowing that her only chance of success lay in civil and submissive manners, she shut her lips tight and made no answer.

"Who sent you?" pursued Hagena, who was the Countess's mistress of the household, and next in authority to her.

"Nobody. I came of myself."

"*Ha, chétife!* I do wonder what the world's coming to! The impudence of the creature! How on earth did she get in? Just get out again as fast as you can, and come on such an errand again if you dare! Be off with you!"

Derette's voice trembled, but not with fear, as she turned back to Cumina. To Hagena she vouchsafed no further word.

"I did not know I was offending any body," she said, in a manner not devoid of childish dignity. "I was trying to do a little bit of good. I think, if you please, I had better go home."

Derette's speech infuriated Hagena. The child had kept her manners and her dignity too, under some provocation, while the mistress of the household was conscious that she had lost hers.

"How dare—" she was beginning, when another voice made her stop suddenly.

"What has the child been doing? I wish to speak with her."

Cumina hastily stopped Derette from leaving the room, and led her up to the lady who had spoken and who had only just entered.

"What is it, my little maid?" she said kindly.

"I beg your pardon," said the child. She was but a child, and her brave heart was failing her. Derette was very near tears. "I did not mean any harm. Somebody had given up having a new gown—and she wanted it very much—to let somebody else have the money; and I thought, if I could beg one for her—but I did not mean to be rude. Please let me go home."

"Thou shalt go home, little one," answered the lady; "but wait a moment. Does any one know the child?"

Nobody knew her.

"Stephen the Watchdog knows me," said Derette, drawing a long breath. "He is my cousin. So is Osbert the porter."

The lady put her arm round Derette.

"What sort of a gown wouldst thou have, my child?"

Derette's eyes lighted up. Was she really to succeed after all?

"A nice one, please," she said, simply, making every one smile except Hagena, who was still too angry for amusement. "Not smart nor grand, you know, but warm and soft. Something woollen, I suppose, it should be."

The lady addressed herself to Hagena.

"Have I any good woollen robe by the walls?"

When a dress was done with, if the materials were worth using for something else, it was taken to pieces; if not, it was hung up "by the walls," ready to give away when needed.

Hagena had some difficulty in answering properly.

"No, Lady; the last was given to Veka, a fortnight since."

"Then," was the quiet answer, which surprised all present, "it must be one of those I am wearing. Let Cumina and Dora bring such as I have."

Derette looked up into the face of her new friend.

"Please, are you the Lady Countess?"

"Well, I suppose I am," replied the Countess with a smile. "Now, little maid, choose which thou wilt."

Seven woollen gowns were displayed before the Countess and Derette, all nearly new—blue, green, scarlet, tawny, crimson, chocolate, and cream-colour. Derette looked up again to the Countess's face.

"Nay, why dost thou look at me? Take thine own choice."

The Countess was curious to see what the child's selection would be.

"I looked to see which you liked best," said Derette, "because I wouldn't like to choose that."

"True courtesy here!" remarked the Countess. "It is nothing to me, my child. Which dost thou like?"

"I like that one," said Derette, touching the crimson, which was a rich, soft, dark shade of the colour, "and I think Agnes would too; but I don't want to take the best, and I am not sure which it is."

"Fold it up," said the Countess to Cumina, with a smile to Derette; "let it be well lapped in a kerchief; and bid Wandregisil go to the Osney Gate, so that Stephen can take the child home."

The parcel was folded up, the Countess's hand kissed with heartfelt thanks, and the delighted Derette, under the care of Cumina, returned to the Osney Gate with her load.

"Well, you are a child!" exclaimed Stephen. "So Cumina has really found you a gown? I thought she would, if she had one to give away."

"No," said Derette, "it is the Countess's gown."

"And who on earth gave you a gown of the Lady's?"

"Her own self!—and, Stephen, it is of her own wearing; she hadn't done with it; but she gave it me, and she was so nice!—so much nicer than all the others except Cumina."

"Well, if ever I did!" gasped Stephen. "Derette, you are a terrible child! I never saw your like."

"I don't know what I've done that's terrible," replied the child. "I'm sure Agnes won't think it terrible to have that pretty gown to wear. What is terrible about it, Stephen?"

They had left the Castle a few yards behind, were over the drawbridge, and winding down the narrow descent, when a sharp call of "Ste-phen!" brought them to a standstill.

"Oh dear, that's Cousin Anania!" exclaimed Derette. "Let me run on, Stephen, and you go back and see what she wants."

"Nay, I must not do that, child. The Lady sent orders that I was to see you home. You'll have to go back with me."

"But she'll worry so! She'll want to know all about the gown, and then she'll want it undone, and I'm sure she'll mess it up—and Cumina folded it so smooth and nice:" urged Derette in a distressed tone.

"We won't let her," answered Stephen, quietly, as they came to the entrance gate. "Well, what's up, Anania?"

"What's Derette doing here? Who came with her? Where are you going?—and what's in that fardel?"

"Oh, is that all you're after? I'll answer those questions when I come back. I've got to take Derette home just now."

"You'll answer them before you go an inch further, if you please. That child's always in some mischief, and you aid and abet her a deal too often."

"But I don't please. I am under orders, Anania, and I can't stop now."

"At least you'll tell me what's in the fardel!" cried Anania, as Stephen turned to go on his way without losing his hold of the parcel.

"A gown which the Lady has given to Derette," said Stephen mischievously, "and she sent commands that I was to escort her home with it."

"A gown!—the Lady!—Derette!" screamed Anania. "Not one of her own?—why on earth should she give Derette a gown?"

"That's the Lady's business, not mine."

"Yes, one of her own," said Derette proudly.

"But what on earth for? She hasn't given me a gown, and I am sure I want it more than that child—and deserve it, too."

"Perhaps you haven't asked her," suggested Derette, trotting after Stephen, who was already half-way across the bridge.

"Asked her! I should hope not, indeed—I know my place, if you don't. You never mean to say you asked her?"

"I can't stop to talk, Cousin Anania."

"But which gown is it?—tell me that!" cried Anania, in an agony of disappointed curiosity.

"It's a crimson woollen one. Good morrow."

"What! never that lovely robe she had on yesterday? Saints bless us all!" was the last scream that reached them from Anania.

Stephen laughed merrily as Derette came up with him.

"We have got clear of the dragon this time," said he.

A few minutes brought them to the Walnut Tree.

"Haimet—Oh, it's Stephen!" cried Isel in a tone of sore distress, as soon as he appeared at the door. "Do, for mercy's sake—I'm just at my wits' end to think whatever—Oh, there she is!"

"Yes, Mother, I'm here," said Derette demurely.

"Yes, she's here, and no harm done, but good, I reckon," added Stephen. "Still, I think it might be as well to look after her a bit, Aunt Isel. If she were to take it into her head to go to London to see the Lady Queen, perhaps you mightn't fancy it exactly."

"What has she been doing?" asked Isel in consternation.

"Only paying a visit to the Countess," said Stephen, laughing.

By this time Derette had undone the knots on the handkerchief, and the crimson robe was revealed in all its beauty.

"Agnes," she said quietly, but with a little undertone of decided triumph, "this is for you. You won't have to give up your gown, though you did give Mother the money."

A robe, in the Middle Ages, meant more than a single gown, and the crimson woollen was a robe. Under and upper tunics, a mantle, and a corset or warm under-bodice, lay before the eyes of the amazed Agnes.

"Derette, you awful child!" exclaimed her mother almost in terror, "what have you been after, and where did you get all that? Why, it's a new robe, and fit for a queen!"

"Don't scold the child," said Stephen. "She meant well, and I believe she behaved well; she got more than she asked for, that's all."

"Please, it isn't quite new, Mother, because the Lady wore it yesterday; but she said she hadn't one done with, so she gave me one she was wearing."

Bit by bit the story was told, while Isel held up her hands in horrified astonishment, which she allowed to appear largely, and in inward admiration of Derette's spirit, of which she tried to prevent the appearance. She was not, however, quite able to effect her purpose.

"*Meine Kind!*" cried Agnes, even more amazed and horrified than Isel. "Dat is not for me. It is too good. I am only poor woman. How shall I such beautiful thing wear?"

"But it is for you," pleaded Derette earnestly, "and you must wear it; because, you see, if you did not, it would seem as if I had spoken falsely to the Lady."

"Ay, I don't see that you can do aught but take it and wear it," said Stephen. "Great ladies like ours don't take their gifts back."

Gerhardt had come in during the discussion.

"Nor does the Lord," he said, "at least not from those who receive them worthily. Take it from Him, dear, with thankfulness to the human instruments whom He has used. He saw thy need, and would not suffer thee to want for obeying His command."

"But is it not too fine, Gerhardt?"

"It might be if we had chosen it," answered Gerhardt with a smile; "but it seems as if the Lord had chosen it for thee, and that settles the matter. It is only the colour, after all."

There was no trimming on the robe, save an edging of grey fur,—not even embroidery: and no other kind of trimming was known at that time. Agnes timidly felt the soft, fine texture.

"It is beautiful!" she said.

"Oh, it is beautiful enough, in all conscience," said Isel, "and will last you a life-time, pretty nigh. But as to that dreadful child—"

"Now, Mother, you won't scold me, will you?" said Derette coaxingly, putting her arms round Isel's neck. "I haven't done any harm, have I?"

"Well, child, I suppose you meant well," said Isel doubtfully, "and I don't know but one should look at folks' intentions more than their deeds, in especial when there's no ill done; but—"

"Oh, come, let's forgive each other all round!" suggested Stephen. "Won't that do?"

Isel seemed to think it would, for she kissed Derette.

"But you must never, never do such a thing again, child, in all the days of your life!" said she.

"Thank you, Mother, I don't want to do it again just now," answered Derette in a satisfied tone.

The afternoon was not over when Anania marched into the Walnut Tree.

"Well, Aunt Isel! I hope you are satisfied *now!*"

"With what, Anania?"

"That dreadfully wicked child. Didn't I tell you? I warned you to look after her. If you only would take good advice when folks take the trouble to give it you!"

"Would you be so good as to say what you mean, Anania? I'm not at all satisfied with dreadfully wicked children. I'm very much dissatisfied with them, generally."

"I mean Derette, of course. I hope you whipped her well!"

"What for?" asked Isel, in a rather annoyed tone.

"What for?" Anania lifted up her hands. "There now!—if I didn't think she would just go and deceive you! She can't have told you the truth, of course, or you could never pass it by in that light way."

"If you mean her visit to the Castle," said Isel in a careless tone, "she told us all about it, of course, when she got back."

"And you take it as coolly as that?"

"How did you wish me to take it? The thing is done, and all's well that ends well. I don't see that it was so much out of the way, for my part. Derette got no harm, and Agnes has a nice new gown, and nobody the worse. If anybody has a right to complain, it is the Countess; and I can't see that she has so much, either; for she needn't have given the robe if she hadn't liked."

"Oh, she's no business to grumble; she has lots more of every thing. She could have twenty robes made like that to-morrow, if she wanted them. I wish I'd half as many—I know that!"

Agnes came down the ladder at that moment, carrying one of her new tunics, which she had just tried on, and was now going to alter to fit herself.

"That's it, is it?" exclaimed Anania in an interested voice. "I thought it was that one. Well, you are in luck! That's one of her newest robes, I do believe. Ah, folks that have more money than they know what to do with, can afford to do aught they fancy. But to think of throwing away such a thing as that on *you!*"

Neither words nor tone were flattering, but the incivility dropped harmless from the silver armour of Agnes's lowly simplicity.

"Oh, but it shall not away be t'rown," she said gently; "I will dem all up-make, and wear so long as they will togeder hold. I take care of dat, so shall you see!"

Anania looked on with envious eyes.

"How good lady must de Countess be!" added Agnes.

"Oh, she can be good to folks sometimes," snarled Anania. "She's just as full of whims as she can be—all those great folks are—proud and stuck-up and crammed full of caprice: but they say she's kind where she *takes*, you know. It just depends whether she takes to you. She never took to me, worse luck! I might have had that good robe, if she had."

"I shouldn't think she would," suddenly observed the smallest voice in the company.

"What do you mean by that, you impudent child?"

"Because, Cousin Anania, I don't think there's much in you to take to."

Derette's prominent feeling at that moment was righteous indignation. She could not bear to hear the gentle, gracious lady, who had treated her with such unexpected kindness, accused of being proud and full of whims, apparently for no better reason than because she had not "taken to" Anania—a state of things which Derette thought most natural and probable. Her sense of justice—and a child's sense of justice is often painfully keen—was outraged by Anania's sentiments.

"Well, to be sure! How high and mighty we are! That comes of visiting Countesses, I suppose.—Aunt Isel, I told you that child was getting insufferable. There'll be no bearing her very soon. She's as stuck-up now as a peacock. Just look at her!"

"I don't see that she looks different from usual," said Isel, who was mixing the ingredients for a "bag-pudding."

Anania made that slight click with her tongue which conveys the idea of despairing compassion for the pitiable incapacity of somebody to perceive patent facts.

Isel went on with her pudding, and offered no further remark.

"Well, I suppose I'd better be going," said Anania—and sat still.

Nobody contradicted her, but she made no effort to go, until Osbert stopped at the half-door and looked in.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" he said to his wife. "I don't know whether you care particularly for those buttons you bought from Veka, but Selis has swallowed two, and—"

"Those buttons! Graven silver, as I'm a living woman! I'll shake him while I can stand over him! And only one blessed dozen I had of them, and the price she charged me—The little scoundrel! Couldn't he have swallowed the common leaden ones?"

"Weren't so attractive, probably," said Osbert, as Anania hurried away, without any leave-taking, to bestow on her son and heir, aged six, the shaking she had promised.

"But de little child, he shall be sick!" said Agnes, looking up from her work with compassionate eyes.

"Oh, I dare say it won't hurt him much," replied Osbert coolly, "and perhaps it will teach him not to meddle. I wish it might teach his mother to stay at home and look after him, but I'm afraid that's hopeless. Good morrow!"

Little Selis seemed no worse for his feast of buttons, beyond a fit of violent indigestion, which achieved the wonderful feat of keeping Anania at home for nearly a week.

"You've had a nice quiet time, Aunt Isel," said Stephen. "Shall I see if I can persuade Selis to take the rest of the dozen?"

Life went on quietly—for the twelfth century—in the little house in Kepeharme Street. That means that nobody was murdered or murderously assaulted, the house was not burned down nor burglariously entered, and neither of the boys lost a limb, and was suffered to bleed to death, for interference with the King's deer. In those good old times, these little accidents were rather frequent, the last more especially, as the awful and calmly-calculated statistics on the Pipe Rolls bear terrible witness.

Romund married, and went to live in the house of his bride, who was an heiress to the extent of possessing half-a-dozen houses in Saint Ebbe's parish. Little Rudolph grew to be seven years old, a fine fearless boy, rather more than his quiet mother knew how to manage, but always amenable to a word from his grave father. The Germans had settled down peaceably in various parts of the country, some as shoemakers, some as tailors, some as weavers, or had hired themselves as day-labourers to farmers, carpenters, or bakers. Several offers of marriage had been made to Ermine, but hitherto, to the surprise of her friends, all had been declined, her brother assenting to this unusual state of things.

"Why, what do you mean to do, Gerard?" asked Isel of her, when the last and wealthiest of five suitors was thus treated. "You'll never have a better offer for the girl than Raven Soclin. He can spend sixty pound by the year and more; owns eight shops in the Bayly, and a brew-house beside Saint Peter's at East Gate. He's no mother to plague his wife, and he's a good even-tempered lad, as wouldn't have many words with her. Deary me! but it's like throwing the fish back into the sea when they've come in your net! What on earth are you waiting for, I should just like to know?"

"Dear Mother Isel," answered Ermine softly, "we are waiting to see what God would have of me. I think He means me for something else. Let us wait and see."

"But there is nothing else, child," returned Isel almost irritably, "without you've a mind to be a nun; and that's what I wouldn't be, take my word for it. Is that what you're after?"

"No, I think not," said Ermine in the same tone.

"Then there's nothing else for you—nothing in this world!"

"This is not the only world," was the quiet reply.

"It's the only one I know aught about," said Isel, throwing her beans into the pan; "or you either, if I'm not mistaken. You'd best be wise in time, or you'll go through the wood and take the crookedest stick you can find."

"I hope to be wise in time, Mother Isel; but I would rather it were God's time than mine. And we Germans, you know, believe in presentiments. Methinks He has whispered to me that the way He has appointed for my treading is another road than that."

Ermine was standing, as she spoke, by the half-door, her eyes fixed on the fleecy clouds which were floating across the blue summer sky.

"Can you see it, Aunt Ermine?" cried little Rudolph, running to her. "Is it up there, in the blue—the road you are going to tread?"

"It is down below first," answered Ermine dreamily. "Down very low, in the dim valleys, and it is rough. But it will rise by-and-bye to the everlasting hills, and to the sapphire blue; and it leads straight to God's holy hill, and to His tabernacle."

They remembered those words—seven months later.

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Note 1. The Pipe Rolls speak of *large* cheeses, which cost from threepence to sixpence each, and the ordinary size, of which two or three were sold for a penny. They were probably very small.

Note 2. Modern value of above prices:—Pig, 1 pound, 19 shillings 7 pence; half ox, 1 pound, 15 shillings 5 pence; cloth, 1 pound 16 shillings 5 and a half pence per ell; cloak, 13 pounds 6 shillings 8 pence; cape, 6 pounds, 13 shillings 4 pence; pair of slippers, 12 shillings 6 pence; boots, per pair, 25 shillings; cheeses, 2 shillings 1 penny each; flour and cabbage, each 1 pound 9 shillings 2 pence; meal and herrings, each 2 pounds, 10 shillings; beans, 2 pounds 1 shilling 8 pence; coffer, 6 pounds, 5 shillings; nails, 2 pounds, 18 shillings 4 pence; rug, 50 pounds. It will be seen that money was far cheaper than now, and living much more expensive.

Note 3. For the sinking of which King Henry paid 19 pounds, 19 shillings 5 pence near this time.

## Chapter Five.

### Warned.

"Though briars and thorns obstruct the way,  
Oh, what are thorns and briars to me,  
If Thy sweet words console and stay,  
If Thou but let me go with Thee?"

"G.E.M."

In the house of Henry the Mason, six doors from the Walnut Tree, three of the Germans had been received—old Berthold, his wife Luitgarde, and their daughter Adelheid. Two years after their coming, Luitgarde had died, and Berthold and his daughter were left alone Adelheid, though ten years the elder, was a great friend of Ermine, and she seemed about as much averse to matrimony as the latter, though being less well-favoured, she had received fewer incentives to adopt it. Raven Soclin, however, did not allow his disappointment in love to affect his spirits, nor to have much time for existence. Ermine's refusal was barely six weeks old when he transferred his very transferable affections to Flemild, and Romund, the family dictator, did not allow any refusal of the offer. In fact, Flemild was fairly well satisfied with the turn matters had taken. She knew she must be either wife or nun—there was no third course open for a woman in England at that day—and she certainly had no proclivity for the cloister. Derette, on the other hand, had expressed herself in terms of great contempt for matrimony, and of decided intention to adopt single life, in the only form in which it was then possible. It was therefore arranged by Romund, and obediently sanctioned by Isel—for that was an age of obedient mothers, so far as sons were concerned—that Flemild should marry Raven Soclin, and Derette should become a novice at Godstowe, in the month of September shortly about to open.

Nothing had yet been heard of Manning, the absent husband and father. Isel still cherished an unspoken hope of his return; but Romund and Flemild had given him up for dead, while the younger children had almost forgotten him.

Another person who had passed out of their life was the Jewish maiden, Countess. She had been married the year after the arrival of the Germans, and had gone to live at Reading: married to an old Jew whom she only knew by name, then no unusual fate for girls of her nation. From little Rudolph, who was just beginning to talk, she had parted most unwillingly.

"Ah! if you would give him to me!" she had said in German to Agnes, with a smile on her lips, yet with tears in the dark eyes. "I know it could not be. Yet if time should come that trouble befel you, and you sought refuge for the child, my heart and my arms would be open. Ah, you think, what could a poor Jewess do for you? Well, maybe so. Yet you know the fable of the mouse that gnawed the net in which the lion was caught. It might be, some day, that even poor Countess—"

Gerhardt laid his hand on the arm of the young Jewess, and Isel, who saw the action, trembled for the consequences of his temerity.

"Friend," he said, "I would, if so were, confide my child to you sooner than to any other outside this house, if your word were given that he should not be taught to deride and reject the Lord that died for him."

"You would take my word?" The dark eyes flashed fire.

"I would take it, if you would give it."

"And you know that no Court in this land would receive the witness of a Jew! You know it?" she repeated fiercely.

"I know it," he answered, rather sadly.

"Yet you would take mine?"

"God would know if you spoke truth. He is the Avenger of all that have none other."

"He has work to do, then!" replied Countess bitterly.

"He would not be too busy, if need were, to see to my little Rudolph. But I do not believe in the need: I think you true."

"Gerhardt, you are the strangest Christian that I ever knew! Do you mean what you say?"

"I mean every word of it, Countess."

"Then—you shall not repent it." And she turned away.

Little Rudolph fretted for a time after his nurse and playfellow. But as the months passed on, her image grew fainter in his memory, and now, at seven years old, he scarcely remembered her except by name, Ermine having spoken of her to him on several occasions.

"I wonder you talk of the girl to that child!" Isel remonstrated. "It were better that he should forget her."

"Pardon me, Mother Isel, but I think not so. The good Lord brought her in our way, and how do I know for what purpose? It may be for Rudolph's good, no less than hers; and she promised, if need arose, to have a care of him. I cannot tell what need may arise, wherein it would be most desirable that he should at least recall her name."

"But don't you see, Ermine, even on your own showing, our Lord has taken her out of your way again?"

"Yes, now. But how do I know that it is for always?"

"Why, child, how can Countess, a married woman, living away at Reading, do anything to help a child at Oxford?"

"I don't know, Mother Isel. The Lord knows. If our paths never cross again, it will not hurt Rudolph to remember that a young Jewess named Countess was his loving friend in childhood: if they should meet hereafter, it may be very needful. And—" that dreamy look came into Ermine's eyes—"something seems to whisper to me that it may be needed. Do not blame me if I act upon it."

"Well, with all your soft, gentle ways, you have a will of your own, I know," said Isel; "so you must e'en go your own way. And after September, Ermine, you'll be the only daughter left to me. Ah me! Well, it's the way of the world, and what is to be must be. I am sure it was a good wind blew you in at my door, for I should have been dreadful lonely without you when both my girls were gone."

"But, dear Mother Isel, Flemild is not going far."

"Not by the measuring-line, very like; but she's going far enough to be Raven's wife, and not my daughter. It makes a deal of difference, that does. And Derette's going further, after the same fashion. I sha'n't see her, maybe, again, above a dozen times in my life. Eh dear! this is a hard world for a woman to live in. It's all work, and worry, and losing, and giving up, and such like."

"There is a better world," said Ermine softly.

"There had need be. I'm sure I deserve a bit of rest and comfort, if ever a hard-working woman did. I'll say nought about pleasure; more by reason that I'm pretty nigh too much worn out and beat down to care about it."

"Nay, friend," said Gerhardt; "we sinners deserve the under-world. The road to the upper lieth only through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Christ."

"I don't know why you need say that," returned Isel with mild resentment. "I've been as decent a woman, and as good a wife and mother, as any woman betwixt Grandpont and Saint Maudlin, let the other be who she may,—ay, I have so, though I say it that hadn't ought. But you over-sea folks seem to have such a notion of everybody being bad, as I never heard before—not even from the priest."

The Church to which Gerhardt belonged held firmly, as one of her most vital dogmas, that strong view of human depravity which human depravity always opposes and resents. Therefore Gerhardt did but enunciate a foundation-article of his faith when he made answer—

"All the evil which I do proceeds from my own depravity."

"Come, you're laying it on a bit too thick," said Isel, with a shake of her head.

"He only speaks for himself, don't you hear, Mother?" suggested Haimet humorously.

Gerhardt smiled, and shook his head in turn.

"Well, but if all the ill we do comes of ourselves, I don't see how you leave any room for Satan. He's busy about us, isn't he?"

"He's 'a roaring lion, that goeth about, seeking whom he may devour'; but he can devour no man without his own participation."

"Why, then, you make us all out to be witches, for it's they who enter into league with Satan."

"Do you know, Gerard," said Haimet suddenly, "some folks in the town are saying that you belong to those over-sea heretics whose children are born with black throats and four rows of teeth, and are all over hair?"

"I don't see that Rudolph resembles that description," was the calm reply of Gerhardt. "Do you?"

"Oh, of course we know better. But there are some folks that say so, and are ready to swear it too. It would be quite as well if you stayed quiet at home for a while, and didn't go out preaching in the villages so much. If the Bishop comes to hear of some things you've said—"

Isel and her daughters looked up in surprise. They had never imagined that their friend's frequent journeys were missionary tours. Haimet, who mixed far more with the outer world, was a good deal wiser on many points.

"What have I said?" quietly replied Gerhardt, stopping his carving—which he still pursued in an evening—to sweep up and throw into the corner the chips which he had made.

"Well, I was told only last week, that you had said when you spoke at Abingdon, that 'Antichrist means all that is in contrast to Christ,' and that there was no such thing as a consecrated priest in the world."

"The first I did say: can you disprove it? But the second I did not say. God forbid that I ever should!"

"Oh, well, I am glad to hear it: but I can tell you, Halenath the Sacristan said he heard you."

"I wish that old chattering magpie would hold his tongue!" exclaimed Isel, going to the door to empty the bowl in which she had been washing the cabbages for supper. "He makes more mischief than any man within ten miles of the Four-Ways."

"Haimet," said Gerhardt, looking up from the lovely wreath of strawberry-blossom which he was carving on a box, "I must not leave you to misapprehend me as Halenath has done. I never said there was no such thing as a consecrated priest: for Christ our Priest is one, of the Order of Melchizedek, and by His one offering He hath perfected His saints for ever. But I did say that the priests of Rome were not rightly consecrated, and that the Pope's temporal power had deprived the Church of true consecration. I will stand as firmly to that which I have said, as I will deny the words I have

not spoken.”

Isel stood aghast, looking at him, while the spoon in her hand went down clattering on the brick floor.

“Dear blessed saints!” seemed to be all she could say.

“Why, whatever do you call that?” cried Haimet. “It sounds to me just as bad as the other, if it isn’t worse. I should think, if anything, it were a less heresy to say there were no consecrated priests, than to say that holy Church herself had lost true consecration. Not that there’s very much to choose between them, after all; only that you cunning fellows can split straws into twenty bits as soon as we can look at them.”

“Do you mean to say that the Church of England has lost true consecration?” gasped Isel.

“If he means one, he means the other,” said Haimet, “because our Church is subject to the holy Father.”

“There is one Church, and there are many Churches,” answered Gerhardt. “One—holy, unerring, indivisible, not seen of men. This is the Bride, the Lamb’s wife; and they that are in her are called, and chosen, and faithful. This is she that shall persevere, and shall overcome, and shall receive the crown of life. But on earth there are many Churches; and these may err, and may utterly fall away. Yea, there be that have done it—that are doing it now.”

“I don’t understand you a bit!” exclaimed Isel. “I always heard of the Catholic Church, that she was one and could not err; that our Lord the Pope was her head, and the Church of England was a branch of her. Isn’t that your doctrine?”

“You mean the same thing, don’t you, now?” suggested Flemild, trying to make peace. “I dare be bound, it’s only words that differ. They are so queer sometimes. Turn ’em about, and you can make them mean almost anything.”

Gerhardt smiled rather sadly, as he rose and put away his carving on one of the broad shelves that ran round the house-place, and served the uses of tables and cupboards.

“Words can easily be twisted,” he said, “either by ignorance or malice. But he is a coward that will deny his words as he truly meant them. God help me to stand to mine!”

“Well, you’d better mind what I tell you about your preaching,” responded Haimet. “Leave preaching to the priests, can’t you? It is their business, not a weaver’s. You keep to your craft.”

“Had you not once a preacher here named Pullus?” asked Gerhardt, without replying to the question.

“I think I have heard of him,” said Haimet, “but he was before my time.”

“I have been told that he preached the Word of God in this city years ago,” said Gerhardt.

“Whom did you say? Cardinal Pullus?” asked Isel, standing up from her cooking. “Ay, he did so! You say well, Haimet, it was before your day; you were only beginning to toddle about when he died. But I’ve listened to him many a time at Saint Martin’s, and on Presthey, too. He used to preach in English, so that the common folks could understand him. Many professed his doctrines. I used to like to hear him, I did—when I was younger. He said nice words, though I couldn’t call ’em back now. No, I couldn’t.”

“I am sorry to hear it; I rather hoped you could,” replied Gerhardt.

“Bless you! I never heard aught of that sort yet, that I could tell you again, a Paternoster after I’d gone forth of the door. Words never stay with me; they run in at one ear and out at the other. Seem to do me good, by times; but I never can get ’em back again, no more than you can the rain when it has soaked into the ground.”

“If the rain and the words bring forth good fruit, you get them back in the best way of all,” said Gerhardt. “To remember the words in your head only, were as fruitless as to gather up rain-drops from the stone or metal into which they cannot penetrate.”

“Well, I never had nought of a head-piece,” returned Isel. “I’ve heard my mother tell that I had twenty wallopings ere she could make me say the Paternoster; and I never could learn nought else save the Joy and the Aggerum.”

“What do you mean by the ‘Aggerum,’ Mother?” inquired Haimet.

“Well, isn’t that what you call it? Aggerum or Adjerum, or some such outlandish name. It’s them little words that prayers begin with.”

“‘*Deus, in adjutorium,*’” said Gerhardt quietly.

Haimet seemed exceedingly amused. He had attended the schools long enough to learn Latin sufficient to interpret the common prayers and Psalms which formed the private devotions of most educated people. This was because his mother had wished him to be a priest. But having now, in his own estimation, arrived at years of discretion, he declined the calling chosen for him, preferring as he said to go into business, and he had accordingly been bound apprentice to a moneter, or money-changer. Poor Isel had mourned bitterly over this desertion. To her mind, as to that of most people in her day, the priesthood was the highest calling that could be attained by any middle-class man, while trade was a very mean and despicable occupation, far below domestic service. She recognised, however, that Haimet was an exception to most rules, and was likely to take his own way despite of her.

Isel’s own lack of education was almost as unusual as Haimet’s possession of it. At that time all learning was in the hands of the clergy, the monastic orders, and the women. By the Joy, she meant the Doxology, the English version of which substituted “joy” for “glory;” while the *Adjutorium* denoted the two responses which follow the Lord’s Prayer in the morning service, “O God, make speed to save us,” “O Lord, make haste to help us.”

“Can’t you say *adjutorium*, Mother?” asked the irreverent youth.



"No, lad, I don't think I can. I'll leave that for thee. One's as good as t'other, for aught I see."

Haimet exploded a second time.

"Good evening!" said Romund's voice, and a cloaked figure, on whose shoulders drops of rain lay glittering, came in at the door. "I thought you were not gone up yet, for I saw the light under the door. Derette, I have news for you. I have just heard that Saint John's anchorite died yesterday, and I think, if you would wish it, that I could get the anchorhold for you. You may choose between that and Godstowe."

Derette scarcely stood irresolute for a moment.

"I should like the anchorhold best, Brother. Then Mother could come to me whenever she wanted me."

"Is that the only reason?" asked Haimet, half laughing.

"No, not quite," said Derette, with a smile; "but it is a good one."

"Then you make up your mind to that?" questioned Romund.

"Yes, I have made up my mind," replied Derette.

"Very good: then I will make application for it. Good night! no time to stay. Mabel? Oh, she's all right. Farewell!"

And Romund shut the door and disappeared.

"Deary me, that seems done all of a hurry like!" said Isel. "I don't half like such sudden, hasty sort of work. Derette, child, are you sure you'll not be sorry?"

"No, I don't think I shall, Mother. I shall have more liberty in the anchorhold than in the nunnery."

"More liberty, quotha!" cried Isel in amazement. "Whatever can the child mean? More liberty, penned up in two little chambers, and never to leave them all your life, than in a fine large place like Godstowe, with a big garden and cloisters to walk in?"

"Ah, Mother, I don't want liberty for my feet, but for my soul. There will be no abbess nor sisters to tease one in the anchorhold."

"Well, and what does that mean, but never a bit of company? Just your one maid, and tied up to her. And the child calls it 'liberty'!"

"You forget, Mother," said Haimet mischievously. "There will be the Lady Derette. In the cloister they are only plain Sister."

Every recluse had by courtesy the title of a baron.

"As if I cared for that rubbish!" said Derette with sublime scorn.

"Dear! I thought you were going on purpose," retorted her brother.

"Whom will you have for your maid, Derette?" asked her sister.

"Ermine, if I might have her," answered Derette with a smile.

Gerhardt suddenly stopped the reply which Ermine was about to make.

"No," he said, "leave it alone to-night, dear. Lay it before the Lord, and ask of Him whether that is the road He hath prepared for thee to walk in. It might be for the best, Ermine."

There was a rather sorrowful intonation in his voice.

"I will wait till the morning, and do as you desire," was Ermine's reply. "But I could give the answer to-night, for I know what it will be. The best way, and the prepared way, is that which leads the straightest Home."

It was very evident, when the morning arrived, that Gerhardt would much have liked Ermine to accept the lowly but safe and sheltered position of companion to Derette in the anchorhold. While the hermit lived alone, but wandered about at will, the anchorite, who was never allowed to leave his cell, always had with him a companion of his own sex, through whom he communicated with the outer world. Visitors of the same sex, or children, could enter the cell freely, or the anchorite might speak through his window to any person. Derette, therefore, would really be less cut off from the society of her friends in the anchorhold, than she would have been as a cloistered sister at Godstowe, where they would only have been permitted to see her, at most, once in a year. But outside the threshold of her cell she might never step, save for imminent peril of life, as in the case of fire. She must live there, and die there, her sole occupation found in devotional exercises, her sole pleasure in her friends' visits, the few sights she could see from her window, and through a tiny slit into the chancel of the Church of Saint John the Baptist, which we know as the chapel of Merton College. Every anchorhold was built close to a church, so as to allow its occupant the privilege of seeing the performance of mass, and of receiving the consecrated wafer, by the protrusion of his tongue through the narrow slit.

In those early days, and before the corruptions of Rome reached their full development, this cloistered life was not without some advantages for the securing of which it is not required now. In rough, wild times, when insult or cruelty to a woman was among the commonest events, it was something for a woman to know that by wearing a certain uniform, her person would be regarded as so sacred that he who dared to molest her would be a man of rare and exceptional wickedness. It was something, also, to be sure, even moderately sure, of provision for her bodily needs during life: something to know that if any sudden accident should deprive her of the services of her only companion, the world

deemed it so good a deed to serve her, that any woman whom she might summon through her little window would consider herself honoured and benefited by being allowed to minister to her even in the meanest manner. The loss of liberty was much assuaged and compensated, by being set against such advantages as these. The recluse was considered the holiest of nuns, not to say of women, and the Countess of Oxford herself would have held it no degradation to serve her in her need.

Derette would dearly have liked to secure the companionship of Ermine, but she saw plainly that it was not to be. When the morning came, therefore, she was much less surprised than sorry that Ermine declined the offer. Gerhardt pressed it on her in vain.

"If you command me, my brother," said Ermine, "I will obey, for you have a right to dispose of me; but if the matter is left to my own choice, I stay with you, and your lot shall be mine."

"But if our lot be hardship and persecution, my Ermine—cold and hunger, nakedness, and peril and sword! This might be a somewhat dull and dreary life for thee, but were it not a safe one?"

"Had the Master a safe and easy life, Brother, that His servants should seek it? Is the world so safe, and the way to Paradise so hard? Is it not written, 'Blessed are ye, when they shall persecute you'? Methinks I see arising, even now, that little cloud which shall ere long cover all the sky with darkness. Shall I choose my place with the 'fearful' that are left without the Holy City, rather than with them that shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth?"

"It is written again, 'When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another,'" replied Gerhardt.

"*When* they persecute you," repeated Ermine. "It has not come yet."

"It may be too late, when it has come."

"Then the way will be plain before me."

"Well, dear, I will urge you no further," said Gerhardt at last, drawing a heavy sigh. "I had hoped that for thee at least—The will of the Lord be done."

"If it were His will to preserve my life, even the persecutors themselves might be made the occasion of doing so."

"True, my Ermine. It may be thou hast more faith than I. Be it as thou wilt."

So Derette had to seek another maid.

"I'm sure I don't know who you'll get," said Isel. "There's Franna's Hawise, but she's a bit of a temper,"—which her hearers knew to be a very mild representation of facts: "and there's Turguia's grand-daughter, Canda, but you'll have to throw a bucket of water over her of a morrow, or she'll never be out of bed before sunrise on the shortest day of the year. Then there's Henry's niece, Joan—" then pronounced as a dissyllable, Joan—"but I wouldn't have such a sloven about me. I never see her but her shoes are down at heel, and if her gown isn't rent for a couple of hand-breadths, it's as much as you can look for. Deary me, these girls! they're a sorry lot, the whole heap of 'em! / don't know where you're going to find one, Derette."

"Put it in the Lord's hands, and He will find you one."

"I'll tell you what, Gerard, I never heard the like of you," answered Isel, setting her pan swinging by its chain on the hook over the fire. "You begin and end every mortal thing with our Lord, and you're saying your prayers pretty nigh all day long. Are you certain sure you've never been a monk?"

"Very certain, friend," said Gerhardt, smiling. "Is not the existence of Agnes answer enough to that?"

"Oh, but you might have run away," said Isel, whose convictions on most subjects were of rather a hazy order. "There are monks that do, and priests too: or if they don't forsake their Order, they don't behave like it. Why, just look at Reinbald the Chaplain—who'd ever take him for a priest, with his long curls and his silken robes, and ruffling up his hair to hide the tonsure?"

"Ay, there are men who are ashamed of nothing so much as of the cross which their Master bore for them," admitted Gerhardt sorrowfully. "And at times it looks as if the lighter the cross be, the less ready they are to carry it. There be who would face a drawn sword more willingly than a scornful laugh."

"Well, we none of us like to be laughed at."

"True. But he who denies his faith through the mockery of Herod's soldiers, how shall he bear the scourging in Pilate's hall?"

"Well, I'm none so fond of neither of 'em," said Isel, taking down a ham.

"It is only women who can't stand being touched," commented Haimet rather disdainfully. "But you are out there, Gerard: it is a disgrace to be laughed at, and disgrace is ever worse to a true man than pain."

"Why should it be disgrace, if I am in the right?" answered Gerhardt. "If I do evil, and refuse to own it, that is disgrace, if you will; but if I do well, or speak truth, and stand by it, what cause have I to be ashamed?"

"But if men believe that you have done ill, is that no disgrace?"

"If they believe it on false witness, the disgrace is equally false. 'Blessed are ye, when men shall persecute you, and shall say all evil against you, lying, for My sake.' Those are His words who bore all shame for us."

"They sha'n't say it of me, unless they smart for it!" cried Haimet hotly.

"Then wilt thou not be a true follower of the Lamb of God, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, but committed Himself unto Him that judgeth righteously."

"Saints be with you!" said Anania, lifting the latch, and intercepting a response from Haimet which might have been somewhat incisive. "I declare, I'm just killed with the heat!"

"I should have guessed you were alive, from the look of you," returned Derette calmly.

"So you're going into the anchorhold, I hear?" said Anania, fanning herself with her handkerchief.

"If Romund can obtain it for me."

"Oh, he has; it's all settled. Didn't you know? I met Mabel in Saint Frideswide's Street (which ran close to the north of the Cathedral), and she told me so.—Aunt Isel, I do wonder you don't look better after that young woman! She'll bring Romund to his last penny before she's done. That chape (a cape or mantle) she had on must have cost as pretty a sum as would have bought a flock of sheep. I never saw such extravagance."

"The money's her own," responded Isel shortly.

"It's his too. And you're his mother. You never ought to let her go on as she does."

"Deary me, Anania, as if I hadn't enough to do!"

"Other folks can slice ham and boil cabbage. You've got no call to neglect your duty. I can tell you, Franna's that shocked you don't speak to the girl; and Turguia was saying only the other day, she didn't believe in folks that pretended to care so much for their children, and let other folks run 'em into all sorts of troubles for want of looking after a bit. I'll tell you, Aunt Isel—"

"Anania, I'll tell *you*," cried Isel, thoroughly put out, for she was hot and tired and not feeling strong, "I'll tell you this once, you're a regular plague and a mischief-maker. You'd make me quarrel with all the friends I have in the world, if I listened to you. Sit you down and rest, if you like to be peaceable; and if you don't, just go home and give other folks a bit of rest for once in your life. I'm just worn out with you, and that's the honest truth."

"Well, to be sure!" gasped the porter's wife, in high dudgeon and much amazement. "I never did—! Dear, dear, to think of it—how ungrateful folks can be! You give them the best advice, and try to help them all you can, and they turn on you like a dog for it! Very well, Aunt Isel; I'll let you alone!—and if you don't rue it one of these days, when your fine lady daughter-in-law has brought you down to beggary for want of a proper word, my name isn't Anania—that's all!"

"Oh, deary weary me!" moaned poor Isel, dropping herself on the form as if she could not stand for another minute. "If this ain't a queer world, I just *don't* know! Folks never let you have a shred of peace, and come and worrit you that bad till you scarce can tell whether you're on your head or your heels, and you could almost find in your heart to wish 'em safe in Heaven, and then if they don't set to work and abuse you like Noah's wife (Note 1) if you don't thank 'em for it! That girl Anania 'll be the death of me one of these days, if she doesn't mend her ways. Woe worth the day that Osbert brought her here to plague us!"

"I fancy he'd say Amen to that," remarked Haimet.

"I heard him getting it pretty hot last night. But he takes it easier than you, Mother; however she goes on at him, he only whistles a tune. He has three tunes for her, and I always know how she's getting on by the one I hear. So long as it's only the *Agnus*, I dare lift the latch; but when it come to *Salve Regina*, things are going awkward."

"I wish she wasn't my niece, I do!" said poor Isel. "Well, folks, come and get your supper."

Supper was over, and the trenchers scraped—for Isel lived in great gentility, seeing that she ate from wooden trenchers, and not on plates made of thick slices of bread—when a rap on the door heralded the visit of a very superior person. Long ago, when a young girl, Isel had been chamberer, or bower-woman, of a lady named Mildred de Hameldun; and she still received occasional visits from Mildred's daughter, whose name was Aliz or Elise de Norton. Next to the Countess of Oxford and her two daughters, Aliz de Norton was the chief lady in the city. Her father, Sir Robert de Hameldun, had been Seneschal of the Castle, and her husband, Sir Ording de Norton, was now filling a similar position. Yet the lofty title of Lady was barely accorded to Aliz de Norton. At that time it was of extreme rarity; less used than in Saxon days, far less than at a subsequent date under the later Plantagenets. The only women who enjoyed it as of right were queens, wives of the king's sons, countesses, and baronesses: for at this period, the sole titles known to the peerage were those of baron and earl. Duke was still a sovereign title, and entirely a foreign one. The epithet of Dame or Lady was also the prerogative of a few abbesses, who held the rank of baroness. Very commonly, however, it was applied to the daughters of the sovereign, to all abbesses, prioresses, and recluses, and to earls' daughters; but this was a matter rather of courtesy than of right. Beyond the general epithet of "my Lord," there was no definite title of address even for the monarch. The appropriation of such terms as Grace, Highness, Excellence, Majesty, or Serenity, belongs to a much later date. Sir, however, was always restricted to knights; and Dame was the most respectful form of address that could be offered to any woman, however exalted might be her rank. The knight was above the peer, even kings receiving additional honour from knighthood; but the equivalent title of Dame does not seem to have been regularly conferred on their wives till about 1230, though it might be given in some cases, as a matter of courtesy, at a rather earlier period.

Perceiving her exalted friend, Isel went forward as quickly as was in her, to receive her with all possible cordiality, and to usher her to the best place in the chimney-corner. Aliz greeted the family pleasantly, but with a shade of constraint towards their German guests. For a few minutes they talked conventional nothings, as is the custom of those who meet only occasionally. Then Aliz said—

"I came to-day, Isel, for two reasons. Have here the first: do you know of any vacant situation for a young woman?"

Isel could do nothing in a hurry,—more especially if any mental process was involved.

"Well, maybe I might," she said slowly. "Who is it, I pray you, and what are her qualifications?"

"It is the daughter of my waiting-woman, and grand-daughter of my old nurse. She is a good girl—rather shy and

inexperienced, but she learns quickly. I would have taken her into my own household, but I have no room for her. I wish to find her a good place, not a poor one. Do you know of any?"

As Isel hesitated, Haimet took up the word.

"Would it please you to have her an anchorhold maid?"

"Oh, if she could obtain such a situation as that," said Aliz eagerly, "there would be no more to wish for."

The holiness of an anchoritess was deemed to run over upon her maid, and a young woman who wore the semi-conventual garb of those persons was safe from insult, and sure of help in time of need.

"My youngest sister goes into Saint John's anchorhold next month," said Haimet, "and we have not yet procured a maid for her."

"So that is your destiny?" said Aliz, with a smile to Derette. "Well, it is a blessed calling."

Her manner, however, added that she had no particular desire to be blessed in that fashion.

"That would be the very thing for Leuesa," she pursued. "I will send her down to talk with you. Truly, we should be very thankful to those choice souls to whom is given the rare virtue of such holy self-sacrifice."

Aliz spoke the feeling of her day, which could see no bliss for a woman except in marriage, and set single life on a pinnacle of holiness and misery not to be reached by ordinary men and women. The virtues of those self-denying people who sacrificed themselves by adopting it were supposed to be paid into an ecclesiastical treasury, and to form a kind of set-off against the every-day shortcomings of inferior married folks. Therefore Aliz expressed her gratitude for the prospect, as affording her an extra opportunity of doing her duty by proxy.

Derette was in advance of her age.

"But I am not sacrificing myself," she said. "I am pleasing myself. I should not like to be a wife."

"Oh, what a saintly creature you must be!" cried Aliz, clasping her hands in admiration. "That you can *prefer* a holy life! It is given to few indeed to attain that height."

"But the holy life does not consist in dwelling in one chamber," suggested Gerhardt, "nor in refraining from matrimony. He that dwelleth in God, in the secret place of the Most High—this is the man that is holy."

"It would be well for you, Gerard, and your friends," observed Aliz freezingly, "not to be quite so ready in offering your strange fancies on religious topics. Are you aware that the priests of the city have sent up a memorial concerning you to my Lord the Bishop, and that it has been laid before King Henry?"

The strawberry which Gerhardt's tool was just then rounding was not quite so perfect a round as its neighbours. He laid the tool down, and the hand which held the carving trembled slightly.

"No, I did not know it," he said in a low voice. "I thank you for the warning."

"I fear there may be some penance inflicted on you," resumed Aliz, not unkindly. "The wisest course for you would be at once to submit, and not even to attempt any excuse."

Gerhardt looked up—a look which struck all who saw it. There was in it a little surface trouble, but under that a look of such perfect peace and sweet acceptance of the Divine will, as they had never before beheld.

"There will be no penance laid on me," he said, "that my Father will not help me to bear. I have only to take the next step, whether it lead into the home at Bethany or the judgment-hall of Pilate. The Garden of God lies beyond them both."

Aliz looked at him as if he were speaking a foreign tongue.

"Gerard," she said, "I do hope you have no foolish ideas of braving out the censure of the Bishop. Such action would not only be sin, but it would be the worst policy imaginable. Holy Church is always merciful to those who abase themselves before her,—who own their folly, and humbly bow to her rebuke. But she has no mercy on rebels who persist in their rebellion,—stubborn self-opinionated men, who in their incredible folly and presumption imagine themselves capable of correcting her."

"No," answered Gerhardt in that same low voice. "She has no mercy."

"Then I hope you see how very foolish and impossible it would be for you to adopt any other course than that of instant and complete submission?" urged Aliz in a kinder tone.

Gerhardt rose from his seat and faced her.

"Your meaning is kind," he said, "and conscientious also. You desire the glory of your Church, but you also feel pity for the suffering of the human creatures who dissent from her, and are crushed under the wheels of her triumphal car. I thank you for that pity. In the land where one cup of cold water goeth not without its reward, it may be that even a passing impulse of compassion is not forgotten before God. It may at least call down some earthly blessing. But for me—my way is clear before me, and I have but to go straight forward. I thank God that I know my duty. Doubt is worse than pain."

"Indeed, I am thankful too," said Aliz, as she rose to take leave. "That you should do your duty is the thing I desire.—Well, Isel, our Lady keep you! I will send Leuesa down to-morrow or the next day."

Aliz departed, and the rest began to think of bedtime. Isel sent the girls upstairs, then Haimet followed, and Agnes

went at last. But Gerhardt sat on, his eyes fixed on the cold hearth. It was evident that he regarded the news which he had heard as of no slight import. He rose at length, and walked to the window. It was only a wooden shutter, fastened by a button, and now closed for the night. Looking round to make sure that all had left the lower room, he threw the casement open. But he did not see Isel, who at the moment was concealed by the red curtain drawn half-way across the house-place, at the other end where the ladder went up.

“Father!” he said, his eyes fixed on the darkened sky, “is the way to Thy holy hill through this thorny path? Wheresoever Thou shalt guide, I go with Thee. But ‘these are in the world!’ Keep them through Thy name, and let us meet in the Garden of God, if we may not go together. O blessed Jesu Christ! the forget-me-nots which bloom around Thy cross are fairer than all the flowers of the world’s gardens.”

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Note 1. In the medieval mystery plays, Noah’s wife was always represented as a scolding vixen.

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## Chapter Six.

### Taken in the Net.

“There is no time so miserable  
But a man may be true.”

Shakespeare.

“Berthold, hast thou heard the news?”

“I have, Pastor. I was coming to ask if you had heard it.”

“Ah, it was told me last night, by one that meant it kindly. I knew it would come sooner or later.”

“What will they do, think you?” Gerhardt hesitated. It was not so easy to guess in 1165 the awful depths to which religious hatred could descend, as it would have been some two centuries later. They knew something then of the fury of the Church against open unbelievers or political enemies; but persecution of Christians by Christians on account of nothing but their belief and the confession of it, was something new at that time.

“They will impose penance on us, I suppose,” suggested old Berthold.

“Doubtless, if we stand firm. And we must stand firm, Berthold,—every one of us.”

“Oh, of course,” replied Berthold calmly. “They won’t touch the women?—what think you?”

“I know not what to think. But I imagine—not.”

“Fine and scourging, perchance. Well, we can stand that.”

“We can stand any thing with God to aid us: without Him we can bear nothing. Thanks be to the Lord, that last they that trust Him will never be called upon to do.”

“I heard there was a council of the bishops to be held upon us,” suggested Berthold a little doubtfully.

“I hope not. That were worse for us than a summons before the King. Howbeit, the will of the Lord be done. It may be that the hotter the furnace is heated, the more glory shall be His by the song of His servants in the fires.”

“Ay, there’ll be four,” said old Berthold, bowing reverently. “Sure enough, Pastor, whatever we are called upon to bear, there will be One more than our number, and His form shall be that of the *Son* of God. Well! the children will be safe, no question. But I am afraid the hottest corner of the furnace may be kept for you, dear Teacher.”

“Be it so,” answered Gerhardt quietly. “Let my Lord do with me what is good in His sight; only let me bring glory to Him, and show forth His name among the people.”

“Ay, but it does seem strange,” was the response, “that the work should be stopped, and the cause suffer, and eloquent lips be silenced, just when all seemed most needed! Can you understand it, Pastor?”

“No,” said Gerhardt calmly. “Why should I? He understands who has it all to do. But the cause, Berthold! The cause will not suffer. It is God’s custom to bring good out of evil—to give honey to His Samsons out of the carcasses of lions, and to bring His Davids through the cave of Adullam to the throne of Israel. It is for Him to see that the cause prospers, in His own time and way. We have only to do each our little handful of duty, to take the next step as He brings it before us. Sometimes the next step is a steep pull, sometimes it is only an easy level progress. We have but to take it as it comes. Never two steps at once; never one step, without the Lord at our right hand. Never a cry of ‘Lord, save me!’ from a sinking soul, that the hand which holds up all the worlds is not immediately stretched forth to hold him up.”

“One can’t always feel it, though,” said the old man wistfully.

“It is enough to know it.”

“Ay, when we two stand talking together in Overee Lane (Overee Lane ran out of Grandpont Street, just below the South Gate), so it may be: but when the furnace door stands open, an King Nebuchadnezzar’s mighty men are hauling you towards it, how then, good Pastor?”

“Berthold, what kind of a father would he be who, in carrying his child over a bridge, should hold it so carelessly that he let it slip from his arms into the torrent beneath, and be drowned?”

"Couldn't believe such a tale, Pastor, unless the father were either drunk or mad. Why, he wouldn't be a man—he'd be a monster."

"And is that the character that thou deemest it fair and true to give to Him who laid down His life for thee?"

"Pastor!—Oh! I see now what you mean. Well—ay, of course—"

"Depend upon it, Berthold, the Lord shall see that thou hast grace sufficient for the evil day, if thy trust be laid on Him. He shall not give thee half enough for thy need out of His royal treasure, and leave thee to make up the other half out of thy poor empty coffer. 'My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory'—'that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.' Is that too small an alner (Note 1) to hold the wealth thou wouldst have? How many things needest thou beyond 'a// things'?"

"True enough," said Berthold. "But I was not thinking so much of myself, Pastor—I've had my life: I'm two-and-fourscore this day; and if I am called on to lay it down for the Lord, it will only be a few months at the furthest that I have to give Him. It wouldn't take so much to kill me, neither. An old man dies maybe easier than one in the full vigour of life. But you, my dear Pastor!—and the young fellows among us—Guelph, and Conrad, and Dietbold, and Wilhelm—it'll be harder work for the young saplings to stand the blast, than for the old oak whose boughs have bent before a thousand storms. There would most likely be a long term of suffering before you, when my rest was won."

"Then our rest would be the sweeter," replied Gerhardt softly. "'He knoweth the way that we take; when He hath tried us, we shall come forth as gold.' He is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tried above that we are able to bear. And He can make us able to bear any thing."

Gerhardt was just turning into Kepeharme Lane, when a voice at his elbow made him pause and look back.

"Did you want me, friend?"

"No," answered a hoarse voice, in a significant tone. "You want me."

Gerhardt smiled. "I thank you, then, for coming to my help. I almost think I know your voice. Are you not Rubi, the brother of Countess, who made such a pet of my little child?"

An affirmative grunt was the response.

"Well, friend?"

"If an open pit lay just across this street, between you and the Walnut Tree, what would you do?" asked the hoarse voice.

"That would depend on how necessary it was that I should pass it, would it not?"

"Life this way—death that way," said Rubi shortly.

"And what way honour?"

"Pshaw! 'All that a man hath will he give for his life.'"

"Truth: yet even life, sometimes, will a man give for glory, patriotism, or love. There is a life beyond this, friend Rubi; and for that, no price were too high to pay."

"Men may weigh gold, but not clouds," answered Rubi in a rather scornful tone.

"Yet how much gold would purchase the life-giving water that comes from the clouds?" was Gerhardt's ready response.

"At how much do you value your life?" asked Rubi without answering the question.

"Truly, friend, I know not how to respond to that. Do you count my life to be in danger, that you ask me?"

"Not if the morning light come to you in Aylesbury or Cricklade—at least, perchance not. But if it dawn on you where you can hear the bell from yon tower—ay, I do."

"I perceive your meaning. You would have me to fly."

In the evening twilight, now fast darkening, Gerhardt could see a nod of Rubi's black head.

"'Should such a man as I flee?' Friend, I am the leader of this band of my countrymen—"

"Just so. That's the reason."

"Were I to flee, would they stand firm?" said Gerhardt thoughtfully, rather to himself than to the young Jew.

"Firm—to what?"

"To God," replied Gerhardt reverently, "and to His truth."

"What does a Gentile care for truth? They want you to worship one dead man, and you prefer to worship another dead man. What's the odds to you? Can't you mutter your Latin, and play with your beads, before both, and have done with it?"

"I worship no saints, and have no beads."

"Father Jacob! You must be a new sort of a Gentile. Never came across a reptile of your pattern before. Is that why Countess took to you?"

"I cannot say. It was the child, I think, that attracted her. Well, friend, I am thankful for your warning. But how come you to know?"

A smothered laugh, as hoarse as the voice, replied—

"Folks have ways and means, sometimes, that other folks can't always guess."

"If you know more than others," said Gerhardt boldly, "suffer me to question you a moment."

"Question away. I don't promise to answer."

"Are we all to be taken and examined?"

"All."

"Before the King?"

"And the creeping creatures called Bishops."

"Will any thing be done to the women and children?"

"Does the lion discriminate between a kid and a goat? 'Let your little ones also go with you.' Even Pharaoh could say that—when he could not help allowing it."

"I think I understand you, Friend Rubi, and I thank you."

"You are not so badly off for brains," said Rubi approvingly.

"But how far to act upon your warning I know not, until I lay it before the Lord, and receive His guidance."

"You—a Gentile—receive guidance from the Holy One (blessed be He)!" Rubi's tone was not precisely scornful; it seemed rather a mixture of surprise, curiosity, and perplexity.

"Ay, friend, I assure you, however strange it may seem to you, the good Lord deigns to guide even us Gentiles. And why not? Is it not written, 'Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer'? and, 'O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come'?"

"Those promises belong to the reign of the Messiah. He is not come yet. Do you new sort of Gentiles believe He is?"

It was a most difficult question to answer. "Yes" would probably drive Rubi away in anger—perhaps with a torrent of blasphemy on his lips. "No" would be false and cowardly.

"I believe," said Gerhardt softly, "that He shall yet come to Zion, and turn away iniquity from Jacob. May thou and I, Rubi, be ready to welcome Him when He cometh!"

"You are better than yonder lot," answered Rubi, with a scornful wave of his hand towards Carfax behind them. "Ay, I suppose the Blessed One has some mercies even for Gentiles—decent ones such as you. Well, remember you've been warned. Good night!"

"Good night, Rubi, and God go with thee!"

As Gerhardt stepped into the Walnut Tree, Isel's voice greeted him from the top of the ladder leading to the upper chamber.

"Who is that—Gerard or Haimet?"

"It is I, Isel," said the German pastor.

"Well, now, don't put out your lantern, but do, like a good man, take this girl back to the Castle. I've been on thorns how to get her back, for I've kept her talking a bit too long, and there hasn't a creature come near that I could ask. It's Leuesa, that Aliz de Norton spoke about, and we've settled she's to be Derette's maid. It's a mercy you've come just in time!"

"The next step!" said Gerhardt to himself with a smile. "Well, this at least is no hard one."

The girl who came down the ladder and entrusted herself to Gerhardt's escort, was very young-looking for an anchorhold: slim, fair, and frail in appearance, with some timidity of manner. They set out for the Castle.

"You know the girl who is to be my mistress?" asked Leuesa. "Will she be easy or hard to serve?"

"Very easy, I think, so long as you obey her. She has a will of her own, as you will find, if you do not."

"Oh dear, I don't want to disobey her! But I don't like to be scolded at from morning to night, whether I do right or wrong."

"Derette will not treat you in that fashion. She has a good temper, and is bright and cheerful."

"I am so glad to hear it! I get so tired—"

Leuesa suddenly broke off her sentence.

"You look young for the work," said Gerhardt.

"I am older than I look. At least, people say so. I am twenty-one."

"Dear! I should not have thought you eighteen."

"Oh yes, I am twenty-one," replied Leuesa, with a bright little laugh; adding with sudden gravity, "I think I am much older than that in some ways."

"Hast thou found life hard, poor child?" asked Gerhardt sympathisingly.

"Well, one gets tired, you know," replied the girl vaguely. "I suppose it has to be, if one's sins are to be expiated. So many sins, so many sufferings. That's what Mother says. It will be counted up some time, maybe. Only, sometimes, it does seem as if there were more sufferings than sins."

"Is that thy religion, Maiden?" responded Gerhardt with a pitying smile.

"It's about all I know. Why?—isn't it good?"

"Friend, if thou wert to suffer for ten thousand years, without a moment's intermission, thy sins could never be balanced by thy sufferings. Suffering is finite; sin is infinite. It is not only what thou hast done, or hast left undone. The sin of thy whole nature requires atonement. *Thou art sin!* The love of sin which is in thee is worse than any act of sin thou couldst commit. What then is to be done with thy sins?"

Leuesa looked up with an expression of wistful simplicity in her blue eyes.

She might be older than her years in some respects, thought Gerhardt, but there were some others in which she was a very child.

"I don't know!" she said blankly, with a frightened accent. "Can't you tell me?"

"Thank God, I can tell thee. Thou must get rid of this load of sin, by laying it on Him who came down from Heaven that He might bear it for thee. Tell me whom I mean."

The flaxen head was shaken. "I can't—not certainly. Perhaps it's a saint I don't know."

"Dost thou not know Jesu Christ?"

"Oh, of course. He's to judge us at the last day."

"If He save thee not before He judge thee, thou wilt never be saved. Dost thou not know He is the Saviour of men?"

"Well, I've heard say so, but I never thought it meant any thing."

"It means every thing to sinners. Now, how art thou about to come by the salvation that Christ has wrought for thee?"

"The priest will give me some, won't he?"

"He hath it not to give thee. Thou must go straight to the Lord Himself."

"But I can't go save through the Church. And oh dear, but I should be frightened to have aught to do with Him! Except when He's a baby, and then we've got our Lady to intercede for us."

"Art thou, then, very much afraid of me?"

"You? Oh no! You're coming with me to take care of me—aren't you?"

"I am. But what am I doing for thee, in comparison of Him who died for thee? Afraid of the Lord that laid down His life for thine! Why, Maiden, there is nought in His heart for thee save love and pity and strength to help. He loved thee—get it into thy mind, grave it deep in thy soul—He loved thee, and gave His life for thee."

"Me?" Leuesa had come to a sudden stand. "You don't mean *me*?"

"I mean thee, and none other."

"Mother always says I'm so stupid, nobody will ever care for me. I thought—I never heard any body talk like that. I thought it was only the very greatest saints that could get near Him, and then only through the Church."

"Thou and I are the Church, if Christ saves us."

"Oh, what do you mean? The priests and bishops are the Church. At least they say so."

"Ay, they do say so, the hirelings that foul with their feet the water whence the flock should drink: 'we are the people, and wisdom shall die with us!' 'The Temple of the Lord are we!' But the Temple of the Lord is larger, and wider, and higher, than their poor narrow souls. Maiden, listen to me, for I speak to thee words from God. The Church of God consists of the elect of God from the beginning to the end of the world, by the grace of God, through the merits of Christ,



gathered together by the Holy Ghost, and fore-ordained to eternal life. They that hear and understand the Word of God, receiving it to their souls' health, and being justified by Christ—these are the Church; these go into life eternal. Hast thou understood me, Maiden?"

"I don't—exactly—know," she said slowly. "I should like to understand. But how can I know whether I am one of them or not?"

"Of the elect of God? If thou hast chosen God rather than the world, that is the strongest evidence thou canst have that He has chosen thee out of the world."

"But I sha'n't be in the world—just exactly. You see I'm going to live in the anchorhold. That isn't the world."

It was not easy to teach one who spoke a different dialect from the teacher. To Gerhardt, the world was the opposite of God; to Leuesa, it was merely the opposite of the cloister.

"Put 'sin' for 'the world,' Maiden," said Gerhardt, "and thou wilt understand me better."

"But what must I do to keep out of sin?"

"If thou wilt love Christ and follow His teaching," said Gerhardt, quoting from his confession of faith, "'thou must watch, and read the Scriptures. Spiritual poverty of heart must thou have, and love purity, and serve God in humility.'"

"I can't read!" exclaimed Leuesa, in a tone which showed that she would have deemed it a very extraordinary thing if she could.

"Thou canst hear. Ermine will repeat them to thee, if thou ask her—so long as we are here."

"Osbert says you won't be for long. He thinks you are bad people; I don't know why."

"Nor do I, seeing we serve God—save that the enemy of God and men spreads abroad falsehoods against us."

They had reached the little postern of the Castle. Gerhardt rapped at the door, and after two or three repetitions, it was opened.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Stephen's voice behind it. "Get you in quickly, Leuesa, for Hagen's in a terrible tantrum. She declares you've run away."

"I'm late, I know," answered Leuesa humbly; "but I could not help it, Stephen."

"Well, you'll catch it, I can tell you; and the longer you stay, the more you'll catch: so best get it over.—Gerard, will you come in? I want a word with you."

Gerhardt stepped inside the postern, and Stephen beckoned him into an outhouse, at the moment untenanted.

"What are you going to do?"

"About what?"

"What! Don't you know you are to be haled before the Bishops? Every body else does."

"Yes, I have been told so."

"Are you going to wait for them?" demanded Stephen, with several notes of astonishment in his voice.

"I am going to wait for the Lord."

"You'll be a fool if you do!" The tone was compassionate, though the words were rough.

"Never. 'They shall not be ashamed that wait for Him.'"

"Do you expect Him to come down from Heaven to save you from the Bishops?"

"As He pleases," said Gerhardt quietly.

"But, man!—if you are a man, and not a stone—don't you know that the Church has authority from God to bind and loose—that her sentence is His also?"

"Your Church has no jurisdiction over mine."

"My Church, forsooth! I am speaking of the Catholic Church, which has authority over every Christian on earth."

"Where is it?"

"Every where."

"The Church that is every where consists of faithful souls, elect of God. That Church will not condemn me for being faithful to the Word of God."

"Oh, I can't split straws like you, nor preach like a doctor of the schools either. But one thing I can do, and that is to say, Gerard, you are in danger—much more danger than the rest. Get away while you can, and leave them to meet it. They won't do half so much to them as to you."

“He that is an hireling, when he seeth the wolf coming, leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.’ Is that conduct you recommend, Stephen?”

“I recommend you to get outside of Oxford as fast as you can, and take your womankind with you; and if you don’t, you’ll be sorry, that’s all. Now be off, and don’t forget that you’ve been warned. Good night!”

“I have been warned thrice, friend. But where God has need of me, there is my post, and there am I. There are penalties for desertion in the army of the Lord. I thank you for your kindly meaning. Good night!”

“Poor fool!” said Stephen to himself as he fastened the postern behind Gerhardt. “Yet—‘penalties for desertion’—I don’t know. Which is the fool, I wonder? If I could have saved *her!*”

Gerhardt went back to the Walnut Tree, where they were sitting down to the last meal. It consisted of “fat fish,” apple turnovers, and spiced ale.

“Eh dear!” said Isel, with a sigh. “To think that this is pretty nigh the last supper you’ll ever eat in this house, Derette! I could cry with the best when I think of it.”

“You can come to see me whenever you wish, Mother—much better than if I were at Godstowe.”

“So I can, child; but you can’t come to me.”

“I can send Leuesa to say that I want to see you.”

“Well, and if so be that I’ve broken my leg that very morning, and am lying groaning up atop of that ladder, with never a daughter to serve me—how then? Thou gone, and Flemild gone, and not a creature near!”

“You’ll have Ermine. But you are not going to break your leg, Mother, I hope.”

“You hope! Oh ay, hope’s a fine trimming, but it’s poor stuff for a gown. And how long shall I have Ermine? She’ll go and wed somebody or other—you see if she doesn’t.”

Ermine smiled and shook her head.

“Well, then, you’ll have Agnes.”

“I shall have trouble—that’s what I shall have: it’s the only thing sure in this world: and it’s that loving it sticks to you all the tighter if you’ve got nothing else. There’s nought else does in this world—without it’s dogs.”

“‘There’s a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother,’” quoted Gerhardt softly.

“There’s precious few of them,” returned Isel, who naturally did not understand the allusion. “You’ll not find one of that sort more than once in a— Mercy on us! here’s a soldier walking straight in!—whatever does the man want?”

Gerhardt’s quick eyes had caught the foreign texture of the soldier’s mantle—the bronzed face with its likeness to Derette—the white cross of the English Crusader.

“He wants his wife and children, I should think,” he answered calmly; and at the same moment the soldier said—

“Isel! Wife! Dost thou not know me?”

Nobody in the room could have given a clear and connected account of what happened after that. Isel cried and laughed by turns, the majority all talked at once, and little Rudolph, divided between fear and admiration, clung to his mother, and cast furtive glances at the new-comer. Manning was naturally astonished to see how his family had grown, and much had to be explained to him—the presence of the Germans, the approaching marriage of Flemild, the past marriage of Romund, and the profession of Derette. The first and third he accepted with bluff good-humour. As to the second, he said he would have a talk with Raven Soclin—very likely he was all right now, though he remembered him a troublesome lad. But Derette’s fate did not appear quite to please him. She had been his pet, and he had pictured her future differently and more according to his own notion of happiness.

“Well, she seems to like it best herself,” said Isel, “and I don’t see but you have to leave folks to be happy their own way, though the way some folks choose is mighty queer. Father Dolfin says we must always give God the best, and if we grudge it to Him, it wipes out the merit of the sacrifice.”

“Ay, Father Dolfin knows how they do things up yonder,” answered Manning. “Do thy duty, and leave the priest to see thou comest safe—that’s my way of thinking.”

“But suppose he fails to ‘see’?” suggested Gerhardt.

Manning eyed him rather suspiciously.

“I hope you aren’t one of that new lot that talk against the priests,” said he. “I’ve heard something of them as I came through Almayne and Guienne: saw one fellow flogged at the market-cross, that had let his tongue run too freely. And I can tell you, I’m not one of that sort. You’re welcome to stay while you behave decently, as I see you’ve been a help and comfort to my women here: but one word against the priests, or one wag of your head in irreverence to the holy mass, and out you go, bag and baggage!—ay, down to that child.”

Rudolph seemed frightened by the harsh tones and loud words, and when Manning ended by striking his hand upon his thigh with a resounding slap to enforce his threat, the child began to whimper.

“I trust, friend, you will never see any irreverence in me towards aught to which reverence is due,” replied Gerhardt; “but if you do, fulfil your words, and I shall not trouble you longer.”

"Well, look out!" said Manning. "I don't much like your long prayers just now: they're a bad sign. As to Haimet's Latin grace, I suppose he's learnt that in the schools; and praying in Latin isn't so bad. But a cross over the supper-table is plenty good enough for me. I never did believe in folks that are always saying their prayers, and reckoning to be better than their neighbours."

"I believe in being as good as I can be," said Gerhardt with a smile. "If that should make me better than my neighbours, it would hardly be my fault, would it? But in truth, Friend Manning, I do not think myself any better, for I know too much of the evil of mine own heart."

"Ay, that's the lingo of the pestilent vipers in Guienne! I could find in my heart to lay a silver penny you'll turn out to be one of that brood. Girls, I hope you haven't caught the infection? We'll wait a few days and see—what we shall see."

"Eh, Manning, they're the peaceablest set ever came in a house!" exclaimed Isel. "Helped me over and over, they have, and never one of 'em gave me an ill word. And Gerard's made a pretty penny with weaving and wood-carving, and every farthing he's given me, save what they wanted for clothes. Do, for mercy's sake, let 'em be! Flemild married, and Derette away to the anchorhold—I shall be a lost woman without Agnes and Ermine! Nigh on seven years they've been here, and I haven't been so comfortable in all my life afore. They may have some queer notions in their heads—that I can't say; most folks have one way or another—but they're downright good for help and quietness. They are, so!"

"What says Father Dolfin about them?"

"Well, he don't say much of no sort," answered Isel doubtfully, with an uneasy recollection of one or two things he had lately said. "But I say they're as good folks as ever walked in shoe-leather, and you'll not find their match in Oxford, let be Kepeharme Lane."

"Well," said Manning, "let them bide a few days: we shall see. But I shall brook no heresy, and so I give you fair warning. No heretic, known to me, shall ever darken the doors of a soldier of the cross!"

"I pray you, hold to that!" was Gerhardt's answer.

The next morning dawned a fair autumn day. Manning seemed somewhat more inclined to be friendly than on the previous evening, and matters went on pleasantly enough until the hour of dinner. They had just risen from table when a rap came on the door. Flemild went to open it.

"Holy saints!" they heard her cry.

Then the door opened, and in walked two men in red and white livery, with four golden crosses patée embroidered on the left arm. With a glance round, they addressed themselves to Manning.

"Are you the owner of this house?"

Manning knew in a moment who his visitors were—official sumners of the Bishop of Lincoln.

"I am," he said. "What would you have?"

One of the sumners unrolled a parchment deed.

"We have here a writ to take the bodies of certain persons believed to be in your house, and we bid you, in the name of holy Church, that you aid us in the execution of our office."

Isel, terribly frightened, was muttering Ave Marias by the dozen. To Gerhardt's forehead the blood had surged in one sudden flush, and then subsiding, left him calm and pale.

"When holy Church bids, I am her lowly servant," was Manning's answer. "Do your duty."

"You say well," replied the sumner. "I demand the body of one Gerard, a stranger of Almayne, of Agnes his wife, of Rudolph their son, and of Ermine, the man's sister."

"Of what stand they accused?"

"Of the worst that could be—heresy."

"Then will I give them no shelter. I pray you to note, Master Sumner, that I returned but last night from over seas, whither I have followed the cross, and have not hitherto had any opportunity to judge of these whom I found here."

"You will have opportunity to clear yourself before the Council," said the sumner. "Find me a rope, good woman. Is *this* your son?" he added, appealing to Gerhardt.

"This is my son," answered Gerhardt, with a tremulous smile. "He is scarcely yet old enough to commit crime."

"Eh, dear, good gentlemen, you'll never take the little child!" pleaded Isel. "Why, he is but a babe. I'll swear to you by every saint in the Calendar, if you will, to bring him up the very best of Catholic Christians, under Father Dolfin's eye. What can he have done?"

"He believes what has been taught him, probably," said the sumner grimly. "But I cannot help it, good wife—the boy's name is in the writ. The only favour in my power to show is to tie him with his mother. Come now, the rope—quick!"

"No rope of mine shall tie *them*!" said Isel, with sudden determination which no one had expected from her. "You may go buy your own ropes for such innocent lambs, for I'll not find you one!"

"But a rope of mine shall!" thundered Manning. "Sit down, silly woman, and hold thy tongue.—I beseech you, my masters, to pardon this foolish creature; women are always making simpletons of themselves."

"Don't put yourself out, good man," answered the sumner with a smile of superiority; "I have a wife and four daughters."

Haimet now appeared with a rope which he handed to the sumner, who proceeded to tie together first Gerhardt and Ermine, then Agnes and Rudolph. The child was thoroughly frightened, and sobbing piteously.

"Oh deary, deary me!" wailed poor Isel. "That ever such a day should come to my house! Dame Mary, and all the blessed Saints in Heaven, have mercy on us! Haven't I always said there was nought but trouble in this world?"

"It's no good vexing, Mother; it has to be," said Flemild, but there were tears in her eyes. "I'm glad Derette's not here."

Derette had gone to see her cousins at the Castle,—a sort of farewell visit before entering the anchorhold.

"Then I'm sorry," said Isel. "She might have given those rascals a lick with the rough side of her tongue—much if she wouldn't, too. I'd like to have heard it, I would!"

The prisoners were marched out, with much show of righteous indignation against them from Manning, and stolid assistance to the sumners on the part of Haimet. When the door was shut and all quiet again, Manning came up to Isel.

"Come, Wife, don't take on!" he said, in a much more gentle tone than before. "We must not let ourselves be suspected, you know. Perhaps they'll be acquitted—they seem decent, peaceable folk, and it may be found to be a false accusation. So long as holy Church does not condemn them, we need not: but you know we must not set ourselves against her officers, nor get ourselves suspected and into trouble. Hush, children! the fewer words the better. They may turn out to be all wrong, and then it would be sin to pity them. We can but wait and see."

"Saints alive! but I'm in a whole sea of trouble already!" cried Isel. "We've lost six hands for work; and good workers too; and here had I reckoned on Ermine tarrying with me, and being like a daughter to me, when my own were gone: and what am I to do now, never speak of them?"

"There are plenty more girls in the city," said Manning.

"Maybe: but not another Ermine."

"Perhaps not; but it's no good crying over spilt milk, Isel. Do the best you can with what you have; and keep your mouth shut about what you have not."

Haimet was seen no more till nearly bedtime, when he came in with the information that all the Germans had been committed to the Castle dungeon, to await the arrival of King Henry, who had summoned a Council of Bishops to sit on the question, the Sunday after Christmas. That untried prisoners should be kept nearly four months in a dark, damp, unhealthy cellar, termed a dungeon, was much too common an occurrence to excite surprise. Isel, as usual, lamented over it, and Derette, who had seen the prisoners marched into the Castle yard, was as warm in her sympathy as even her mother could have wished. Manning tried, not unkindly, to silence them both, and succeeded only when they had worn themselves out.

About ten days later, Derette made her profession, and was installed in the anchorhold, with Leuesa as her maid. The anchorhold consisted of two small chambers, some ten feet square, with a doorway of communication that could be closed by a curtain. The inner room, which was the bedchamber, was furnished with two bundles of straw, two rough woollen rugs, a tin basin, a wooden coffer, a form, and some hooks for hanging garments at one end. The outer room was kitchen and parlour; it held a tiny hearth for a wood-fire (no chimney), another form, a small pair of trestles and boards to form a table, which were piled in a corner when not wanted for immediate use; sundry shelves were put up around the walls, and from hooks in the low ceiling hung a lamp, a water-bucket, a pair of bellows, a bunch of candles, a rope of onions, a string of dried salt fish, and several bundles of medical herbs. The scent of the apartment, as may be imagined, was somewhat less fragrant than that of roses. In one corner stood the Virgin Mary, newly-painted and gilt; in the opposite one, Saint John the Baptist, whom the imager had made with such patent whites to his eyes, set in a bronzed complexion, that the effect was rather startling. A very small selection of primitive culinary utensils lay on a shelf close to the hearth. Much was not wanted, when the most sumptuous meal to be had was boiled fish or roasted onions.

Derette was extremely tired, and it was no cause for wonder. From early morning she had been kept on the strain by most exciting incidents. Her childhood's home, though it was scarcely more than a stone's throw from her, she was never to see again. Father or brother might not even touch her hand any more. Her mother and sister could still enter her tiny abode; but she might never go out to them, no matter what necessity required it. Derette was bright, and sensible, and strong: but she was tired that night. And there was no better repose to be had than sitting on a hard form, and leaning her head against the chimney-corner.

"Shut the window, Leuesa," she said, "and come in. I am very weary, and I must sleep a little, if I can, before compline."

"No marvel, Lady," replied Leuesa, doing as she was requested. "I am sure you have had a tiring day. But your profession was lovely! I never saw a prettier scene in my life."

"Ay, marriages and funerals are both sights for the world. Which was it most like, thinkest thou?"

"O Lady! a marriage, of course. Has it not made you the bride of Jesu Christ?"

Leuesa fancied she heard a faint sigh from the chimney-corner; but Derette gave no answer.

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Note 1. The alner, or alms-bag, was the largest sort of purse used in the Middle Ages.

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## Chapter Seven.

## Via Dolorosa.

“We bless Thee for the quiet rest Thy servant taketh now,  
We bless Thee for his blessedness, and for his crowned brow;  
For every weary step he trod in faithful following Thee,  
And for the good fight foughten well, and closed right valiantly.”

The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin was filled to overflowing, but it was not the church we know as such now. That more ancient edifice had been built in the days of Alfred, and its nave was closely packed with the clergy of Oxford and the neighbourhood, save a circle of curule chairs reserved for the members of the Council. Into the midst of the excited crowd of clergy—among whom were sprinkled as many laymen, chiefly of the upper class, as could find room to squeeze in—filed an imposing procession of dignitaries—priests, archdeacons, bishops—all robed in full canonicals; the Bishop of the diocese being preceded by his crucifer. There was as yet no bishopric of Oxford, and the diocese was that of Lincoln. It was a point of the most rigid ecclesiastical etiquette that no prelate should have his official cross borne before him in the diocese of another: and the standing quarrel between the two archbishops on that point was acute and long lasting. The clerical procession was closed by the Dean of Saint Mary’s—John de Oxineford—a warm opponent of Becket, the exiled and absent Primate. After the clergy came a number of the chief officers of state, and lastly, King Henry the Second, who took his seat in the highest of the curule chairs, midmost among the others.

The first of the Plantagenets was no common man. Like most of his race, he was a born statesman; and also like most of them, he allowed his evil passions and natural corruption such free scope that his talents were smothered under their weight. In person he was of middle stature, somewhat thickly built, with a large round head covered by curly hair, cut square upon the forehead. Long arms ended in large hands, the care of which he entirely neglected, never wearing gloves save when he carried a hawk. His complexion was slightly florid, his eyes small but clear and sparkling, dove-like when he was pleased, but flashing fire in his anger. Though his voice was tremulous, yet he could be an eloquent speaker. He rarely sat down, but commonly stood, whether at mass, council, or meals. Except on ceremonial occasions, he was extremely careless in his attire, wearing short clothes of a homely cut, and requiring some persuasion to renew them. He detested every thing that came in the way of his convenience, whether long skirts, hanging sleeves, royal mantles, or boots with folding tops. He was (for his time) a great reader, a “huge lover of the woods” and of all sylvan sports, fond of travelling, a very small eater, a generous almsgiver, a faithful friend—and a good hater. The model example which he set before him as a statesman was that of his grandfather, Henry First. The Empress Maud, his mother, was above all things Norman, and was now living in Normandy in peaceful old age. Perhaps her stormy and eventful life had made her *fee/* weary of storms, for she rarely emerged from her retirement except in the character of a peacemaker. Certainly she had learnt wisdom by adversity. Her former supercilious sternness was gone, and a meek and quiet spirit, which earned the respect of all, had taken its place. She may have owed that change, and her quiet close of life, instrumentally, in some measure to the prayers of the good Queen Maud, that sweet and saintly mother to whom Maud the Empress had in her childhood and maturity been so complete a contrast, and whom she now resembled in her old age. Her son was unhappily not of her later tone, but rather of the earlier, though he rarely reached those passionate depths of pride and bitterness through which his aged mother had struggled into calm. He did not share her Norman proclivities, but looked back—as the mass of his people did with him—to the old Saxon laws of Alfred and of Athelstan, which he called the customs of his grandfather. In a matter of trial for heresy, or a question of doctrine, he was the obedient servant of Rome; but when the Pope laid officious hands on the venerable customs of England, and strove to dictate in points of state law, he found no obedient servant in Henry of Anjou.

This morning, being a ceremonial occasion, His Majesty’s attire had risen to it. He wore a white silken tunic, the border richly embroidered in gold; a crimson dalmatic covered with golden stars; a mantle of blue samite, fastened on the right shoulder with a golden fermail set with a large ruby; and red hose, crossed by golden bands all up the leg. The mantle was lined with grey fur; golden lioncels decorated the fronts of the black boots; and a white samite cap, adorned with ostrich feathers, and rising out of a golden fillet, reposed on the King’s head.

When the members of the Council had taken their seats, and the Bishop of Lichfield had offered up sundry Latin prayers which about one in ten of the assembled company understood, the King rose to open the Council.

“It is not unknown to you, venerable Fathers,” he said, “for what purpose I have convened this Council. There have come into my kingdom certain persons, foreigners, from the dominions of the Emperor, who have gone about the country preaching strange doctrines, and who appear to belong to some new foreign sect. I am unwilling to do injustice, either by punishing them without investigation, or by dismissing them as harmless if they are contaminating the faith and morals of the people. But inasmuch as it appertains to holy Church to judge questions of that nature, I have here summoned you, my Fathers in God, and your clergy, that you may examine these persons, and report to me how far they are innocent or guilty of the false doctrines whereof they are suspected. I pray you therefore so to do: and as you shall report, so shall I know how to deal with them.”

His Majesty reseated himself, and the Bishop of the diocese rose, to deliver a long diatribe upon the wickedness of heresy, the infallibility of the Church, and the necessity for the amputation of diseased limbs of the body politic. As nobody disagreed with any of his sentiments, the harangue was scarcely necessary; but time was of small value in the twelfth century. Two other Bishops followed, with long speeches: and then the Council adjourned for dinner, the Earl of Oxford being their host.

On re-assembling about eleven o’clock, the King commanded the prisoners to be brought up. Up they came, the company of thirty—men, women, and children, Gerhardt the foremost at the bar.

“Who are thou?” he was asked.

“I am a German named Gerhardt, born in the dominions of the Duke of Francia, an elector of the Empire.”

“Art thou the leader of this company?”

“I am.”

“Wherefore earnest thou to this land?”

“Long ago, in my childhood, I had read of the blessed Boniface, who, being an Englishman, travelled into Almayne to teach our people the faith of Christ. I desired to pay back to your land something of the debt we owed her, by bringing back to her the faith of Christ.”

"Didst thou ignorantly imagine us without it?"

"I thought," replied Gerhardt in his quiet manner, "that you could scarcely have too much of it."

"What is thy calling?"

"While in this country, I have followed the weaver's craft."

"Art thou a lettered man?"

"I am."

"Try him," said one of the Bishops. A Latin book was handed up to Gerhardt, from which he readily construed some sentences, until the Council declared itself satisfied on that point. This man before them, whatever else he might be, was no mere ignorant peasant.

"Are the rest of thy company lettered men?"

"No. They are mostly peasants."

"Have they gone about preaching, as thou hast?"

"The men have done so."

"And how can ignorant peasants teach abstruse doctrines?"

"I do not think they attempted that. They kept to the simple doctrines."

"What understandest thou by that?" Gerhardt was beginning to answer, when the Bishop of Winchester interposed with another question. He was Prince Henry of Blois, the brother of King Stephen, and a better warrior than a cleric. "Art thou a priest?"

"I am not."

"Go on," said the Bishop of Lincoln, who led the examination. "What meanest thou by the faith of Christ? What dost thou believe about Christ?"

Gerhardt's reply on this head was so satisfactory that the Bishop of Worcester—not long appointed—whispered to his brother of Winchester, "The man is all right!"

"Wait," returned the more experienced and pugnacious prelate. "We have not come to the crux yet."

"You call yourselves Christians, then?" resumed Lincoln.

"Certainly we are Christians, and revere the doctrines of the Apostles."

"What say you of the remedies for sin?"

"I know of one only, which is the blood of Christ our Lord."

"How!—are the sacraments no remedies?"

"Certainly not."

"Is sin not remitted in baptism?"

"No."

"Is not the blood of Christ applied to sinners in the holy Eucharist?"

"I utterly refuse such a doctrine."

"What say you of marriage? is that a sacrament?"

"I do not believe it."

"Ha! the man is all right, is he?" whispered old Winchester satirically to his young neighbour, Worcester.

"Doth not Saint Paul term marriage '*sacramentum magnum*'?"

"He did not write in Latin."

This was awkward. The heretic knew rather too much.

"Are you aware that all the holy doctors are against you?"

"I am not responsible for their opinions."

"Do you not accept the interpretation of the Church?"

What his Lordship meant by this well-sounding term was a certain bundle of ideas—some of them very illiterate, some very delicate hair-splitting, some curious even to comicality,—gathered out of the writings of a certain number of men, who assuredly were not inspired, since they often travesty Scripture, and at times diametrically contradict it. Having lived in the darkest times of the Church, they were extremely ignorant and superstitious, even the best of them being enslaved by fancies as untrue in fact as they were unspiritual in tone. It might well have been asked as the response, Where is it?—for no Church, not even that of Rome herself, has ever put forward an authorised commentary explanatory of holy Scripture. Her “interpretation of the Church” has to be gathered here and there by abstruse study, and so far as her lay members are concerned, is practically received from the lips of the nearest priest. Gerhardt, however, did not take this line in replying, but preferred to answer the Bishop’s inaccurate use of the word Church, which Rome impudently denies to all save her corrupt self. He replied—

“Of the true Church, which is the elect of God throughout all ages, fore-ordained to eternal life? I see no reason to refuse it.”

The Scriptural doctrine of predestination has been compared to “a red rag” offered to a bull, in respect of its effect on those—whether votaries of idols or latitudinarianism—who are conscious that they are not the subjects of saving grace. To none is it more offensive than to a devout servant of the Church of Rome. The Bishop took up the offence at once.

“You hold that heresy—that men are fore-ordained to eternal life?”

“I follow therein the Apostle Paul and Saint Austin.”

This was becoming intolerable.

“Doth not the Apostle command his hearers to ‘work out their own salvation’?”

“Would it please my Lord to finish the verse?”

It did not please my Lord to finish the verse, as that would have put an extinguisher on his interpretation of it.

“These heretics refuse to be corrected by Scripture!” he cried instead, as a much more satisfactory thing to say.

Gerhardt’s quiet answer was only heard by those near him—“I have not been so yet.”

This aggravating man must be put down. The Bishop raised his voice.

“Speak, ye that are behind this man. Do ye accept the interpretation of Scripture taught by the Church our mother, to whom God hath committed the teaching of all her children?”

Old Berthold replied. “We believe as we have been taught, but we do not wish to dispute.”

“Ye are obstinate in your heresy! Will ye do penance for the same?”

“No,” answered Gerhardt.

“Let them have one more chance,” said King Henry in a low voice. “If they are unsound on one point only, there might yet be hope of their conversion.”

“They are unsound on every point, my Lord,” replied Lincoln irascibly; “but at your desire I will test them on one or two more.—Tell me, do ye believe that the souls of the dead pass into Purgatory?”

“We do not.”

“Do you pray for the dead?”

“No.”

“Do you invoke the blessed Mary and the saints, and trust to their merits and intercession?”

“Never. We worship God, not men.”

At this point Winchester beckoned to Lincoln, and whispered something in his ear.

“I am told,” pursued the latter, addressing Gerhardt, “that you hold the priests of holy Church not to be validly consecrated, and have so said in public. Is it so?”

“It is so. The temporal power of the Pope has deprived the Church of the true consecration. You have only the shadow of sacraments, and the traditions of men.”

“You reject the holy sacraments entirely, then?”

“Not so. We observe the Eucharist at our daily meals. Our Lord bade us ‘as oft as we should drink,’ to take that wine in remembrance of Him. We do His bidding.”

“Ye presume to profane the Eucharist thus!” cried Lichfield in pious horror. “Ye administer to yourselves—”

“As Saint Basil held lawful,” interposed Gerhardt.

“Saint Basil spoke of extraordinary occasions when no priest could be had.”

“But if it be lawful at any time to receive without priestly consecration, it cannot be unlawful, at every time.”

It did not occur to the Bishop to ask the pertinent question, in what passage of Scripture priestly consecration of the Eucharist was required,—nay, in what passage any consecration at all is ever mentioned. For at the original institution of the rite, our Lord consecrated nothing, but merely gave thanks to God (Note 1), as it was customary for the master of the house to do at the Passover feast; and seeing that “if He were on earth, He should not be a priest.” (Note 2.) He cannot have acted as a priest when He was on earth. We have even distinct evidence that He declined so to act (Note 3). And in any subsequent allusions to this Sacrament in the New Testament (Note 4), there is no mention of either priests or consecration. It did not, however, suit the Bishop to pursue this inconvenient point. He passed at once to another item.

“Ye dare to touch the sacred cup reserved to the priests—”

“When did Christ so reserve it? His command was, ‘Drink ye all of it.’”

“To the Apostles, thou foolish man!”

“Were they priests at that time?”

This was the last straw. The question could not be answered except in the negative, for if the ordination of the Apostles be not recorded after the Resurrection (John twenty 21-23), then there is no record of their having been ordained at all. To be put in a corner in this manner was more than a Bishop could stand.

“How darest thou beard me thus?” he roared. “Dost thou not know what may follow? Is not the King here, who has the power of life and death, and is he not an obedient son of holy Church?”

The slight smile on Gerhardt’s lips said, “Not very!” But his only words were—

“Ay, I know that ye have power. ‘This is your hour, and the power of darkness.’ We are not afraid. We have had our message of consolation. ‘Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.’”

“Incredible folly!” exclaimed Lincoln. “That was said to the early Christians, who suffered persecution from the heathen: not to heretics, smarting under the deserved correction of the Church. How dare you so misapply it?”

“All the Lord’s martyrs were not in the early Church. ‘We are the circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.’ Do to us what ye will. ‘Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Living or dying, we are the Lord’s.’”

“We solemnly adjudge you false heretics,” was the stern reply, “and deliver you up to our Catholic Prince for punishment. Depart in peace!”

Gerhardt looked up. “‘My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you!’ Be it so. We go in peace; we go to peace. Our suffering will soon be over. Already we behold Jesus our Lord at the right hand of God, and we are ready to partake of His sufferings, that we may reign with Him.”

King Henry now rose to pronounce sentence. The condemned criminals before him were to be branded on the forehead with a mark of ignominy, to be scourged, and cast forth out of the city. No man might receive them under his roof, relieve them with food, nor administer to them consolation of any sort. And this was the sentence of the King and of holy Church, to the honour and laud of God, and of Mary, His most glorious Mother!

The sentence was carried out even more barbarously than it was pronounced. The foreheads of all were branded with hot irons, they were whipped through the city, and their clothes having been cut short to the girdle (John twenty 21-23), they were turned into the snow-covered fields. One of the men appointed to use the branding-irons had just lost a daughter, and moved by a momentary impulse of pity (for which he afterwards blamed himself and did penance), he passed two or three of the younger women—Ermine among them—with a lighter brand than the rest. No such mercy was shown to the men or the elder women, nor would it have been to Ermine, had it not been the case that her extreme fairness made her look much younger than she really was.

Gerhardt, being regarded as the ringleader, was also branded on the chin.

“Courage, my children!” he said to the shivering, trembling little company, as they were marched down High Street. “We are counted worthy—worthy to suffer shame for Him who suffered dire shame for us. Let us praise God.”

And to the amazement, alike of the officials and the crowd of spectators, the song was set up, and echoed into the side streets—“Blessed are ye, when men shall persecute you, for the Son of Man’s sake!” varied every now and then by a joyous chorus of “Glory to God in the highest! on earth peace, goodwill towards men!”

The song was heard clearly enough in the Walnut Tree: so clearly, that Flemild even fancied she could distinguish Ermine’s voice from the rest.

“Mother, will you go and look?” she asked, tears running down her face.

“I’ll not go near,” said Isel, in a tone of defiance very unusual with her. “I’ll not get your father and you into trouble. And if I were to go, much if I didn’t tear somebody a-pieces.”

“O Mother! you wouldn’t touch our old friends? They’ve enough to bear, surely.”

“I said *somebody!* child!” was the growl in answer: and Flemild did not venture to reply.

Fainter and fainter grew the sounds; only strengthened for a minute when the higher notes of the chorus supervened. Then came a great roar of applause from the crowd, as the East Gate was reached, and the heretics were cast out from the priest-ridden city. But they scarcely heard that in Kepeharme Lane.

At the window of the anchorhold stood Derette, having sent Leuesa to bring her word what happened. She could see nothing, yet she heard the joyous chant of “Glory to God in the highest!” as the crowd and the condemned swept down



the street just beyond her ken. Leusa did not even try to hide her tears when she reached the shelter of the anchorhold: before that, it would have been perilous to shed them.

“Oh, it was dreadful, Lady! Gerard never looked at any one: he walked first, and he looked as if he saw nothing but God and Heaven. Agnes I could not see, nor the child; I suppose they were on the other side. But Ermine saw me, and she gave me a smile for you—I am sure she meant it for you—such as an angel might have given who had been a few hours on earth, and was just going back to his place before the Throne.”

Manning and Haimet, who had joined the crowd of sightseers, had not returned when the latch of the Walnut Tree was lifted, and Anania walked in.

“What, both stayed at home! O Aunt Isel, you have missed such a sight!”

“Well, you’ve got it, then, I suppose,” muttered Isel.

“I shall never forget it—not if I live to be a hundred.”

“Umph! Don’t think I shall neither.”

“Now, didn’t I tell you those foreigners were no good? Osbert always said so. I knew I was right. And I am, you see.”

“You’re standing in my light, Anania—that’s all I can see at present.”

Anania moved about two inches. “Oh, but it was grand to see the Council come out of Saint Mary’s! All the doctors in their robes, and the Bishops, and last the King—such a lovely shade his mantle was! It’s a pity the Queen was not there too; I always think a procession’s half spoiled when there are no ladies.”

“Oh, that’s what you’re clucking about, is it? Processions, indeed!”

“Aunt Isel, are you very cross, or what’s the matter with you?”

“She’s in pain, I fear,” said Flemild quickly.

“Where’s the pain? I’ve gathered some splendid fresh betony and holy-thistle.”

“Here!” said Isel, laying her hand on her heart.

“Why, then, holy-thistle’s just what you want. I’ll send you some down by Stephen.”

“Thank you. But it’ll do me no good.”

“Oh, don’t you say that, now.—Flemild, I wonder you did not come to see all the sights. You’ll find you’ve not nearly so much time for pleasure after you’re married; don’t look for it. Have you settled when it’s to be?”

“It was to have been last month, you know, but Father wanted it put off.”

“Ay, so as he could know Raven a bit better. Well, when is it to be now?”

“March, they say.”

“You don’t say it as if you enjoyed it much.”

“Maybe she takes her pleasure in different ways from you,” said Isel. “Can’t see any, for my part, in going to see a lot of poor wretches flogged and driven out into the snow. Suppose you could.”

“O Aunt!—when they were heretics?”

“No, *nor murderers neither*—without they’d murdered me, and then I reckon I shouldn’t have been there to look at ‘em.”

“But the priests say they are worse than murderers—they murder men’s souls.”

“I’m alive, for aught I know. And I don’t expect to say my Paternoster any worse than I did seven years gone.”

“How do you know they haven’t bewitched you?” asked Anania in a solemn tone.

“For the best of all reasons—that I’m not bewitched.”

“Aunt Isel, I’m not so sure of that. If those wretches—”

“O Anania, do let Mother be!” pleaded Flemild. “It is her pain that speaks, not herself. I told you she was suffering.”

“You did; but I wonder if her soul isn’t worse than her body. I’ll just give Father Dolfin a hint to look to her soul and body both. They say those creatures only bewitched one maid, and she was but a poor villein belonging to some doctor of the schools: and so frightened was she to see their punishment that she was in a hurry to recant every thing they had taught her. Well! we shall see no more of them, that’s one good thing. I shouldn’t think any of them would be alive by the end of the week. The proclamation was strict—neither food nor shelter to be given, nor any compassion shown. And branded as they are, every body will know them, you see.”

Stephen came in while his sister-in-law was speaking.

"Come, now, haven't you had talk enough?" said he. "You've a tongue as long as from here to Banbury Cross. You'd best be going home, Anania, for Osbert's as cross as two sticks, and he'll be there in a few minutes."

"Oh dear, one never has a bit of peace! I did think I could have sat a while, and had a nice chat."

"It won't be so nice if you keep Osbert waiting, I can tell you."

Anania rose with evident reluctance, and gathered her mantle round her.

"Well, good-day, Aunt Isel! I'll send you down the holy-thistle. Good-day, Flemild. Aren't you coming with me, Stephen?"

"No; I want to wait for Uncle Manning."

"Stephen, I'm obliged to you for ever and ever! If she'd stayed another minute, I should have flown at her!"

"You looked as if you'd come to the end of your patience," said Stephen, smiling, but gravely; "and truly, I don't wonder. But what's this about holy-thistle? Are you sick, Aunt Isel?"

Isel looked searchingly into her nephew's face.

"You look true," she said; "I think you might be trusted, Stephen."

"Oh, *if* you're grieving over *them*, don't be afraid to tell me so. I did my best to save Gerard, but he would not be warned. I'd have caught up the child and brought him to you, if I'd had a chance; but I was hemmed in the crowd, a burly priest right afore me, and I couldn't have laid hand on him. Poor souls! I'm sorry for them."

"God bless thee for those words, Stephen! I'm sore for them to the very core of my heart. If they'd been my own father's children or mine, I couldn't feel sadder than I do. And to have to listen to those hard, cold, brutal words from that woman—"

"I know. She is a brute. I guessed somewhat how things were going with you, for I saw her turn in here from the end of Saint Edward's; and I thought you mightn't be so sorry to have her sent off. Her tongue's not so musical as might be."

Manning and Haimet came in together. The former went up to Isel, while Haimet began a conversation with his cousin, and after a moment the two young men left the house together. Then Manning spoke.

"Wife and children," said he, "from this day forward, no word is to be uttered in my house concerning these German people. They are heretics, so pronounced by holy Church; and after that, no compassion may be shown to them. Heretics are monsters, demons in human form, who seek the ruin of souls. Remember my words."

Isel looked earnestly in her husband's face.

"No," said Manning, not unkindly, but firmly; "no excuses for them, Isel. I can quite understand that you feel sorry for those whom you have regarded as friends for seven years: but such sorrow is now sin. You must crush and conquer it. It were rebellion against God, who has judged these miscreants by the lips of His Church."

Isel broke down in a very passion of tears.

"I can't help it, Manning; I can't help it!" she said, when she could speak. "It may be sin, but I must do it and do penance for it—it's not a bit of use telling me I must not. I'll try not to talk if you bid me be silent, but you must give me a day or two to get quieted,—till every living creature round has done spitting venom at them. I don't promise to hold my tongue to that ninny of an Anania—she aggravates me while it isn't in human nature to keep your tongue off her; it's all I can do to hold my hands."

"She is very provoking, Father," said Flemild in an unsteady voice; "she wears Mother fairly out."

"You may both quarrel with Anania whenever you please," replied Manning calmly; "I've nothing to say against that. But you are not to make excuses for those heretics, nor to express compassion for them. Now those are my orders: don't let me have to give them twice."

"No, Father; you shall not, to me," said Flemild in a low tone.

"I can't promise you nothing," said Isel, wiping her eyes on her apron, "because I know I shall just go and break it as fast as it's made: but when I can, I'll do your bidding, Manning. And till then, you'll have either to thrash me or forgive me—whichever you think the properest thing to do."

Manning walked away without saying more.

Snow, snow everywhere!—lying several inches deep on the tracks our forefathers called roads, drifted several feet high in corners and clefts of the rocks. Pure, white, untrodden, in the silent fields; but trampled by many feet upon the road to Dorchester, the way taken by the hapless exiles. No voice was raised in pity, no hand outstretched for help; every door was shut against the heretics. Did those who in after years were burned at the stake on the same plea suffer more or less than this little band of pioneers, as one after another sank down, and died in the white snow? The trembling hands of the survivors heaped over each in turn the spotless coverlet, and then they passed on to their own speedy fate.

The snow descended without intermission, driving pitilessly in the scarred faces of the sufferers. Had they not known that it came from the hand of their heavenly Father, they might have fancied that Satan was warring against them by that means, as the utmost and the last thing that he could do. But as the snow descended, the song ascended as unceasingly. Fainter and less full it grew to human ears, as one voice after another was silenced. It may be that the angels heard it richer and louder, as the choristers grew more few and weak.

Of the little family group which we have followed, the first to give way was Agnes. She had taken from her own

shivering limbs, to wrap round the child, one of the mutilated garments which alone her tormentors had left her. As they approached Nuneham, she staggered and fell. Guelph and Adelheid ran to lift her up.

"Oh, let me sleep!" she said. "I can sing no more."

"Ay, let her sleep," echoed Gerhardt in a quivering voice; "she will suffer least so. Farewell for a moment, my true beloved! We shall meet again ere the hour be over."

Gerhardt held on but a little longer. Doubly branded, and more brutally scourged than the rest, he was so ill from the first that he had to be helped along by Wilhelm and Conrad, two of the strongest in the little company. How Ermine fared they knew not: they could only tell that when they reached Bensington, she was no longer among them. Most of the children sank early. Little Rudolph fared the best, for a young mother who had lost her baby gave him such poor nourishment as she could from her own bosom. It was just as they came out of Dorchester, that they laid him down tenderly on a bed of leaves in a sheltered corner, to sleep out his little life. Then they passed on, still southwards—still singing "Glory to God in the highest!" and "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake!" Oh, what exquisite music must have floated up through the gates of pearl, and filled the heavenly places, from that poor faint song, breathed by those trembling voices that could scarcely utter the notes!

A few hours later, and only one dark figure was left tottering through the snow. Old Berthold was alone.

Snow everywhere!—and the night fell, and the frost grew keen; and Bensington had not long been left behind when old Berthold lay down in the ditch at the road-side. He had sung his last song, and could go no further. He could only wait for the chariot of God—for the white-winged angels to come silently over the white snow, and carry him Home.

"The Lord will not forget me, though I am the last left," he said to himself. "His blessings are not mere empty words. 'Glory to God in the highest!'" And Berthold slept.

"Rudolph!" The word was breathed softly, eagerly, by some moving thing closely wrapped up, in the dense darkness of the field outside Dorchester. There was no answer.

"Rudolph!" came eagerly again.

The speaker, who was intently listening, fancied she heard the faintest possible sound. Quickly, quietly, flitting from one point to another, feeling with her hands on the ground, under the bushes, by the walls, she went, till her outstretched hands touched something round and soft, and not quite so chillingly cold as every thing else seemed to be that night.

"Rudolph! art thou here?"

"Yes, it's me," said the faint childish voice. "Where am I?—and who are you?"

"Drink," was the answer; and a bottle of warm broth was held to the boy's blue lips. Then, when he had drunk, he was raised from the ground, clasped close to a woman's warm breast, and a thick fur mantle was hastily wrapped round them both.

"Who are you?" repeated the child. "And where—where's Mother?"

"I am an old friend, my little child. Hast thou ever heard the name of Countess?"

"Yes," murmured the child feebly. He could not remember yet how or where he had heard it; he only knew that it was not strange to him.

"That is well. Glory be to the Blessed that I have found thee in time to save thee!"

They were speeding back now into the lighted town—not lighted, indeed, by out-door lamps, but by many an open door and uncovered window, and the lanterns of passengers going up or down the street. Countess carried the child to a stone house—only Jews built stone houses in towns at that day—and into a ground-floor room, where she laid him down on a white couch beside the fire. There were two men in the room—both old, and with long white beards.

"Countess! what hast thou there?" sternly asked one of the men.

"Father Jacob!—a babe of the Goyim!" exclaimed the other.

"Hush!" said Countess in a whisper, as she bent over the boy. "The life is barely in him. May the Blessed (to whom be praise!) help me to save my darling!"

"Accursed are all the infidels!" said the man who seemed slightly the younger of the two. "Daughter, how earnest thou by such a child, and how darest thou give him such a name?"

Countess made no answer. She was busy feeding little Rudolph with bits of bread sopped in warm broth.

"Where am I?" asked the child, as sense and a degree of strength returned to him. "It isn't Isel's house."

"Wife, dost thou not answer the Cohen?" said the elder man angrily.

"The Cohen can wait for his answer; the child cannot for his life. When I think him safe I will answer all you choose."

At length, after careful feeding and drying, Countess laid down the spoon, and covered the child with a warm woollen coverlet.

"Sleep, my darling!" she said softly. "The God of Israel hush thee under His wings!"

A few moments of perfect quiet left no doubt that little Rudolph was sound asleep. Then Countess stood up, and

turned to the Rabbi.

"Now, Cohen, I am ready. Ask me what you will."

"Who and what is this child?"

"An exile, as we are. An orphan, cast on the great heart of the All-Merciful. A trust which was given to me, and I mean to fulfil it."

"That depends on the leave of thy lord."

"It depends on nothing of the sort. I swear to the dead father of this boy that I would protect him from all hurt."

"Swear! Well, then—" said the elder Jew—"an oath must be fulfilled, Cohen?"

"That depends on circumstances," returned the Rabbi in Jesuitical wise. "For instance, if Countess swear by any idol of the Goyim, it is void. If she swear by her troth, or faith, or any such thing, it may be doubtful, and might require a synod of the Rabbins to determine it. But if she swear by the Holy One (blessed be He!) then the oath must stand. But of course, daughter, thou wilt have the boy circumcised, and bring him up as a proselyte of Israel."

The expression in the eyes of Countess did not please the Rabbi.

"Thus I swear," she said: "'God do so to me and more also, if I bring not the child to you unhurt!' How can I meet that man at the day of doom, if I have not kept mine oath—if I deliver not the boy to him unhurt, as he will deem hurting?"

"But that were to teach him the idolatries of the Goyim!" exclaimed the Rabbi in horror.

"I shall teach him no idolatry. Only what his father would have taught him—and I know what that was. I have listened to him many a day on Presthey and Pary's Mead."

"Countess, I shall not suffer it. Such a thing must not be done in my house."

"It has to be done in mine," said Countess doggedly.

"I do not forbid thee to show mercy to the child. If he be, as thou sayest, an orphan and an exile, and thou moreover hast accepted some fashion of trust with regard to him (however foolish it were to do so), I am willing that thou shouldst keep him a day or two, till he has recovered. But then shelter must be sought for him with the Goyim."

"Do you two know," said Countess, in a low voice of concentrated determination, "that this child's parents, and all of their race that were with them, have been scourged by the Goyim?—branded, and cast forth as evil, and have died in the night and in the snow, because they would *not* worship idols? These are not of the brood of the priests, who hate them. The boy is mine, and shall be brought up as mine. I swear it."

"But not for life?"

"I swear it."

"Did the child's father know what thou hadst sworn? as if not, perchance there may be means to release thee."

The black eyes flashed fire.

"I tell you, I swear unto him by Adonai, the God of Israel, and He knew it! In the lowest depths and loftiest heights of my own soul I swear, and He heard it. I repeated the vow this night, when I clasped the boy to my heart once more. God will do so to me and more also, if I bring not the boy unhurt to his father and his mother at the Judgment Day!"

"But, my daughter, if it can be loosed?"

"What do I care for your loosing? He will not loose me. And the child shall not suffer. I will die first."

"Let the child tarry till he has recovered: did I not say so? Then he must go forth."

"If you turn him forth, you turn me forth with him."

"Nonsense!"

"You will see. I shall never leave him. My darling, my white snow-bird! I shall never leave the boy."

"My daughter," said the Rabbi softly, for he thought the oil might succeed where the vinegar had failed, "dost thou not see that Leo's advice is the best? The child must tarry with thee till he is well; no man shall prevent that."

"Amen!" said Countess.

"But that over, is it not far better both for him and thee that he should go to the Goyim? We will take pains, for the reverence of thine oath, to find friends of his parents, who will have good care of him: I promise thee it shall be done, and Leo will assent thereto."

Leo confirmed the words with—"Even so, Cohen!"

"But I pray thee, my daughter, remember what will be thought of thee, if thou shouldst act as thou art proposing to do. It will certainly be supposed that thou art wavering in the faith of thy fathers, if even it be not imagined that thou hast forsaken it. Only think of the horror of such a thing!"

"I have not forsaken the faith of Abraham."

"I am sure of that; nevertheless, it is good thou shouldst say it."

"If the Cohen agree," said Leo, stroking his white beard, "I am willing to make a compromise. As we have no child, and thou art so fond of children, the child shall abide with thee, on condition that thou take a like oath to bring him up a proselyte of Israel: and then let him be circumcised on the eighth day after his coming here. But if not, some friend of his parents must be found. What say you, Cohen?"

"I am willing so to have it."

"I am not," said Countess shortly. "As to friends of the child's parents, there are none such, save the God for whom they died, and in whose presence they stand to-night. I must keep mine oath. Unhurt in body, unhurt in soul, according to their conception thereof, and according to my power, will I bring the boy to his father at the coming of Messiah."

"Wife, wouldst thou have the Cohen curse thee in the face of all Israel?"

"These rash vows!" exclaimed the Rabbi, in evident uneasiness. "Daughter, it is written in the Torah that if any woman shall make a vow, her husband may establish it or make it void, if he do so in the day that he hear it; and the Blessed One (unto whom be praise!) shall forgive her, and she shall not perform the vow."

"The vow was made before I was Leo's wife."

"Well, but in the day that he hath heard it, it is disallowed."

"There is something else written in the Torah, Cohen. 'Every vow of a widow, or of her that is divorced, shall stand.'"

"Father Isaac! when didst thou read the Torah? Women have no business to do any such thing."

"It is there, whether they have or not."

"Then it was thy father's part to disallow it."

"I told him of my vow, and he did not."

"That is an awkward thing!" said Leo in a low tone to the Rabbi.

"I must consult the Rabbins," was the answer. "It may be we shall find a loophole, to release the foolish woman. Canst thou remember the exact words of thy vow?"

"What matter the exact words? The Holy One (blessed be He!) looketh on the heart, and He knew what I meant to promise."

"Yet how didst thou speak?"

"I have told you. I said, 'God do so to me and more also, if I bring not the child to you unhurt!'"

"Didst thou say 'God'? or did the man say it, and thy word was only 'He'?" asked the Rabbi eagerly, fancying that he saw a way of escape.

"What do I know which it was? I meant Him, and that is in His eyes as if I had said it."

"Countess, if thou be contumacious, I cannot shelter thee," said Leo sternly.

"My daughter," answered the Rabbi, still suavely, though he was not far from anger, "I am endeavouring to find thee a way of escape."

"I do not wish to escape. I swear, and I will do it. Oh, bid me depart!" she cried, almost fiercely, turning to Leo. "I cannot bear this endless badgering. Give me my raiment and my jewels, and bid me depart in peace!"

There was a moment's dead silence, during which the two old men looked fixedly at each other. Then the Rabbi said

"It were best for thee, Leo. Isaac the son of Deuslesalt (probably a translation of Isaiah or Joshua) hath a fair daughter, and he is richer than either Benefei or Jurnet. She is his only child."

"I have seen her: she is very handsome. Yet such a winter night! We will wait till morning, and not act rashly."

"No: now or not at all," said Countess firmly.

"My daughter," interposed the Rabbi hastily, "there is no need to be rash. If Leo give thee now a writing of divorcement, thou canst not abide in his house to-night. Wait till the light dawns. Sleep may bring a better mind to thee."

Countess vouchsafed him no answer. She turned to her husband.

"I never wished to dwell in thy house," she said very calmly, "but I have been a true and obedient wife. I ask thee now for what I think I have earned—my liberty. Let me go with my little child, whom I love dearly,—go to freedom, and be at peace. I can find another shelter for to-night. And if I could not, it would not matter—for me."

She stooped and gathered the sleeping child into her arms.

“Speak the words,” she said. “It is the one boon that I ask of you.”

Leo rose—with a little apparent reluctance—and placed writing materials before the Rabbi, who with the reed-pen wrote, or rather painted, a few Hebrew words upon the parchment. Then Leo, handing it to his wife, said solemnly—

“Depart in peace!”

The fatal words were spoken. Countess wrapped herself and Rudolph in the thick fur mantle, and turned to leave the room, saying to the man whose wife she was no longer—

“I beseech you, send my goods to my father’s house. Peace be unto you!”

“Peace be to thee, daughter!” returned the Rabbi.

Then, still carrying the child, she went out into the night and the snow.

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Note 1. See Matthew 27 verses 26, 27; Mark fourteen verses 22, 23; Luke twenty-two verses 17, 20; One Corinthians eleven verse 24, when it will be seen that “blessed” means gave thanks to God, not blessed the elements.

Note 2. Hebrews Seven verse 14; Eight verse 4.

Note 3. Matthew Eight verse 4.

Note 4. Acts two verse 46; twenty-seven verse 11; One Corinthians eleven verses 20-34.

Note 5. Diceto makes this barbarity a part of the sentence passed on the Germans. Newbury mentions it only as inflicted.

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## Chapter Eight.

### In the White Witch’s Hut.

“But all my years have seemed so long;  
And toil like mine is wondrous dreary;  
And every body thinks me strong:  
And I’m aweary.”

M.A. Chaplin.

“Heigh-Ho! It’s a weary life, Gib—a weary life!”

The words came from an old woman, and were addressed to a cat. Neither of them was an attractive-looking object. The old woman was very old, having a face all over minute wrinkles, a pair of red eyes much sunken, and the semblance of a beard under her chin. The cat, a dark tabby, looked as if he had been in the wars, and had played his part valiantly. His coat, however, was less dilapidated than the old woman’s garments, which seemed to be composed mainly of disconnected rags of all colours and shapes. She sat on a three-legged stool, beside a tiny hearth, on which burned a small fire of sticks.

“Nobody cares for us, Gib: nobody! They call me a witch—the saints know why, save that I am old and poor. I never did hurt to any, and I’ve given good herb medicines to the women about; and if I do mutter a few outlandish words over them, what harm does it do? They mean nothing; and they make the foolish girls fancy I know something more than they do, and so I get a silver penny here, or a handful of eggs there, and we make shift to live.”

She spoke aloud, though in a low voice, as those often do who live alone; and the cat rose and rubbed himself against her, with a soft “Me-ew!”

“Well, Gib! Didst thou want to remind me that so long as thou art alive, I shall have one friend left? Poor puss!” and she stroked her uncomely companion.

“How the wind whistles! Well, it is cold to-night! There’ll be nobody coming now to consult the Wise Woman. We may as well lie down, Gib—it’s the only warm place, bed is. Holy saints! what’s that?”

She listened intently for a moment, and Gib, with erect tail, went to the door and smelt under it. Then he looked back at his mistress, and said once more,—“Me-ew!”

“Somebody there, is there? A bit frightened, I shouldn’t wonder. Come in, then—there’s nought to fear,”—and she opened the crazy door of her hut. “Well, can’t you come in—must I lift you up? Why, what—Mary, Mother!”

Half lifting, half dragging, for very little strength was left her, the old woman managed to pull her visitor inside. Then she bolted the door, and stooping down, with hands so gentle that they might have been an infant’s, softly drew away from a young scarred face the snow-saturated hair.

“Ay, I see, my dear, I see! Don’t you try to speak. I can guess what you are, and whence you come. I heard tell what had happened. Don’t you stir, now, but just drink a drop of this warm mallow tea—the finest thing going for one in your condition. I can’t give you raiment, for I’ve none for myself, but we’ll see to-morrow if I can’t get hold o’ somewhat: you’ve not been used to wear rags. I’ll have ‘em, if I steal ‘em. Now, don’t look at me so reproachful-like! well, then, I’ll beg ‘em, if it worries you. Oh, you’re safe here, my dear! you’ve no need to look round to see if no villains is a-coming after you. They’ll not turn up in these quarters, take my word for it. Not one o’ them would come near the witch’s hut after nightfall. But I’m no witch, my dearie—only a poor old woman as God and the blessed saints have quite forgot, and folks are feared of me.”

"The Lord never forgets," the parched lips tried to say.

"Don't He? Hasn't He forgot both you and me, now?"

"No—never!"

"Well, well, my dear! Lie still, and you shall tell me any thing you will presently. Have another sup!—just one at once, and often—you'll soon come round. I know some'at about herbs and such-like, if I know nought else. See, let me lay this bundle of straw under your head; isn't that more comfortable, now? Poor thing, now what are you a-crying for?—does your face pain you bad? I'll lay some herbs to it, and you won't have so much as a scar there when they've done their work. Ay, I know some'at about herbs, I do! Deary me, for sure!—poor thing, poor thing!"

"The Lord bless you!"

"Child, you're the first that has blessed me these forty years! and I never hear *that* name. Folks take me for one of Sathanas' servants, and they never speak to me of—that Other. I reckon they fancy I should mount the broomstick and fly through the chimney, if they did. Eh me!—and time was I was a comely young maid—as young and well-favoured as you, my dear: eh dear, dear, to think how long it is since! I would I could pull you a bit nearer the fire; but I've spent all my strength—and that's nought much—in hauling of you in. But you're safe, at any rate; and I'll cover you up with straw—I've got plenty of that, if I have not much else. Them villains, to use a young maid so!—or a wife, whichever you be. And they say I'm in league with the Devil! I never got so near him as they be."

"I am a maid."

"Well, and that's the best thing you can be. Don't you be in a hurry to change it. Come, now, I'll set on that sup o' broth was given me at the green house; you'll be ready to drink it by it's hot. Well, now, it's like old times and pleasant, having a bit o' company to speak to beside Gib here. What's your name, now, I wonder?"

"Ermine."

"Ay, ay. Well, mine's Haldane—old Haldane, the Wise Woman—I'm known all over Oxfordshire, and Berkshire too. Miles and miles they come to consult me. Oh, don't look alarmed, my pretty bird! you sha'n't see one of them if you don't like. There's a sliding screen behind here that I can draw, and do by times, when I want to fright folks into behaving themselves; I just draw it out, and speak from behind it, in a hollow voice, and don't they go as white!—I'll make a cosy straw bed for you behind it, and never a soul of 'em 'll dare to look in on you—no, not the justice himself, trust me. I know 'em: Lords, and constables, and foresters, and officers—I can make every mother's son of 'em shiver in his shoes, till you'd think he had the ague on him. But *you* sha'n't, my dear: you're as safe as if the angels was rocking you. Maybe they'll want to come with you: but they'll feel strange here. When you can talk a bit without hurting of you, you shall tell me how you got here."

"I lost my way in the snow."

"Well, no wonder! Was there many of you?"

"About thirty."

"And all served like you?"

"Yes, except my brother: he was our leader, and they served him worse. I do not think the children were branded."

"Children!"

"Ay, there were eight children with us."

"One minds one's manners when one has the angels in company, or else maybe I should speak my mind a bit straight. And what was it for, child?"

"They said we were heretics."

"I'll be bound they did! But what had you done?"

"My brother and some others had preached the Gospel of Christ in the villages round, and further away."

"What mean you by that, now?"

"The good news that men are sinners, and that Jesus died for sinners."

"Ah! I used to know all about that once. But now—He's forgotten me."

"No, never, never, Mother Haldane! It is thou who hast forgotten Him. He sent me to thee to-night to tell thee so."

"Gently now, my dear! Keep still. Don't you use up your bit of strength for a worthless old woman, no good to any body. There ain't nobody in the world as cares for me, child. No, there ain't nobody!"

"Mother Haldane, I think Christ cared for you on His cross; and He cares for you now in Heaven. He wanted somebody to come and tell you so; and nobody did, so he drove me here. You'll let me tell you all about it, won't you?"

"Softly, my dear—you'll harm yourself! Ay, you shall tell me any thing you will, my snow-bird, when you're fit to do it; but you must rest a while first."

There was no sleep that night for Mother Haldane. All the long winter night she sat beside Ermine, feeding her at short intervals, laying her herb poultices on the poor brow, covering up the chilled body from which it seemed as if the

shivering would never depart. More and more silent grew the old woman as time went on, only now and then muttering a compassionate exclamation as she saw more clearly all the ill that had been done. She kept up the fire all night, and made a straw bed, as she had promised, behind the screen, where the invalid would be sheltered from the draught, and yet warm, the fire being just on the other side of the screen. To this safe refuge Ermine was able to drag herself when the morning broke.

"You'll be a fine cure, dearie!" said the old woman, looking on her with satisfaction. "You'll run like a hare yet, and be as rosy as Robin-run-by-the-hedge."

"I wonder why I am saved," said Ermine in a low voice. "I suppose all the rest are with God now. I thought I should have been there too by this time. Perhaps He has some work for me to do:—it may be that He has chosen you, and I am to tell you of His goodness and mercy."

"You shall tell any thing you want, dearie. You're just like a bright angel to old Mother Haldane. I'm nigh tired of seeing frightened faces. It's good to have one face that'll look at you quiet and kind; and nobody never did that these forty years. Where be your friends, my maid? You'll want to go to them, of course, when you're fit to journey."

"I have no friends but One," said the girl softly: "and He is with me now. I shall go to Him some day, when He has done His work in me and by me. As to other earthly friends, I would not harm the few I might mention, by letting their names be linked with mine, and they would be afraid to own me. For my childhood's friends, *they* are all over-sea. I have no friend save God and you."

When Ermine said, "He is with me now," the old woman had glanced round as if afraid of seeing some unearthly presence. At the last sentence she rose—for she had been kneeling by the girl—with a shake of her head, and went outside the screen, muttering to herself.

"Nobody but the snow-bird would ever link them two together! Folks think I'm Sathanas' thrall."

She put more sticks on the fire, muttering while she did so.

"'Goodness and mercy!' Eh, deary me! There's not been much o' that for the old witch. Folks are feared of even a white witch, and I ain't a black 'un. Ay, feared enough. They'll give me things, for fear. But nobody loves me—no, nobody loves me!"

With a vessel of hot broth in her hands, she came back to the niche behind the screen.

"Now, my dearie, drink it up. I must leave you alone a while at after. I'm going out to beg a coverlet and a bit more victuals. You're not afear'd to be left? There's no need, my dear—never a whit. The worst outlaw in all the forest would as soon face the Devil himself as look behind this screen. But I'll lock you in if you like that better."

"As you will, Mother Haldane. The Lord will take care of me, in the way He sees best for me, and most for His glory."

"I'll lock you in. It'll not be so hard for Him then. Some'at new, bain't it, for the like o' me to think o' helping Him?"

Ermine answered only by a smile. Let the old woman learn to come nigh to God, she thought, however imperfectly; other items could be put right in time.

It was nearly three hours before Haldane returned, and she came so well laden that she had some work to walk. A very old fur coverlet hung over her left arm, while on her right was a basket that had seen hard service in its day.

"See you here, dearie!" she said, holding them up to the gaze of her guest. "Look you at all I've got for you. I didn't steal a bit of it—I saw from your face you wouldn't like things got that way. Here's a fine happing of fur to keep you warm; and I've got a full dozen of eggs given me, and a beef-bone to make broth, and a poke o' meal: and they promised me a cape at the green house, if I bring 'em some herbs they want. We shall get along grandly, you'll see. I've picked up a fine lot of chestnuts, too,—but them be for me; the other things be for you. I'll set the bone on this minute; it's got a goodly bit o' meat on it."

"You are very good to me, Mother Haldane. But you must take your share of the good things."

"Never a whit, my dearie! I got 'em all for you. There, now!"

She spread the fur coverlet over Ermine, wrapping her closely in it, and stood a moment to enjoy the effect.

"Ain't that warm, now? Oh, I know where to go for good things! Trust the Wise Woman for that! Can you sleep a while, my dear? Let me put you on a fresh poultice, warm and comforting, and then you'll try, won't you? I'll not make no more noise than Gib here, without somebody comes in, and then it's as may be."

She made her poultice, and put it on, covered Ermine well, made up the fire, and took her seat on the form, just outside the screen, while Ermine tried to sleep. But sleep was coy, and would not visit the girl's eyes. Her state of mind was strangely quiescent and acquiescent in all that was done to her or for her. Perhaps extreme weakness had a share in this; but she felt as if sorrow and mourning were as far from her as was active, tumultuous joy. Calm thankfulness and satisfaction with God's will seemed to be the prevailing tone of her mind. Neither grief for the past nor anxiety for the future had any place in it. Her soul was as a weaned child.

As Haldane sat by the fire, and Ermine lay quiet but fully awake on the other side of the screen, a low tap came on the door.

"Enter!" said Haldane in a hollow voice, quite unlike the tone she used to Ermine: for the Wise Woman was a ventriloquist, and could produce terrifying effects thereby.

The visitor proved to be a young woman, who brought a badly-sprained wrist for cure. She was treated with an herb poultice, over which the old woman muttered an inaudible incantation; and having paid a bunch of parsnips as her fee, she went away well satisfied. Next came a lame old man, who received a bottle of lotion. The third applicant wanted a



charm to make herself beautiful. She was desired to wash herself once a day in cold spring water, into which she was to put a pinch of a powder with which the witch furnished her. While doing so, she was to say three times over—

“Win in, white! Wend out, black!  
Bring to me that I do lack.  
Wend out, black! Win in, white!  
Sweet and seemly, fair to sight.”

The young lady, whose appearance might certainly have been improved by due application of soap and water, departed repeating her charm diligently, having left behind her as payment a brace of rabbits.

A short time elapsing, before any fresh rap occurred, Haldane went to look at her patient.

“Well, my dear, and how are you getting on? Not asleep, I see. Look at them rabbits! I can make you broth enough now. Get my living this way, look you. And it’s fair too, for I gives ’em good herbs. Fine cures I make by times, I can tell you.”

“I wondered what you gave the last,” said Ermine.

The old woman set her arms akimbo and laughed.

“Eh, I get lots o’ that sort. It’s a good wash they want, both for health and comeliness; and I make ’em take it that way. The powder’s nought—it’s the wash does it, look you: but they’d never do it if I told ’em so. Mum, now! there’s another.”

And dropping her voice to a whisper, Haldane emerged from the screen, and desired the applicant to enter.

It was a very handsome young woman who came in, on whose face the indulgence of evil passions—envy, jealousy, and anger—had left as strong a mark as beauty. She crossed herself as she stepped over the threshold.

“Have you a charm that will win hearts?” she asked.

“Whose heart do you desire to win?” was the reply.

“That of Wigan the son of Egglas.”

“Has it strayed from you?”

“I have never had it. He loves Brichtiva, on the other side of the wood, and he will not look on me. I hate her. I want to beguile his heart away from her.”

“What has she done to you?”

“Done!” cried the girl, with a flash of her eyes. “Done! She is fair and sweet, and she has won Wigan’s love. That is what she has done to me.”

“And you love Wigan?”

“I care nothing for Wigan. I hate Brichtiva. I want to be revenged on her.”

“I can do nothing for you,” answered Haldane severely. “Revenge is the business of the black witch, not the Wise Woman who deals in honest simples and harmless charms. Go home and say thy prayers, Maiden, and squeeze the black drop out of thine heart, that thou fall not into the power of the Evil One. Depart!”

This interview quite satisfied Ermine that Haldane was no genuine witch of the black order. However dubious her principles might be in some respects, she had evidently distinct notions of right and wrong, and would not do what she held wicked for gain.

Other applicants came at intervals through the day. There were many with burns, scalds, sprains, or bruises, nearly all of which Haldane treated with herbal poultices, or lotions; some with inward pain, to whom she gave bottles of herbal drinks. Some wanted charms for all manner of purposes—to make a horse go, induce plants to grow, take off a spell, or keep a lover true. A few asked to have their fortunes told, and wonderful adventures were devised for them. After all the rest, when it began to grow dusk, came a man muffled up about the face, and evidently desirous to remain unknown.

The White Witch rested her hands on the staff which she kept by her, partly for state and partly for support, and peered intently at the half-visible face of the new-comer.

“Have you a charm that will keep away evil dreams?” was the question that was asked in a harsh voice.

“It is needful,” replied Haldane in that hollow voice, which seemed to be her professional tone, “that I should know what has caused them.”

“You a witch, and ask that?” was the sneering answer.

“I ask it for your own sake,” said Haldane coldly. “Confession of sin is good for the soul.”

“When I lack shriving, I will go to a priest. Have you any such charm?”

“Answer my question, and you shall have an answer to yours.”

The visitor hesitated. He was evidently unwilling to confess.

"You need not seek to hide from me," resumed Haldane, "that the wrong you hold back from confessing is a deed of blood. The only hope for you is to speak openly."

The Silence continued unbroken for a moment, during which the man seemed to be passing through a mental conflict. At length he said, in a hoarse whisper—

"I never cared for such things before. I have done it many a time,—not just this, but things that were quite as—well, bad, if you will. They never haunted me as this does. But they were men, and these—Get rid of the faces for me! I must get rid of those terrible faces."

"If your confession is to be of any avail to you, it must be complete," said Haldane gravely. "Of whose faces do you wish to be rid?"

"It's a woman and a child," said the man, his voice sinking lower every time he spoke, yet it had a kind of angry ring in it, as if he appealed indignantly against some injustice. "There were several more, and why should these torment me? Nay, why should they haunt *me* at all? I only did my duty. There be other folks they should go to—them that make such deeds duty. I'm not to blame—but I can't get rid of those faces! Take them away, and I'll give you silver—gold—only take them away!"

The probable solution of the puzzle struck Haldane as she sat there, looking earnestly into the agitated features of her visitor.

"You must confess all," she said, "the names and every thing you know. I go to mix a potion which may help you. Bethink you, till I come again, of all the details of your sin, that you may speak honestly and openly thereof."

And she passed behind the screen. One glance at the white face of the girl lying there told Haldane that her guess was true. She knelt down, and set her lips close to Ermine's ear.

"You know the voice," she whispered shortly. "Who is he?"

"The Bishop's sumner, who arrested us."

"And helped to thrust you forth at the gate?"

Ermine bowed her head. Haldane rose, and quickly mixing in a cup a little of two strong decoctions of bitter herbs, she returned to her visitor.

"Drink that," she said, holding out the cup, and as he swallowed the bitter mixture, she muttered—

"Evil eye be stricken blind!  
Cords about thy heart unwind!  
Tell the truth, and shame the fiend!"

The sumner set down the cup with a wry face.

"Mother, I will confess all save the names, which I know not. I am sumner of my Lord of Lincoln, and I took these German heretics four months gone, and bound them, and cast them into my Lord's prison. And on Sunday, when they were tried, I guarded them through the town, and thrust them out of the East Gate. Did I do any more than my duty? There were women and little children among them, and they went to perish. They must all be dead by now, methinks, for no man would dare to have compassion on them, and the bitter cold would soon kill men so weak already with hunger. Yet they were heretics, accursed of God and men: but their faces were like the faces of the angels that are in Heaven. Two of those faces—a mother and a little child—will never away from me. I know not why nor how, but they made me think of another winter night, when there was no room for our Lady and her holy Child among men on earth. Oh take away those faces! I can bear no more."

"Did they look angrily at thee?"

"Angry! I tell you they were like the angels. I was pushing them out at the gate—I never thought of any thing but getting rid of heretics—when she turned, and the child looked up on me—such a look! I shall behold it till I die, if you cannot rid me of it."

"My power extends not to angels," replied Haldane.

"Can you do nought for me, then?" he asked in hopeless accents. "Must I feel for ever as Herod the King felt, when he had destroyed the holy innocents? I am not worse than others—why should they torture me?"

"Punishment must always follow sin."

"Sin! Is it any sin to punish a heretic? Father Dolfin saith it is a shining merit, because they are God's enemies, and destroy men's souls. I have not sinned. It must be Satan that torments me thus; it can only be he, since he is the father of heretics, and they go straight to him. Can't you buy him off? I'll give you any gold to get rid of those faces! Save me from them if you can!"

"I cannot. I have no power in such a case as thine. Get thee to the priest and shrive thee, thou miserable sinner, for thy help must come from Heaven and not from earth."

"The priest! *Shrive* me for obeying the Bishop, and bringing doom upon the heretics! Nay, witch!—art thou so far gone down the black road that thou reckonest such good works to be sins?"

And the sumner laughed bitterly.

"It is thy confession of sin wherewith I deal," answered Haldane sternly. "It is thy conscience, not mine, whereon it lieth heavy. Who is it that goeth down the black road—the man that cannot rest for the haunting of dead faces, or the

poor, harmless, old woman, that bade him seek peace from the Church of God?"

"The Church would never set that matter right," said the sumner, half sullenly, as he rose to depart.

"Then there is but one other hope for thee," said a clear low voice from some unseen place: "get thee to Him who is the very Head of the Church of God, and who died for thee and for all Christian men."

The sumner crossed himself several times over, not waiting for the end of one performance before he began another.

"Dame Mary, have mercy on us!" he cried; "was that an angel that spake?"

"An evil spirit would scarcely have given such holy counsel," gravely responded Haldane.

"Never expected to hear angels speak in a witch's hut!" said the astonished sumner. "Pray you, my Lord Angel—or my Lady Angela, if so be—for your holy intercession for a poor sinner."

"Better shalt thou have," replied the voice, "if thou wilt humbly rest thy trust on Christ our Lord, and seek His intercession."

"You see well," added Haldane, "that I am no evil thing, else would good spirits not visit me."

The humbled sumner laid two silver pennies in her hand, and left the hut with some new ideas in his head.

"Well, my dear, you've a brave heart!" said Haldane, when the sound of his footsteps had died away. "I marvel you dared speak. It is well he took you for an angel; but suppose he had not, and had come round the screen to see? When I told you the worst outlaw in the forest would not dare to look in on you, I was not speaking of *them*. They stick at nothing, commonly."

"If he had," said Ermine quietly, "the Lord would have known how to protect me. Was I to leave a troubled soul with the blessed truth untold, because harm to my earthly life might arise thereby?"

"But, my dear, you don't think he'll be the better?"

"If he be not, the guilt will not rest on my head."

The dark deepened, and the visitors seemed to have done coming. Haldane cooked a rabbit for supper for herself and Ermine, not forgetting Gib. She had bolted the door for the night, and was fastening the wooden shutter which served for a window, when a single tap on the door announced a late applicant for her services. Haldane opened the tiny wicket, which enabled her to speak without further unbarring when she found it convenient.

"Folks should come in the day," she said.

"Didn't dare!" answered a low whisper, apparently in the voice of a young man. "Can you find lost things?"

"That depends on the planets," replied Haldane mysteriously.

"But can't you rule the planets?"

"No; they rule me, and you too. However, come within, and I will see what I can do for you."

Unbarring the door, she admitted a muffled man, whose face was almost covered by a woollen kerchief evidently arranged for that purpose.

"What have you lost?" asked the Wise Woman.

"The one I loved best," was the unexpected answer.

"Man, woman, or child?"

"A maiden, who went forth the morrow of Saint Lucian, by the East Gate of Oxford, on the Dorchester road. If you can, tell me if she be living, and where to seek her."

Haldane made a pretence of scattering a powder on the dying embers of her wood-fire. (Note 1.)

"The charm will work quicker," she said, "if I know the name of the maiden."

"Ermine."

Haldane professed to peer into the embers.

"She is a foreigner," she remarked.

"Ay, you have her."



"I would have died for her!"—Page 243.

"A maiden with fair hair, a pale soft face, blue eyes, and a clear, gentle voice."

"That's it!—where is she?"

"She is still alive."

"Thanks be to all the saints! Where must I go to find her?"

"The answer is, Stay where you are."

"Stay! I cannot stay. I must find and succour her."

"Does she return your affection?"

"That's more than I can say. I've never seen any reason to think so."

"But you love her?"

"I would have died for her!" said the young man, with an earnest ring in his voice. "I have perilled my life, and the priests say, my soul. All this day have I been searching along the Dorchester way, and have found every one of them but two—her, and one other. I did my best, too, to save her and hers before the blow fell."

"What would you do, if you found her?"

"Take her away to a safe place, if she would let me, and guard her there at the risk of my life—at the cost, if need be."

"The maid whom you seek," said Haldane, after a further examination of the charred sticks on the hearth, "is a pious and devout maiden; has your life been hitherto fit to mate with such?"

"Whatever I have been," was the reply, "I would give her no cause for regret hereafter. A man who has suffered as I have has no mind left for trifling. She should do what she would with me."

Haldane seemed to hesitate whether she should give further information or not.

"Can't you trust me?" asked the young man sorrowfully. "I have done ill deeds in my life, but one thing I can say boldly,—I never yet told a lie. Oh, tell me where to go, if my love yet lives? Can't you trust me?"

"I can," said a voice which was not Haldane's. "I can, Stephen."

Stephen stared round the hut as if the evidence of his ears were totally untrustworthy. Haldane touched him on the shoulder with a smile.

"Come!" she said.

The next minute Stephen was kneeling beside Ermine, covering her hand with kisses, and pouring upon her all the sweetest and softest epithets which could be uttered.

"They are all gone, sweet heart," he said, in answer to her earnest queries. "And the priests may say what they will, but I believe they are in Heaven."

"But that other, Stephen? You said, me and one other. One of the men, I suppose?"

"That other," said Stephen gently, "that other, dear, is Rudolph."

"What can have become of him?"

"He may have strayed, or run into some cottage. That I cannot find him may mean that he is alive."

"Or that he died early enough to be buried," she said sadly.

"The good Lord would look to the child," said Haldane unexpectedly. "He is either safe with Him, or He will tell you some day what has become of Him."

"You're a queer witch!" said Stephen, looking at her with some surprise.

"I'm not a witch at all. I'm only a harmless old woman who deals in herbs and such like, but folks make me out worse than I am. And when every body looks on you as black, it's not so easy to keep white. If others shrink from naming God to you, you get to be shy of it too. Men and women have more influence over each other than they think. For years and years I've felt as if my soul was locked up in the dark, and could not get out: but this girl, that I took in because she needed bodily help, has given me better help than ever I gave her—she has unlocked the door, and let the light in on my poor smothered soul. Now, young man, if you'll take an old woman's counsel—old women are mostly despised, but they know a thing or two, for all that—you'll just let the maid alone a while. She couldn't be safer than she is here; and she'd best not venture forth of the doors till her hurts are healed, and the noise and talk has died away. Do you love her well enough to deny yourself for her good? That's the test of real love, and there are not many who will stand it."

"Tell me what you would have me do, and I'll see," answered Stephen with a smile.

"Can you stay away for a month or two?"

"Well, that's ill hearing. But I reckon I can, if it is to do any good to Ermine."

"If you keep coming here," resumed the shrewd old woman, "folks will begin to ask why. And if they find out why, it won't be good for you or Ermine either. Go home and look after your usual business, and be as like your usual self as you can. The talk will soon be silenced if no fuel be put to it. And don't tell your own mother what you have found."

"I've no temptation to do that," answered Stephen gravely. "My mother has been under the mould this many a year."

"Well, beware of any friend who tries to ferret it out of you—ay, and of the friends who don't try. Sometimes they are the more treacherous of the two. Let me know where you live, and if you are wanted I will send for you. Do you see this ball of grey wool? If any person puts that into your hand, whenever and however, come here as quick as you can. Till then, keep away."

"Good lack! But you won't keep me long away?"

"I shall think of her, not of you," replied Haldane shortly. "And the more you resent that, the less you love."

After a moment's struggle with his own thoughts, Stephen said, "You're right, Mother. I'll stay away till you send for me."

"Those are the words of a true man," said Haldane, "if you have strength to abide by them. Remember, the test of love is not sweet words, but self-sacrifice; and the test of truth is not bold words, but patient endurance."

"I'm not like to forget it. You bade me tell you where I live? I am one of the watchmen in the Castle of Oxford; but I am to be found most days from eleven to four on duty at the Osney Gate of the Castle. Only, I pray you to say to whomsoever you make your messenger, that my brother's wife—he is porter at the chief portal—is not to be trusted. She has a tongue as long as the way from here to Oxford, and curiosity equal to our mother Eve's or greater. Put yon ball of wool in *her* hand, and she'd never take a wink of sleep till she knew all about it."

"I trust no man till I have seen him, and no woman till I have seen through her," said Haldane.

"Well, she's as easy to see through as a church window. Ermine knows her. If you must needs trust any one, my cousin Derette is safe; she is in Saint John's anchorhold. But I'd rather not say too much of other folks."

"O Stephen, Mother Isel!"

"Aunt Isel would never mean you a bit of harm, dear heart, I know that. But she might let something out that she did not mean; and if a pair of sharp ears were in the way, it would be quite as well she had not the chance. She has carried a sore heart for you all these four months, Ermine; and she cried like a baby over your casting forth. But Uncle Manning and Haimet were as hard as stones. Flemild cried a little too, but not like Aunt Isel. As to Anania, nothing comes amiss to her that can be sown to come up talk. If an earthquake were to swallow one of her children, I do believe she'd only think what a fine thing it was for a gossip."

"I hope she's not quite so bad as that, Stephen."

"Hope on, sweet heart, and farewell. Here's Mother Haldane on thorns to get rid of me—that I can see. Now, Mother, what shall I pay you for your help, for right good it has been?"

Haldane laid her hand on Stephen's, which was beginning to unfasten his purse—a bag carried on the left side, under the girdle.

"Pay me," she said, "in care for Ermine."

"There's plenty of that coin," answered Stephen, smiling, as he withdrew his hand. "You'll look to your half of the bargain, Mother, and trust me to remember mine."

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Note 1. The ordinary fire at this time was of wood. Charcoal, the superior class of fuel, cost from 5 shillings to 10 shillings per ton (modern value from six to twelve guineas).

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## Chapter Nine.

### The Secret that was not told.

"Thine eye is on Thy wandering sheep;  
Thou knowest where they are, and Thou wilt keep  
And bring them home."

Hetty Bowman.

"So you've really come back at last! Well, I did wonder what you'd gone after! Such lots of folks have asked me—old Turguia, and Franna, and Aunt Isel, and Derette—leastwise Leuesa—and ever such a lot: and I couldn't tell ne'er a one of them a single word about it."

Anania spoke in the tone of an injured woman, defrauded of her rights by the malice prepense of Stephen.

"Well," said Stephen calmly, "you may tell them all that I went after my own business; and if any of them thinks that's what a man shouldn't do, she can come and tell me so."

"Well, to be sure! But what business could you have to carry you out of the town for such a time, and nobody to know a word about it? Tell me that, if you please."

"Don't you tell her nought!" said Osbert in the chimney-corner. "If you went to buy a new coat, she'll want to know where the money was minted, and who sheared the sheep."

"I'll finish my pie first, I think," answered Stephen, "for I am rather too hungry for talk; and I dare say she'll take no harm by that."

He added, in mental reservation,—“And meantime I can be thinking what to say.”

"Oh, *you* never want to know nought!" exclaimed Anania derisively. "Turguia, she said you were gone after rabbits—as if any man in his senses would do that in the snow: and Aunt Isel thought you were off on a holiday; and Franna was certain sure you were gone a-courting."

Stephen laughed to himself, but made no other reply.

"Baint you a-going to tell me, now?" demanded Anania.

"Aunt Isel wasn't so far out," said Stephen, helping himself to a second wedge of pie.

"And Franna?"

Anania was really concerned on that point. She found Stephen very useful, and his wages, most of which he gave her, more than paid for his board. If he were to marry and set up house for himself, it would deprive her of the means to obtain sundry fashionable frivolities wherein her soul delighted. Stephen was quite aware of these facts, which put an amusing edge on his determination to keep the truth from the inquisitive gossip.

"Franna?" he repeated. "Did you say she thought I'd gone after squirrels? because I've brought ne'er a one."

"No, stupid! She said you'd gone a-courting, and I want to know who."

"You must ask Franna that, not me. I did not say so."

"You'll say nothing, and that's the worst of signs. When folks won't answer a reasonable question, ten to one they've been in some mischief."

"I haven't finished the pie."

"Much you'll tell me when you have!"

"Oh, I'll answer any reasonable question," said Stephen, with a slight emphasis on the adjective.

Osbert laughed, and Anania was more vexed than ever.

"You're a pair!" said he.

"Now, look you here! I'll have an answer, if I stand here while Christmas; and you sha'n't have another bite till you've given it. Did you go a-courting?"

As Anania had laid violent hands on the pie, which she held out of his grasp, and as Stephen had no desire to get into a genuine quarrel with her, he was obliged to make some reply.

"Will you give me back the pie, if I tell you?"

"Yes, I will."

"Then, I'd no such notion in my head. Let's have the pie."

"When?" Anania still withheld the pie.

"When what?"

"When hadn't you such a notion? when you set forth, or when you came back?"

"Eat thy supper, lad, and let them buzzing things be!" said Osbert. "There'll never be no end to it, and thou mayest as well shut the portcullis first as last."

"Them's my thoughts too," said Stephen.

"Then you sha'n't have another mouthful."

"Nay, you're off your bargain. I answered the question, I'm sure."

"You've been after some'at ill, as I'm a living woman! You'd have told me fast enough if you hadn't. There's the pie,"—Anania set it up on a high shelf—"take it down if you dare!"

"I've no wish to quarrel with you, Sister. I'll go and finish my supper at Aunt Isel's—they'll give me some'at there, I know."

"Anania, don't be such a goose!" said Osbert.

"Don't you meddle, or you'll get what you mayn't like!" was the conjugal answer.

Osbert rose and took down a switch from its hook on the wall.

"You'll get it first, my lady!" said he: and Stephen, who never had any fancy for quarrelling, and was wont to leave the house when such not unfrequent scenes occurred, shut the door on the ill-matched pair, and went off to Kepeharme Lane.

"Stephen, is it? Good even, lad. I'm fain to see thee back. Art only just come?"

"Long enough to eat half a supper, and for Anania to get into more than half a temper," said Stephen, laughing. "I'm come to see, Aunt, if you'll give me another half."

"That I will, lad, and kindly welcome. What will thou have? I've a fat fish pie and some cold pork and beans."

"Let's have the pork and beans, for I've been eating pie up yonder."

"Good, and I'll put some apples down to roast. Hast thou enjoyed thy holiday?"

"Ay, middling, thank you, if it hadn't been so cold."

"It's a desperate cold winter!" said Isel, with a sigh, which Stephen felt certain was breathed to the memory of the Germans. "I never remember a worse."

"I'm afraid you feel lonely, Aunt."

"Ay, lonely enough, the saints know!"

"Why doesn't Haimet wed, and bring you a daughter to help you? Mabel's a bit too grand, I reckon."

"Mabel thinks a deal of herself, that's true. Well. I don't know. One's not another, Stephen."

"I'll not gainsay you, Aunt Isel. But mayn't 'another' be better than none? Leastwise, some others,"—as a recollection of his amiable sister-in-law crossed his mind.

"I don't know, Stephen. Sometimes that hangs on the 'one.' You'll think it unnatural in me, lad, but I don't miss Flemild nor Derette as I do Ermine."

"Bless you, dear old thing!" said Stephen in his heart.

"O Stephen, lad, I believe you've a kind heart; you've shown it in a many little ways. Do let me speak to you of them now and again! Your uncle won't have me say a word, and sometimes I feel as if I should burst. I don't believe you'd tell on me, if I did, and it would relieve me like, if I could let it out to somebody."

"Catch me at it!" said Stephen significantly. "You say what you've a mind, Aunt Isel: I'm as safe as the King's Treasury."

"Well, lad, do you think they're all gone—every one?"

"I'm afraid there's no hope for the most of them, Aunt," said Stephen in a low voice.

"Then you do think there might—?"

"One, perhaps, or two—ay, there *might* be, that had got taken in somewhere. I can't say it isn't just possible. But folks would be afraid of helping them, mostly."

"Ay, I suppose they would," said Isel sorrowfully.

Stephen ate in silence, sorely tempted to tell her what he knew. Had the danger been for himself only, and not for Ermine, he thought he should certainly have braved it.

"Well!" said Isel at last, as she stood by the fire, giving frequent twirls to the string which held the apples. "Maybe the good Lord is more merciful than men. *They* haven't much mercy."

"Hold you there!" said Stephen.

"Now why shouldn't we?—we that are all sinners, and all want forgiving? We might be a bit kinder to one another, if we tried."

"Some folks might. I'm not sure you could, Aunt Isel."

"Eh, lad, I'm as bad a sinner as other folks. I do pray to be forgiven many a time."

"Maybe that's a good help to forgiving," said Stephen.

"So you're back from your holiday?" said Haimet, coming in, and flinging his felt hat on one of the shelves. "Well, where did you go?"

"Oh, round-about," replied Stephen, taking his last mouthful of beans.

"Did you go Banbury way?"

"No, t'other way," answered Stephen, without indicating which other way.

"Weather sharp, wasn't it?"

"Ay, sharp enough. It's like to be a hard winter.—Well, Aunt, I'm much obliged to you. I reckon I'd best be turning home now."

"Weather rather sharp there too, perhaps?" suggested Haimet jocosely.

"Ay, there's been a bit of a storm since I got back. I came here to get out of it. I'm a fair-weather-lover, as you know."

Stephen went home by a round-about way, for he took Saint John's anchorhold in the route. He scarcely knew why he did it; he had an idea that the sight of Derette would be an agreeable diversion of his thoughts. Too deep down to be thoroughly realised, was a vague association of her with Ermine, whose chief friend in the family she had been.

Derette came to the casement as soon as she heard from Leuesa who was there.

"Good evening, Stephen!" she said cordially. "Leuesa, my maid, while I chat a minute with my cousin, prithee tie on thine hood and run for a cheese. I forgot it with the other marketing this morrow. What are cheeses now? a halfpenny each?"

"Three a penny, Lady, they were yesterday."

"Very good; bring a pennyworth, and here is the money."

As soon as Leuesa was out of hearing, Derette turned to Stephen with a changed expression on her face.

"Stephen!" she said, in a low whisper, "you have been to see after *them*. Tell me what you found."

"I never said nought o' the sort," answered Stephen, rather staggered by his cousin's penetration and directness.

"Maybe your heart said it to mine. You may trust me, Stephen. I would rather let out my life-blood than any secret which would injure them."

"Well, you're not far wrong, Derette. Gerard and Agnes are gone; they lie under the snow. So does Adelheid; but Berthold was not buried; I reckon he was one of the last. I cannot find Rudolph."

"You have told me all but the one thing my heart yearns to know. Ermine?"

Stephen made no reply.

"You have found her!" said Derette. "Don't tell me where. It is enough, if she lives. Keep silence."

"Some folks are hard that you'd have looked to find soft," answered Stephen, with apparent irrelevance; "and by times folk turn as soft as butter that you'd expect to be as hard as stones."

Derette laid up the remark in her mind for future consideration.

"Folks baint all bad that other folks call ill names," he observed further.

Derette gave a little nod. She was satisfied that Ermine had found a refuge, and with some unlikely person.



"Wind's chopped round since morning, seems to me," pursued Stephen, as if he had nothing particular to say. "Blew on my back as I came up to the gate."

Another nod from Derette. She understood that Ermine's refuge lay south of Oxford.

"Have you seen Flemild?" she asked. "She has sprained her wrist sadly, and cannot use her hand."

"Now just you tell her," answered Stephen, with a significant wink, "I've heard say the White Witch of Bensington makes wonderful cures with marsh-mallows poultice: maybe it would ease her."

"I'll let her know, be sure," said Derette: and Stephen took his leave as Leuesa returned with her purchase.

He had told her nothing about Ermine: he had told her every thing. Derette thanked God for the—apparently causeless—impulse to mention her sister's accident, which had just given Stephen the opportunity to utter the last and most important item. Not the slightest doubt disturbed her mind that Ermine was in the keeping of the White Witch of Bensington, and that Stephen was satisfied of the Wise Woman's kind treatment and good faith. She was sorry for Gerhardt and Agnes; but she had loved Ermine best of all. As for Rudolph, if Ermine were safe, why should he not be likewise? Derette's was a hopeful nature, not given to look on the dark side of any thing which had a light one: a tone of mind which, as has been well said, is worth a thousand a year to its possessor.

Leuesa returned full of excitement. A wolf had been killed only three miles from the city, and the Earl had paid the sportsman fourpence for its head, which was to be sent up to the King—the highest price ever given for a wolf's head in that county. The popular idea that Edgar exterminated all the wolves in England is an error. Henry Second paid tenpence for three wolves' heads (Pipe Roll, 13 Henry Second), and Henry Third's State Papers speak of "hares, wolves, and cats," in the royal forests (Close Roll, 38 Henry Third).

The days went on, and Stephen received no summons to the Wise Woman's hut. He found it very hard to keep away. If he could only have known that all was going on right! But weeks and months passed by, and all was silence. Stephen almost made up his mind to brave the witch's anger, and go without bidding. Yet there would be danger in that, for Anania, who had been piqued by his parrying of her queries, watched him as a cat watches a mouse.

He was coming home, one evening in early summer, having been on guard all day at the East Gate, when, as he passed the end of Snydyard (now Oriel) Street, a small child of three or four years old toddled up to him, and said—

"There! Take it."

Stephen, who had a liking for little toddlers, held out his hand with a smile; and grew suddenly grave when there was deposited in it a ball of grey wool.

"Who gave thee this?"

"Old man—down there—said, 'Give it that man with the brown hat,'" was the answer.

Stephen thanked the child, threw it a sweetmeat, with which his pocket was generally provided, and ran after the old man, whom he overtook at the end of the street.

"What mean you by this?" he asked.

The old man looked up blankly.

"I know not," said he. "I was to take it to Stephen the Watchdog,—that's all I know."

"Tell me who gave it you, then?"

"I can't tell you—a woman I didn't know."

"Where?"

"A bit this side o' Dorchester."

"That'll do. Thank you."

The ball was safely stored in Stephen's pocket, and he hastened to the Castle. At the gate he met his brother.

"Here's a pretty mess!" said Osbert. "There's Orme of the Fen run off, because I gave him a scolding for his impudence: and it is his turn to watch to-night. I have not a minute to go after him; I don't know whatever to do."

Stephen grasped the opportunity.

"I'll go after him for you, if you'll get me leave for a couple of days or more. I have a bit of business of my own I want to see to, and I can manage both at once—only don't tell Anania of it, or she'll worry the life out of me."

Osbert laughed.

"Make your mind easy!" said he. "Go in and get you ready, lad, and I'll see to get you the leave."

Stephen turned into the Castle, to fetch his cloak and make up a parcel of provisions, while Osbert went to the Earl, returning in a few minutes with leave of absence for Stephen. To the great satisfaction of the latter, Anania was not at home; so he plundered her larder, and set off, leaving Osbert to make his excuses, and to tell her just as much, or as little, as he found convenient. Stephen was sorely tempted to go first to Bensington, but he knew that both principle and policy directed the previous search for Orme. He found that exemplary gentleman, after an hour's search, drinking and gambling in a low ale-booth outside South Gate; and having first pumped on him to get him sober, he sent him off to his

work with a lecture. Then, going a little way down Grandpoint Street, he turned across Presthey, and coming out below Saint Edmund's Well, took the road to Bensington.

The journey was accomplished in much shorter time than on the previous occasion. As Stephen came up to the Witch's hut, he heard the sound of a low, monotonous voice; and being untroubled, at that period of the world's history, by any idea that eavesdropping was a dishonourable employment, he immediately applied his ear to the keyhole. To his great satisfaction, he recognised Ermine's voice. The words were these:—

"I confess to Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hiddest these things from the wise and prudent, and revealedst them unto little children. Even so, Father; for this was well-pleasing before Thee. All things are to Me delivered from My Father; and none knoweth the Son save the Father; neither the Father doth any know, save the Son, and he to whom the Son is willing to reveal Him. Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

"Did He say that, now, dearie?" asked the voice of the White Witch. "Eh, it sounds good—it does so! I'm burdened, saints knows; I'd like to find a bit o' rest and refreshing. Life's a heavy burden, and sin's a heavier; and there's a many things I see are sins now, that I never did afore you came. But how am I to know that He's willing?"

"Won't you come and see, Mother?" said Ermine softly.

"Husht! Bide a bit, my dear: there's a little sound at the door as I don't rightly understand. Maybe—"

In another moment the wicket opened, and Haldane's face looked out upon Stephen.

"Good evening, Mother!" said Stephen, holding up the ball of grey wool.

"Ay, you got it, did you? Come in—you're welcome."

"I hope I am," replied Stephen, going forward. Ermine was no longer hidden behind the screen, but seated on the form in the chimney-corner. On her calm fair brow there was no scar visible.

"Ay, ain't she a fine cure!" cried the old woman. "That's white mallows, that is, and just a pinch of—Well, I'd best tell no tales. But she's a grand cure; I don't hide her up now. Nobody'd ever guess nought, from the look of her, now, would folks? What think you?"

"No, I hope they wouldn't," answered Stephen: "leastwise they sha'n't if I can help it."

Haldane laid her hand on his arm impressively.

"Stephen, you must take her away."

"I'll take her fast enough, if she'll go, Mother; but why? I reckoned she was as safe here as she could be anywhere."

"She *was*," said Haldane significantly. "She won't be, presently. I don't tell my secrets: but the Wise Woman knows a thing or two. You'd best take her, and waste no time: but it must not be to Oxford. There's folks there would know her face."

"Ay, to be sure there are. Well, Mother, I'll do your bidding. Where'll she be safest?"

"You'd best be in London. It's the biggest place. And when a man wants to hide, he'll do it better in a large town than a little place, where every body knows his neighbour's business."

"All right!" said Stephen. "Ermine!"—and he went up to her—"will you go with me?"

Ermine lived in an age when it was a most extraordinary occurrence for a woman to have any power to dispose of herself in marriage, and such a thing was almost regarded as unnatural and improper. She held out her hand to Stephen.

"I will go where the Lord sends me," she said simply. "Dear Mother Haldane saved my life, and she has more right to dispose of me than any one else. Be it so."

"When folks are wed, they commonly have gifts made them," said Haldane with a smile. "I haven't much to give, and you'll think my gift a queer one: but I wish you'd take it, Ermine. It's Gib."

"I will take Gib and welcome, and be very thankful to you," answered Ermine in some surprise. "But, Mother Haldane, you are leaving yourself all alone. I was afraid you would miss me, after all these weeks, and if you lose Gib too, won't you be lonely?"

"Miss you!" repeated the old woman in a tremulous voice. "Miss you, my white bird that flew into my old arms from the cruel storm? Sha'n't I miss you? But it won't be for long. Ay! when one has kept company with the angels for a while, one's pretty like to miss them when they fly back home. But you'd best take Gib. The Wise Woman knows why. Only I don't tell all my secrets. And it won't be for long."

Haldane had been laying fresh sticks on the embers while she spoke. Now she turned to Stephen.

"She'd best have Gib," she said. "He's like another creature since she came. She'll take care of him. And you'll take care of her. I told you last time you were here as I'd do the best for her, not for you. But this is the best for both of you. And maybe the good Lord'll do the best for me. Ermine says He's not above keeping a poor old woman company. But whatever comes, and whatever you may hear, you bear in mind that I did my best for you."

"Ay, that I'm sure you've done, Mother," replied Stephen warmly. "As for Gib, I'll make him welcome for your sake; he looks rather comfortable now, so I think he'll get along."

It certainly was not too much to say that Gib was another creature. That once dilapidated-looking object, under Ermine's fostering care, had developed into a sleek, civilised, respectable cat; and as he sat on her lap, purring and blinking at the wood-fire, he suggested no ideas of discomfort.

"Ay, I've done my best," repeated the old woman with a sigh. "The Lord above, He knows I've done it. You'd best be off with the morning light. I can't be sure—Well, I mustn't tell my secrets."

Stephen was inclined to be amused with the Wise Woman's reiteration of this assertion. What fancy she had taken into her head he could not guess. It was some old-womanly whim, he supposed. If he could have guessed her reason for thus dismissing them in haste—if he had seen in the embers what she saw coming nearer and nearer, and now close to her very door—wild horses would not have carried Stephen away from the woman who had saved Ermine.

Haldane's bidding was obeyed. The dawn had scarcely broken on the following morning, when Stephen and Ermine, with Gib in the arms of the latter, set forth on their journey to London. Haldane stood in her doorway to watch them go.

"Thank God!" she said, when she had entirely lost sight of them. "Thank God, my darling is safe! I can bear anything that comes now. It is only what such as me have to look for. And Ermine said the good Lord wouldn't fail them that trusted Him. I'm only a poor ignorant old woman, and He knows it; but He took the pains to make me, and He'll not have forgot it; and Ermine says He died for me, and I'm sure He could never forget that, if He did it. I've done a many ill things, though I'm not the black witch they reckon me: no, I've had more laid to my charge than ever I did; but for all that I'm a sinner, I'm afeared, and I should be sore afeared to meet what's coming if He wouldn't take my side. But Ermine, she said He would, if I trusted myself to Him."

Haldane clasped her withered hands and looked heavenwards.

"Good Lord!" she said, "I'd fain have Thee on my side, and I do trust Thee. And if I'm doing it wrong way about, bethink Thee that I'm only a poor old woman, that never had no chance like, and I mean to do right, and do put things to rights for me, as Thou wouldst have 'em. Have a care of my darling, and see her safe: and see me through what's coming, if Thou wilt be so good. Worlds o' worlds, Amen."

That conclusion was Haldane's misty idea of the proper way to end a prayer (Note 1). Perhaps the poor petition found its way above the stars as readily as the choral services that were then being chanted in the perfumed cathedrals throughout England.

She went in and shut the door. She did not, as usual, shake her straw bed and fold up the rug. A spectator might have thought that she had no heart for it. She only kept up the fire; for though summer was near, it was not over-warm in the crazy hut, and a cold east wind was blowing. For the whole of the long day she sat beside it, only now and then rising to look out of the window, and generally returning to her seat with a muttered exclamation of "Not yet!" The last time she did this, she pulled the faded woollen kerchief over her shoulders with a shiver.

"Not yet! I reckon they'll wait till it's dusk. Well! all the better: they'll have more time to get safe away."

The pronouns did not refer to the same persons, but Haldane made no attempt to specify them.

She sat still after that, nodding at intervals, and she was almost asleep when the thing that she had feared came upon her. A low sound, like and yet unlike the noise of distant thunder, broke upon her ear. She sat up, wide awake in a moment.

"They're coming! Good Lord, help me through! Don't let it be very bad to bear, and don't let it be long!"

Ten minutes had not passed when the hut was surrounded by a crowd. An angry crowd, armed with sticks, pitchforks, or anything that could be turned into a weapon—an abusive crowd, from whose lips words of hate and scorn were pouring, mixed with profaner language.

"Pull the witch out! Stone her! drown her! burn her!" echoed on all sides.

"Good Lord, don't let them burn me!" said poor old Haldane, inside the hut. "I'd rather be drowned, if Thou dost not mind."

Did the good Lord not mind what became of the helpless old creature, who, in her ignorance and misery, was putting her trust in Him? It looked like it, as the mob broke open the frail door, and roughly hauled out the frailer occupant of the wretched hut.

"Burn her!" The cry was renewed: and it came from one of the two persons most prominent in the mob—that handsome girl to whom Haldane had refused the revenge she coveted upon Brichtiva.

"Nay!" said the other, who was the Bishop's sumner, "that would be irregular. Burning's for heretics. Tie her hands and feet together, and cast her into the pond: that's the proper way to serve witches."

The rough boys among the crowd, to whom the whole scene was sport—and though we have become more civilised in some ways as time has passed, sport has retained much of its original savagery even now—gleefully tied together Haldane's hands and feet, and carried her, thus secured, to a large deep pond about a hundred yards from her abode.

This was the authorised test for a witch. If she sank and was drowned, she was innocent of the charge of witchcraft; if she swam on the surface, she was guilty, and liable to the legal penalty for her crime. Either way, in nine out of ten cases, the end was death: for very few thought of troubling themselves to save one who proved her innocence after this fashion. (Note 2.)

The boys, having thus bound the poor old woman into a ball, lifted her up, and with a cry of—"One—two—three!" flung her into the pond. At that moment a man broke through the ring that had formed outside the principal actors.

"What are you doing now? Some sort of mischief you're at, I'll be bound—you lads are always up to it. Who are you ducking? If it's that cheat Wrangecoke, I'll not meddle, only don't—What, Mother Haldane! Shame on you! Colgrim,

Walding, Oselach, Amfrid!—shame on you! What, *you*, Erenbald, that she healed of that bad leg that laid you up for three months! And *you*, Baderun, whose child she brought back well-nigh from the grave itself! If you are men, and not demons, come and help me to free her!”

The speaker did not content himself with words. He had waded into the pond, and was feeling his way carefully to the spot where the victim was. For Mother Haldane had not struggled nor even protested, but according to all the unwritten laws relating to witchcraft, had triumphantly exhibited her innocence by sinking to the bottom like a stone. The two spectators whom he had last apostrophised joined him in a shamefaced manner, one muttering something about his desire to avoid suspicion of being in league with a witch, and the other that he “didn’t mean no harm:” and among them, amid the more or less discontented murmurs of those around, they at last dragged out the old woman, untied the cords, and laid her on the grass. The life was yet in her; but it was nearly gone.

“Who’s got a sup of anything to bring her to?” demanded her rescuer. “She’s not gone; she opened her eyes then.”

The time-honoured remedies for drowning were applied. The old woman was set on her head “to let the water run out;” and somebody in the crowd having produced a flask of wine, an endeavour was made to induce her to swallow. Consciousness partially returned, but Haldane did not seem to recognise any one.

“Don’t be feared, Mother,” said the man who had saved her. “I’ll look after you. Don’t you know me? I am Wigan, son of Egglas the charcoal-burner, in the wood.”

Then Mother Haldane spoke,—slowly, with pauses, and as if in a dream.

“Ay, He looked after me. Did all—I asked. He kept them—safe, and—didn’t let it—be long.”

She added two words, which some of her hearers said were—“Good night.” A few thought them rather, “Good Lord!”

Nobody understood her meaning. Only He knew it, who had kept safe the two beings whom Mother Haldane loved, and had not let the hour of her trial and suffering be long.

And then, when the words had died away in one last sobbing sigh, Wigan the son of Egglas stood up from the side of the dead, and spoke to the gazing and now silent multitude.

“You can go home,” he said. “You’ve had your revenge. And what was it for? How many of you were there that she had not helped and healed? Which of you did she ever turn away unhelped, save when the malady was beyond her power, or when one came to her for aid to do an evil thing? Men, women, lads! you’ve repeated the deed of Iscariot this day, for you’ve betrayed innocent blood—you have slain your benefactor and friend. Go home and ask God and the saints to forgive you—if they ever can. How they sit calm above yonder, and stand this world, is more than I can tell.—Poor, harmless, kindly soul! may God comfort thee in His blessed Heaven! And for them that have harried thee, and taken thy life, and have the black brand of murder on their souls, God pardon them as He may!”

The crowd dispersed silently and slowly. Some among them, who had been more thoughtless than malicious, were already beginning to realise that Wigan’s words were true. The sunner, however, marched away whistling a tune. Then Wigan, with his shamefaced helpers, Erenbald and Baderun, and a fourth who had come near them as if he too were sorry for the evil which he had helped to do, inasmuch as he had not stood out to prevent its being done, lifted the frail light corpse, and bore it a little way into the wood. There, in the soft fresh green, they dug a grave, and laid in it the body of Mother Haldane.

“We’d best lay a cross of witch hazel over her,” suggested Baderun. “If things was all right with her, it can’t do no harm; and if so be—”

“Lay what you like,” answered Wigan. “I don’t believe, and never did, that she was a witch. What harm did you ever know her do to any one?”

“Nay, but Mildred o’ th’ Farm, over yonder, told me her black cow stopped giving milk the night Mother Haldane came up to ask for a sup o’ broth, and she denied it.”

“Ay, and Hesela by the Brook—I heard her tell,” added Erenbald, “that her hens, that hadn’t laid them six weeks or more, started laying like mad the day after she’d given the White Witch a gavache. What call you that?”

“I call it stuff and nonsense,” replied Wigan sturdily, “save that both of them got what they deserved: and so being, I reckon that God, who rewards both the righteous and the wicked, had more to do with it than the White Witch.”

“Eh, Wigan, but them’s downright wicked words! You’d never go to say as God Almighty takes note o’ hens, and cows, and such like?”

“Who does, then? How come we to have any eggs and milk?”

“Why, man, that’s natur’.”

“I heard a man on Bensington Green, one day last year,” answered Wigan, “talking of such things; and he said that ‘nature’ was only a fool’s word for God. And said I to myself, That’s reason.”

Wigan, being one of that very rare class who think for themselves, was not comprehended by his missionary tours, had been to this man’s heart as a match to tinder.

“Ay, and he said a deal more too: but it wouldn’t be much use telling you. There—that’s enough. She’ll sleep quiet there. I’ll just go round by her hut, and see if her cat’s there—no need to leave the creature to starve.”

“Eh, Wigan, you’d never take that thing into your house? It’s her familiar, don’t you know? They always be, them black cats—they’re worse than the witches themselves.”

“Specially when they aren’t black, like this? I tell you, she wasn’t a witch; and as to the cat, thou foolish man, it’s

nought more nor less than a cat. I'll take it home to Brichtiva my wife,—she's not so white-livered as thou."

"Eh, Wigan, you'll be sorry one o' these days!"

"I'm as sorry now as I can be, that I didn't come up sooner: and I don't look to be sorry for aught else."

Wigan went off to the empty hut. But all his coaxing calls of "Puss, puss!" proved vain. Gib was in Ermine's arms; and Ermine was travelling towards London in a heavy carrier's waggon, with Stephen on horseback alongside. He gave up the search at last, and went home; charging Brichtiva that if Gib should make a call on her, she was to be careful to extend to him an amount of hospitality which would induce him to remain.

But Gib was never seen in the neighbourhood of Bensington again.

"What wonder?" said Erenbald. "The thing was no cat—it was a foul fiend; and having been released from the service of its earthly mistress, had returned as a matter of course to Satan its master."

This conclusion was so patent to every one of his neighbours that nobody dreamed of questioning it. Morally speaking, there is no blindness so hopelessly incurable as that of the man who is determined to keep his eyes shut. Only the Great Physician can heal such a case as this, and He has often to do it by painful means.

"Christ save you!" said Isel, coming into the anchorhold one evening, a fortnight after Stephen's disappearance. "Well, you do look quiet and peaceful for sure! and I'm that tired!—"

"Mother, I am afraid you miss me sadly," responded Derette, almost self-reproachfully.

"I'm pleased enough to think you're out of it, child. Miss you? Well, I suppose I do; but I haven't scarce time to think what I miss. There's one thing I'd miss with very great willingness, I can tell you, and that's that horrid tease, Anania. She's been at me now every day this week, and she will make me tell her where Stephen is, and what he's gone after,—and that broom knows as much as I do. She grinds the life out of me, pretty nigh: and what am I to do?"

Derette smiled sympathetically. Leuesa said—

"It does seem strange he should stay so long away."

"Anania will have it he is never coming again."

"I dare say she is right there," said Derette suddenly.

"Saints alive! what dost thou mean, child? Never coming again?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Derette quietly.

"Well, I should. I should wonder more than a little, I can tell you. Whatever gives you that fancy, child?"

"I have it, Mother; why I cannot tell you."

"I hope you are not a prophetess!"

"I don't think I am," said Derette with a smile.

"I think Ermine was a bit of one, poor soul! She seemed to have some notion what was coming to her. Eh, Derette! I'd give my best gown to know those poor things were out of Purgatory. Father Dolfin says we shouldn't pray for them: but I do—I can't help it. If I were a priest, I'd say mass for them every day I lived—ay, I would! I never could understand why we must not pray for heretics. Seems to me, the more wrong they've gone, the more they want praying for. Not that *they* went far wrong—I'll not believe it. Derette, dost thou ever pray for the poor souls?"

"Ay, Mother: every one of them."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it. And as to them that ill-used them, let them look to themselves. Maybe they'll not find themselves at last in such a comfortable place as they look for. The good Lord may think that cruelty to Christian blood (Note 3)—and they were Christian blood, no man can deny—isn't so very much better than heresy after all. Hope he does."

"I remember Gerard's saying," replied Derette, "that all the heresies in the world were only men's perversions of God's truths: and that if men would but keep close to Holy Scripture, there would be no heresies."

"Well, it sounds like reason, doesn't it?" answered Isel with a sigh.

"But I remember his saying also," pursued Derette, "that where one man followed reason and Scripture, ten listened to other men's voices, and ten more to their own fancies."

Dusk was approaching on the following day, when a rap came on the door of the anchorhold, and a voice said—

"Leuesa, pray you, ask my cousin to come to the casement a moment."

"Stephen!" cried Derette, hurrying to her little window when she heard his voice. "So you have come back!"

"Shall I go now, Lady, for the fresh fish?" asked Leuesa, very conveniently for Stephen, who wondered if she good-naturedly guessed that he had a private communication to make.

"Do," said Derette, giving her three silver pennies.

As soon as Leuesa was out of hearing, Stephen said—"I am only here for a few hours, Derette, and nobody knows it save my Lord, you, and my brother. I have obtained my discharge, and return to London with the dawn."

"Are you not meaning to come back, Stephen? Folks are saying that."

"Folks are saying truth. I shall live in London henceforth. But remember, Derette, that is a secret."

"I shall not utter it, Stephen. Truly, I wish you all happiness, but I cannot help being sorry."

There were tears in Derette's eyes. Stephen had ever been more brotherly to her than her own brothers. It was Stephen who had begged her off from many a punishment, had helped her over many a difficulty, had made her rush baskets and wooden boats, and had always had a sweetmeat in his pocket for her in childhood. She was grieved to think of losing him.

"You may well wish me happiness in my honeymoon," he said, laughingly.

"Are you married? Why, when—O Stephen, Stephen! is it Ermine?"

"You are a first-rate guesser, little one. Yes, I have Ermine safe; and I will keep her so, God helping me."

"I am so glad, Steenie!" said Derette, falling into the use of the old pet name, generally laid aside now. "Tell Ermine I am so glad to hear that, and so sorry to lose you both: but I will pray God and the saints to bless you as long as I live, and that will be better for you than our meeting, though it will not be the same thing to me."

"So glad, and so sorry!" It seems to me, Cousin, that's no inapt picture of life. God keep thee!—to the day when—Ermine says—it will be all 'glad' and no 'sorry.'"

"Ay, we shall meet one day. Farewell!"

The days passed, and no more was seen or heard of Stephen in Oxford. What had become of him was not known at the Walnut Tree, until one evening when Osbert looked in about supper-time, and was invited to stay for the meal, with the three of whom the family now consisted—Manning, Isel, and Haimet. As Isel set on the table a platter of little pies, she said—

"There, that's what poor Stephen used to like so well. Maybe you'll fancy them too, Osbert."

"Why do you call him poor Stephen?" questioned Osbert, as he appropriated a pie. "He is not particularly poor, so far as I know."

"Well, we've lost him like," said Isel, with a sigh. "When folks vanish out of your sight like snow in a thaw, one cannot help feeling sorry."

"Oh, I'm sorry for myself, more ways than one: but not so much for Stephen."

"Why, Osbert, do you know where he is, and what he's doing?"

"Will you promise not to let on to Anania, if I tell you?"

"Never a word that I can help, trust me."

"Her knowing matters nought, except that she'll never let me be if she thinks I have half a notion about it. Well, he's gone south somewhere—I don't justly know where, but I have a guess of London way."

"What for?"

"Dare say he had more reasons than he gave me. He told me he was going to be married."

"Dear saints!—who to?"

"Didn't ask him."

Isel sat looking at Osbert in astonishment, with a piece of pie transfixed on the end of her knife.

"You see, if I did not know, I shouldn't get so much bothered with folks asking me questions: so I thought I'd let it be."

That Osbert's "folks" might more properly be read "Anania," Isel knew full well.

"Saints love us!—but I would have got to know who was my sister-in-law, if I'd been in your place."

"To tell the truth, Aunt, I don't care, so long as she is a decent woman who will make Stephen comfortable; and I think he's old enough to look out for himself."

"But don't you know even what he was going to do?—seek another watch, or go into service, or take to trade, or what?"

"I don't know a word outside what I have just told you. Oh, he'll be all right! Stephen has nine lives, like a cat. He always falls on his feet."

"But it don't seem natural like!"

Osbert laughed. "I suppose it is natural to a woman to have more curiosity than a man. I never had much of that

stuff. Anania's got enough for both."

"Well, I'm free to confess she has. Osbert, how do you manage her? I can't."

"Let her alone as long as I can, and take the mop to her when I can't," was the answer.

"I should think the mop isn't often out of your hand," observed Haimet with painful candour.

"It wears out by times," returned Osbert drily.

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Note 1. "Into the worlds of worlds" is the Primer's translation of "*in saecula saeculorum*."

Note 2. That witchcraft is no fable, but a real sin, which men have committed in past times, and may commit again, is certain from Holy Scripture. But undoubtedly, in the Middle Ages, numbers of persons suffered under accusation of this crime who were entirely innocent: and the so-called "white witches" were in reality mere herbalists and dealers in foolish but harmless charms, often consisting in a kind of nursery rhyme and a few Biblical words.

Note 3. The wrong of cruelty to men and women, as such, whether they were Christians or not, had not dawned on men's minds in the twelfth century, nor did it till the Reformation. But much pity was often expressed for the sufferings of "Christian blood," and a very few persons had some compassion for animals.

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## Chapter Ten.

### Barriers in the Way.

"Christ is my readiness: who lives in Him  
Can scarcely be unready."

S.W. Partridge.

A little way out of Dorchester, surrounded by pollard willow trees, and on a narrow slip of ground which sloped down towards the river, stood a tiny mud hut, the inhabitants of which lived in great misery even for that time. One small chamber, with a smaller lean-to, constituted the whole dwelling. As to furniture, a modern eye, glancing round, would have said there was none. There was a bundle of rags, covering a heap of straw, in one corner; and in another was a broken bench, which with a little contrivance might have seated three persons of accommodating tempers. A hole in the roof let out the smoke—when it chose to go; and let in the rain and snow, which generally chose to come. On a niche in the wall stood a single pan, an axe, and a battered tin bowl, which comprised all the family riches. The axe was the tool which obtained bread—and very little of it; the pan did all the cooking; the bowl served for pail, jug, and drinking-vessel. An iron socket let into the wall held a piece of half-burnt pinewood, which was lamp and candle to the whole house. A handful of chips of wood, branches, and dried leaves, in one corner, represented the fuel; and a heap of snow underneath the hole showed that its influence was not potent.

On the heap of rags, five persons were lying, huddled close together for warmth's sake—father, mother, and three children. How had they come into such a condition as this? Ah, they had not always lived thus. Only a few years ago, this man had been a prosperous silversmith at Reading; his wife had been well dressed, his children well fed, his acquaintance large, and himself generally respected. How had it come about that they were now in this pitiable condition? Had the man been idle and neglectful of his business? By no means; he had been diligent and hard-working. Was he a drunken profligate? Not at all; he was, for the age, unusually sober. Had he committed some terrible crime which had brought him to ruin?

The only true answer seems scarcely possible: and yet the only answer possible is awfully true. The man was born a Jew, and had become a Christian. It was only natural that this should turn the Jewish community against him; and all his acquaintances deserted him as a matter of course. But surely this very fact should have made the Christian community more friendly and helpful! Alas, the Christian community, in bondage to the iron yoke of Rome, hated him more as a Jew than they welcomed him as a Christian. Rome has always been the hater and opponent of Israel. The law of England at that time was actually this: that if a Jew became converted to Christianity, he forfeited everything he possessed to the Crown, and had to begin the world again. This had been the lot of poor David ben Mossi, and his wife Ruth, whose conversion had taken place under Gerhardt's preaching. They were too honest to hide the change in their convictions, though to reveal it meant worldly ruin. They applied for baptism, and by so doing literally gave up all for Christ—home, goods, gain, and occupation, not to speak of friends. David obtained work as a woodcutter, which brought them in just enough to keep life in them and rags about them; and he built with his own hands, aided by his faithful Ruth, the mud hovel, wherein they found the only shelter that this cold world had for them. They had left Reading, preferring solitude to averted looks and abusive tongues; and not a creature in Dorchester came near them. Alike as Jews and as poor people, they were not worth cultivating.

David had retained his name, being one used also by Christians; but Ruth had been required to change hers. She had chosen the name of Christian, as the most truthful and expressive that she could take.

"And I like to feel," she said to David, "that I have something of our blessed Lord in my name."

"Let us keep Him in our hearts, Wife," was the answer: "then it will not much matter whether or no we have Him any where else."

It was bitterly cold in the hovel that snowy night. The children had cried themselves to sleep, and the parents felt as if they could easily have done the same. The lights were out at Dorchester, and all nature had settled down to rest, when Christian, who could not sleep for the cold, fancied she heard a voice outside the hut.

"David!" it seemed to say.

But the voice, if voice there were, was faint, and Christian did not like to rouse the husband who had lost his suffering in sleep, for what might have been a mere fancy. The voice spoke again.

"Ruth!" it said this time.

Christian hesitated no longer.

"David! There is one without, calling on us. And it must be one we knew of old, for it calls me by my old name. Pray thee, get up, and let the poor soul in; 'tis not a night for a dog to tarry without, never speak of a human creature, who must be in some trouble."

David sat up and listened.

"I hear nothing, Wife. I think thou must have been dreaming."

"Nay, I have been wide awake this hour gone. I am sure some one spoke."

"I think it's fancy, Christian. However—"

"There's no harm in making sure."

"There's the harm of letting in a lot of snow," said David, not suiting the action to the word, for he had risen and was pulling on his hose. They required careful pulling, as they were so nearly in pieces that very little rough handling would have damaged them past repair. He was fastening the last clasp when the voice spoke again. It was nearer now, close at the door, and it was low and trembling, as if the applicant had hard work to speak at all.

"For the love of the Crucified," it said, "take in a Christian child!"

David's response was to open the door instantly.

Something at once staggered in, and sank down on the bench:—something which looked at first sight more like a statue of white marble than a human being, so thick lay the snow over the wrappers which enfolded it. But when David had succeeded in unfolding the wrappers, and brushing off the snow, they discovered that their visitor was a woman, and that in her arms a child lay clasped, either dead or sleeping.

The moment that Christian perceived so much as this, she hastily rose, throwing her poor mantle over her, and drew near to the stranger.

"Poor soul, you're heartily welcome," she said, "whoever you are. We have little beside a roof to offer you, for we have scarcely food or raiment ourselves, nor money to buy either; but such as we have we will give you with all our hearts."

"May the Blessed bless you!" was the faint answer. "Don't you know me, Ruth?"

"Know you!" Christian studied the face of her unexpected guest. "Nay, I do almost believe—Countess! Is it you?"

"Ay."

"Whatever has brought you to this? The richest Jewess in Reading! Have you, too, become a Christian like us?"

Countess did not give a direct answer to that direct question.

"I am not poor now," she said. "I can find you money for food for us all, if you will suffer me to stay here till the storm has abated, and the roads can be travelled again."

"That won't be this s'ennight," interjected David.

"But how—what?" queried Christian helplessly.

"This brought me," said Countess, touching the child. "I was under vow to save him. And—well, I could not do it otherwise."

"Is he alive?" asked Christian pityingly.

"Yes, only very fast asleep. Lay him down with your little ones, and wrap this coverlet over them all, which has sheltered us in our journey."

It was a down coverlet of rich damask silk. Christian's fingers touched it as with a feeling of strangeness, and yet familiarity—as a handling of something long unfelt, but well-known years ago.

"I have nothing to offer you save a crust of barley bread," she said hesitatingly. "I am sorry for it, but it is really all I have."

"Then," said Countess with a smile, "play the widow of Zarephath. Give me thy 'little cake,' and when the light dawns, you shall have a new cruse and barrel in reward."

"Nay, we look for no reward," answered Christian heartily. "I am only grieved that it should be so little. You are spent with your journey."

"I am most spent with the weight. I had to carry the child, and this," she replied, touching a large square parcel, tied in a silk handkerchief round her waist. "It is the child's property—all he has in the world. May the Blessed One be praised that I have saved them both!"

"To them that have no might, He increaseth strength," quoted Christian softly. "Then—is not this your child?"



"Yes—now."

"But not—?"

"By gift, not by birth. And it is the Holy One who has given him. Now, good friends, let me not keep you from sleeping. Perhaps I shall sleep myself. We will talk more in the morning."

It was evident when the morning arrived, that the saved child had suffered less than she who had saved him. Both needed care, nourishment, and rest; but Countess wanted it far more than Rudolph. A few days sufficed to restore him to his usual lively good health; but it was weeks ere she recovered the physical strain and mental suffering of that terrible night. But Countess was one of those people who never either "give in" or "give up." Before any one but herself thought her half fit for it, she went out, not mentioning her destination, on an expedition which occupied the greater part of a day, and returned at night with a satisfied expression on her face.

"I have settled every thing," she said. "And now I will tell you something. Perhaps you were puzzled to know why I sought shelter with you, instead of going to some of my wealthy acquaintances in the town?"

"I was, very much," answered Christian hesitatingly.

"I supposed you had some reason for it," said David.

"Right. I had a reason—a strong one. That I shall not tell you at present. But I will tell you what perhaps you have already guessed—that I have been divorced from Leo."

"Well, I fancied you must have had a quarrel with him, or something of that kind," replied Christian.

"Oh, we are on excellent terms," said Countess in a rather sarcastic tone. "So excellent, that he even proposed himself to lend me an escort of armed retainers to convey me to London."

"To London!" exclaimed Christian, in some surprise. "I thought you would be going back to your father's house at Oxford."

"Oh, no!—that would not do at all. I did think of it for a moment; not now. London will be much better."

"May I take the liberty to ask how you mean to live?" said David. "Of course it is no business of mine, but—"

"Go on," said Countess, when he hesitated.

"Well, I don't quite see what you can do, without either husband or father. Perhaps your brother Rubi is coming with you? You can't live alone, surely."

"I could, and get along very well, too; but I suppose one must not defy the world, foolish thing as it is. No, my brother Rubi is not coming, and I don't want him either. But I want you—David and Ruth."

David and Ruth—as Countess persisted in calling her—looked at each other in surprise and perplexity.

"You can take a week to think about it," resumed Countess, in her coolest manner, which was very cool indeed. "I shall not set forth until the Sabbath is over. But I do not suppose you are so deeply in love with this hovel that you could not bring yourselves to leave it behind."

"What do you mean us to do or be?"

"I intend to set up a silversmith's and jeweller's shop, and I mean David to be the silversmith, and to train Rudolph to the business."

This sounded practical. David's heart leaped within him, at the thought of returning to his old status and occupation.

"I could do that," he said, with a gleam in his eyes.

"I know you could," replied Countess.

"And /?" suggested Christian wistfully.

"You may see to the house, and keep the children out of mischief. We shall want some cooking and cleaning, I suppose; and I hate it."

"Do you take no servants with you?" asked Christian, in an astonished tone. For a rich lady like Countess to travel without a full establishment, both of servants and furniture, was amazing to her.

"I take the child with me," said Countess.

Christian wondered why the one should hinder the other; but she said no more.

"But—" David began, and stopped.

"I would rather hear all the objections before I set forth," responded Countess calmly.

"Countess, you must clearly understand that we cannot deny our faith."

"Who asked you to do so?"

"Nor can we hide it."

"That is your own affair. Do Christians clean silver worse than Jews?"

"They should not, if they are real Christians and not mere pretenders."

"Shams—I hate shams. Don't be a sham anything. Please yourself whether you are a Jew or a Christian, but for goodness' sake don't be a sham."

"I hope I am not that," said David. "If you are content with us, Countess, my wife and I will be only too happy to go with you. The children—"

"Oh, you don't fancy leaving them behind? Very well—they can play with Rudolph, and pull the cat's tail."

"I shall whip them if they do," said Christian, referring not to Rudolph, but to the cat.

"Countess, do you mean to cut yourself off from all your friends?" asked David, with a mixed feeling of perplexity and pity. "I cannot understand why you should do so."

"Friends!" she replied, with an indescribable intonation. "I fancy I shall take them all with me. Do as I bid thee, David, and trouble not thyself to understand me."

David felt silenced, and asked no more questions.

"Rudolph must have an English name," said Countess abruptly. "Let him be called Ralph henceforth. That is the English version of his own name, and he will soon grow accustomed to it."

"What is he to call you?" asked Christian.

"What he pleases," was the answer.

What it pleased Rudolph to do was to copy the other children, and say "Mother;" but he applied the term impartially alike to Countess and to Christian, till the latter took him aside, and suggested that it would be more convenient if he were to restrict the term to one of them.

"You see," she said, "if you call us both by one name, we shall never know which of us you mean."

"Oh, it does not matter," answered Master Rudolph with imperial unconcern. "Either of you could button me up and tie my shoes. But if you like, I'll call you Christie."

"I think it would be better if you did," responded Christian with praiseworthy gravity.

From the time that this matter was settled until the journey was fairly begun, Countess showed an amount of impatience and uneasiness which it sometimes took all Christian's meekness to bear. She spent the whole day, while the light lasted, at the little lattice, silently studying a large square volume, which she carefully wrapped every evening in silk brocade, and then in a woollen handkerchief, placing it under the pillow on which she slept, and which had come from Leo's house for her use. Beyond that one day's expedition, she never quitted the hut till they left Dorchester. Of the hardships inseparable from her temporary position she did not once complain; all her impatience was connected with some inner uncertainty or apprehension which she did not choose to reveal. Rudolph looked far more disdainfully than she on the rye-crusts and ragged garments of his companions.

At last, on the Sunday morning—for nobody dreamed in those days of not travelling on Sunday after mass—a small party of armed servants arrived at the hut, leading three palfreys and four baggage-mules, beside their own horses. Three of the mules were already loaded. Countess issued her orders, having evidently considered and settled every thing beforehand. Christian was to ride one palfrey, Countess the other, and David the third, with Rudolph in front of him. His children were to be disposed of, in panniers, on the back of the unloaded mule, with a lad of about fifteen years, who was one of the escort, behind them.

"Hast thou found us any convoy, Josce?" asked Countess of the man who took direction of the escort.

Josce doffed his cap to answer his mistress, to whom he showed considerable deference.

"Deuslesalt journeys to-day as far as Wallingford," he said, "and Simeon the usurer, who has a strong guard, will go thence to-morrow to Windsor."

"Good. Set forth!" said Countess.

So they set out from the mud hovel. The snow was still deep in many parts, but it had been trodden down in the well-worn tracks, such as was the high road from Oxford to London. Countess rode first of the party, ordering David to ride beside her; Christian came next, by the mule which bore her children; the armed escort was behind. A mile away from the hut they joined the imposing retinue of Deuslesalt, who was a wealthy silk-merchant, and in their company the journey to Wallingford was accomplished. There Countess and Rudolph found shelter with Deuslesalt in the house of a rich Jew, while David, Christian, and the children were received as travellers in a neighbouring hospital; for an hospital, in those days, was not necessarily a place where the sick were treated, but was more of the nature of a large almshouse, where all the inmates lived and fared in common.

On the second day they joined the usurer's party, which was larger and stronger than that of the silk-merchant. At Windsor they found an inn where they were all lodged; and the following day they entered London. It now appeared that Countess had in some mysterious manner made preparation for her coming; for they rode straight to a small house at the corner of Mark Lane, which they found plainly but comfortably furnished to receive them. Countess paid liberally and dismissed her escort, bade David unpack the goods she had brought, and dispose of the jewels in the strong safes built into the walls, desired Christian to let her know if anything necessary for the house were not provided, and established herself comfortably at the window with her big book, and Rudolph on a hassock at her feet.

“David!” she said, looking up, when the unpacking was about half done.

David touched his forehead in answer.

“I wish thou wouldst buy a dog and cat.”

“Both?” demanded David, rather surprised. “They will fight.”

“Oh, the cat is for the children,” said Countess coolly; “I don’t want one. But let the dog be the biggest thou canst get.”

“I think I’d have the dog by himself,” said David. “The children will be quite as well pleased. And if you want a big one, he is pretty sure to be good-tempered.”

So David and Rudolph went to buy a dog, and returned with an amiable shaggy monster quite as tall as the latter—white and tan, with a smile upon his lips, and a fine feathery tail, which little Helwis fell at once to stroking. This eligible member of the family received the name of Olaf, and was clearly made to understand that he must tolerate anything from the children, and nothing from a burglar.

Things were settling down, and custom already beginning to come into the little shop, when one evening, as they sat round the fire, Countess surprised David with a question—

“David, what did the priest do to thee when thou wert baptised?”

David looked up in some astonishment.

“Why, he baptised me,” said he simply.

“I want to know all he did,” said Countess.

“Don’t think I could tell you if I tried. He put some oil on me, and some spittle,—and water, of course,—and said ever so many prayers.”

“What did he say in his prayers?”

“Eh, how can I tell you? They were all in Latin.”

“The Lord does not speak French or English, then?” demanded Countess satirically.

“Well!” said David, scratching his head, “when you put it that way—”

“I don’t see what other way to put it. But I thought they baptised with water?”

“Oh, yes, the real baptism is with water.”

“Then what is the good of the unreal baptism, with oil and other rubbish?”

“I cry you mercy, but you must needs ask the priest. I’m only an ignorant man.”

“Dost thou think he knows?”

“The priest? Oh, of course.”

“I should like to be as sure as thou art. Can any body baptise?—or must it be done by a priest only?”

“Oh, only—well—” David corrected himself. “Of course the proper person is a priest. But in case of necessity, it can be done by a layman. A woman, even, may do it, if a child be in danger of death. But then, there is no exorcism nor anointing; only just the baptising with water.”

“I should have thought that was all there need be, at any time.”

With that remark Countess dropped the subject. But a few days later she resumed the catechising, though this time she chose Christian as her informant.

“What do Christians mean by baptism?”

Christian paused a moment. She had not hitherto reflected on the esoteric meaning of the ceremony to which she had been ordered to submit as the introductory rite of her new religion.

“I suppose,” she said slowly, “it must mean—confession.”

“Confession of what?” inquired Countess.

“Of our faith in the Lord Jesus,” replied Christian boldly.

To Christian’s surprise, Countess made no scornful answer. She sat in silence, looking from the window with eyes that saw neither the knight who was riding past, nor the fish-woman selling salt cod to the opposite neighbour.

“Can faith not exist without confession?” she said in a low tone.

“Would it not be poor faith?”

"Why?" demanded Countess, drawing her brows together, and in a tone that was almost fierce.

"I should think there would be no love in it. And faith which had no love in it would be a very mean, shabby, worthless sort of faith."

"I don't see that," said Countess stubbornly. "I believe that this book is lying on the window-seat. Can't I do that without loving either the window-seat or the book?"

"Ah, yes, when you only believe things. But the faith which is shown in baptism is not believing a fact; it is trusting yourself, body and soul, with a Person."

"That makes a difference, I dare say," replied Countess, and relapsed into silence.

A week later she came into the shop, where David was busy polishing up the ornaments in stock.

"David," she said abruptly, "what does a Christian do when he is completely perplexed, and cannot tell how to act?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," said David, looking perplexed himself. "Never was like that, so far as I know. Leastwise—No, I couldn't just say I ever have been."

"O happy man! Some Christians are, sometimes, I suppose?"

"I should think so. I don't know."

"What wouldst thou do, then, if thou wert in a slough from which thou sawest not the way out?"

"Why, I think—I should pray the Lord to show me the way out. I don't see what else I could do."

"And if no answer came?"

"Then I should be a bit afraid it meant that I'd walked in myself, and hadn't heeded His warnings. Sometimes, I think, when folks do that, He leaves them to flounder awhile before He helps them out."

"That won't do this time."

"Well, if that's not it, then maybe it would be because I wanted to get out on my own side, and wouldn't see His hand held out on the other. The Lord helps you out in His way, not yours: and that often means, up the steeper-looking bank of the two."

Countess was silent. David applied himself to bending the pin of a brooch, which he thought rather too straight.

"Is it ever right to do wrong?" she said suddenly.

"Why, no!—how could it be?" answered David, looking up.

"You put me deeper in the slough, every word you say. I will go no further to-day."

And she turned and walked away.

"Christie," said David to his wife that evening, "thou and I must pray for our mistress."

"Why, what's the matter with her?"

"I don't know. She's in some trouble; and I think it is not a little trouble. Unless I mistake, it is trouble of a weary, wearing sort, that she goes round and round in, and can't see the way out."

"But what are we to ask for, if we know nothing?"

"Dear heart! ask the Lord to put it right. He knows the way out; He does not want us to tell Him."

A fortnight elapsed before any further conversation took place. At the end of that time Ash Wednesday came, and David and Christian went to church as usual. The service was half over, when, to their unspeakable astonishment, they perceived Countess standing at the western door, watching every item of the ceremonies, with an expression on her face which was half eager, half displeased, but wholly disturbed and wearied. She seemed desirous to avoid being seen, and slipped out the instant the mass was over.

"Whatever brought her there?" asked Christian.

David shook his head.

"I expect it was either the Lord or the Devil," he said. "Let us ask Him more earnestly to bring her out of the slough on the right side."

"Did you see me in All Hallows this morning?" asked Countess abruptly, as they sat beside the fire that night. The children were in bed, and Olaf lying on the hearth.

"Ay, I did," replied Christian; and her tone added—"to my surprise."

"What are those things for there?"

"What things?"

"A number of dolls, all painted and gilt."

"Do you mean the holy images?"

"I mean the images. I don't believe in the holiness."

"They are images of the blessed saints."

"What are they for?" demanded Countess, knitting her brows.

"The priest says they are to remind us, and are helps to prayer."

"To whose prayers?" said Countess disdainfully. "No woman in England prays more regularly than I; but I never wanted such rubbish as that to help me."

"Oh, they don't help me," said David. "I never pay any attention to them; I just pray straight up."

"I don't understand praying to God in the House of Baal. 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.'"

"But they say the Church has loosed that command now. And of course we can't set ourselves up above the Church."

"What on earth do you mean? Art thou God, to kill and to make alive, that thou shouldst style the keeping of His command 'setting one's self above the Church?' The Church shall never guide me, if she speak contrary to God."

"But how can she, when God inspires her?"

"There is another question I want settled first. How can I believe that God inspires her, when I see that she contradicts His distinct commands?"

"I suppose the priest would say that was very wicked."

"What do I care for that popinjay? How did *you* get over it? Had you no sensation of horror, when you were required to bow down to those stocks and stones?"

"Well, no," said Christian, speaking very slowly. "I believed what Gerard had taught us, and—"

"When did Gerhardt ever teach you that rubbish?"

"He never did," answered David. "The priests taught us that. And I did find it main hard to swallow at first."

"Ah! I'm afraid I shall find it too hard to swallow at last. But there is nothing of all that in this book."

"I know nought about books. But of course the Church must know the truth," responded David uneasily.

"This is the truth," answered Countess, laying her hand upon the book. "But if this be, that is not. David—Ruth—I believe as you do in Jesus Christ of Nazareth: but I believe in no gilded images nor priestly lies. I shall take my religion from His words, not from them. I should like to be baptised, if it mean to confess Him before men; but if it only mean to swallow the priests' fables, and to kneel before gods that cannot hear nor save, I will have none of it. As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will never bow down to the work of men's hands!"

She had risen and stood before them, a grand figure, with hands clenched and eyes on fire. Christian shrank as if alarmed. David spoke in a regretful tone.

"Well! I thought that way myself for a while. But they said. I couldn't be a Christian if I did not go to church, and attend the holy mass. The Church had the truth, and God had given it to her: so I thought I might be mistaken, and I gave in. I've wondered sometimes whether I did right."

"If that be what baptism means—to put my soul into the hands of that thing they call the Church, and let it mould me like wax—to defile myself with all the idols and all the follies that I see there—I will not be baptised. I will believe without it. And if He ask me at the Day of Doom why I did not obey His command given in Galilee, I shall say, 'Lord, I could not do it without disobeying Thy first command, given amid the thunders of Sinai.' If men drive me to do thus, it will not be my sin, but theirs."

"Well, I don't know!" answered David, in evident perplexity. "I suppose you *could* be baptised, with nothing more—but I don't know any priest that would do it."

"Would you do it?"

"Oh, I daren't!"

"David, your religion is very queer."

"What's the matter?" asked David in astonishment.

"The other day, when I told you I was in a great slough, you did not advise me to go and ask those gaudy images to help me out of it; you spoke of nobody but the Lord. Now that we come to talk about images, you flounder about as if you did not know what to say."

"Well, don't you see, I know one o' them two, but I've only been told the other."

"Oh yes, I see. You are not the first who has had one religion for sunshiny weather, and another for rainy days; only

that with you—different from most people—you wear your best robe in the storm.”

David rubbed his face upon the sleeve of his jacket, as if he wished to rub some more discrimination into his brains.

“Nay, I don’t know—I hope you’ve no call to say that.”

“I usually say what I think. But there’s no need to fret; you’ve time to mend.”

Both the women noticed that for a few days after that, David was very silent and thoughtful. When the Sunday came he excused himself from going to church, much to the surprise and perplexity of his wife. The day after he asks for a holiday, and did not return till late at night.

As they sat round the fire on the following evening, David said suddenly,—“I think I’ve found it out.”

“What?” asked his mistress.

“Your puzzle—and my own too.”

“Let me have the key, by all means, if you possess it.”

“Well, I have been to see the hermit of Holywell. They say he is the holiest man within reach of London, go what way you will. And he has read me a bit out of a book that seems to settle the matter. At least I thought so. Maybe you mightn’t see it so easy.”

“It takes more than fair words to convince me. However, let me hear what it is. What was the book? I should like to know that first.”

“He said it was an epistle written by Paul the Apostle to somebody—I can’t just remember whom.”

“Who was he?”

“Why, he was one of the saints, wasn’t he?”

“I don’t know. There’s no mention of him in my book.”

David looked like a man stopped unexpectedly in rapid career. “You always want to know so much about every thing!” he said, rubbing his face on his sleeve, as he had a habit of doing when puzzled. “Now I never thought to ask that.”

“But before I can act on a message from my superior, I must surely satisfy myself as to the credentials of the messenger. However, let us hear the message. Perhaps that may tell us something. Some things bear on their faces the evidence of what they are—still more of what they are not.”

“Well, what he read was this: ‘If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.’ And ‘Look you,’ saith he, ‘there isn’t a word here of any body else.’ ‘If thou shalt confess Him—not the saints, nor the images, nor the Church, nor the priest. ‘Baptism,’ saith he, ‘is confessing Him.’ Then he turned over some leaves, and read a bit from another place, how our Lord said, ‘Come unto Me, all ye—”

Countess’s eyes lighted up suddenly. “That’s in my book. ‘All ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.’”

“That’s it. And says he, ‘He does not say, “Come to the Church or the priest,” but “Come to Me.”’ ‘Well,’ says I, ‘but how can you do one without the other?’ ‘You may come to the priest easy enough, and never come to Christ,’ saith he, ‘so it’s like to be as easy to come to Christ without the priest.’ ‘Well, but,’ says I, ‘priests doesn’t say so.’ ‘No,’ says he; ‘they don’t’—quite short like. ‘But for all I can see in this book,’ says he, ‘He does.’”

“Go on!” said Countess eagerly, when David paused.

“Well, then—I hope you’ll excuse me if I said more than I should—says I to him, ‘Now look here, Father: suppose you had somebody coming to you for advice, that had been a Jew like me, and was ready to believe in our Lord, but could not put up with images and such, would you turn him away because he could not believe enough, or would you baptise him?’ ‘I would baptise him,’ saith he. Then he turns over the book again, and reads: “‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ That is what the Apostles said to one man,’ says he: ‘and if it was enough then, it is enough now.’ ‘But, Father,’ says I, ‘that sounds rather as if you thought the Church might go wrong, or had gone wrong, in putting all these things beside our Lord.’ ‘My son,’ saith he, ‘what meanest thou by the Church? The Holy Ghost cannot teach error. Men in the Church may go wrong, and are continually wandering into error. What said our Lord to the rulers of the Jews, who were the priests of His day? “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.” This book is truth: when men leave this book,’ saith he, ‘they go astray.’ ‘But not holy Church?’ said I. ‘Ah,’ saith he, ‘the elect may stray from the fold; how much more they that are strangers there? The only safe place for any one of us,’ he says, ‘is to keep close to the side of the Good Shepherd.’”

“David, where dwells that hermit?”

“By the holy well, away on the Stronde, west of Lud Gate. Any body you meet on that road will tell you where to find him. His hut stands a bit back from the high way, on the north.”

“Very good. I’ll find him.”

The next day, until nearly the hour of curfew, nothing was seen of Countess. She took Olaf with her as guard, and they returned at the last moment, just in time to enter the City before the gates were closed. David and Christian had finished their work, shut up the shop, and put the children to bed, when Olaf made his stately entrance, with his mistress behind him.

"Thy old hermit," she said, addressing David, "is the first decent Christian I have found—the first that goes by his Master's words, and does not worry me with nonsense."

She drew off her hood, and sat down in the chimney-corner.

"You found him then?" answered David. "Had you much trouble?"

"I found him. Never mind the trouble."

"Has he settled the puzzle for you, then?"

"I think I settled it for him."

"I ask your pardon, but I don't understand you."

"I don't suppose you do."

"Countess," said Christian, coming down the ladder, "I bought the herrings as you bade me; but there is no salt salmon in the market to-day."

"To whom are you speaking?" inquired Countess, with an expression of fun about the corners of her lips.

"You," replied Christian in surprise.

"Then, perhaps you will have the goodness to call me by my Christian name, which is Sarah."

"O Countess! have you been baptised?"

"I have."

"By the hermit?"

"By the hermit."

"But how?"

"How? With water. What did you expect?"

"But—all at once, without any preparation?"

"What preparation was needed? I made my confession of Christ, and he baptised me in His name. The preparation was only to draw the water."

"What on earth did you do for sponsors?"

"Had none."

"Did he let you?"

A little smothered laugh came from Countess. "He had not much choice," she said. "He did try it on. But I told him plainly, I was not going to give in to that nonsense: that if he chose to baptise me at once, I was there ready, and would answer any questions and make any confession that he chose. But if not—not. I was not coming again."

"And he accepted it!" said David, with a dozen notes of exclamation in his voice.

"Did I not tell you he was the most sensible Christian I ever found? He said, 'Well!—after all, truly, any thing save the simple baptism with water was a man-made ordinance. The Ethiopian eunuch had no sponsors'—I don't know who he was, but I suppose the hermit did—and he probably made as true a Christian for all that' 'In truth,' said I, 'the institution of sponsors seems good for little children—friends who promise to see that they shall be brought up good Christians if their parents die early; but for a woman of my age, it is simply absurd, and I won't have it. Let me confess Christ as my Messiah and Lord, and baptise me with water in His name, and I am sure he will be satisfied with it. And if any of the saints and angels are not satisfied, they can come down and say so, if they think it worth while.' So—as he saw, I suppose, that I was not going to do it—he gave in."

"I hope it's all right," said David, rather uneasily.

"David, I wish I could put a little sense into you. You are a good man, but you are a very foolish one. 'All right!' Of course it is all right. It is man, and not God, who starts at trifles like a frightened horse, and makes men offenders for a word. The Lord looketh on the heart."

"Ay, but Moses (on whom be peace!) was particular enough about some details which look very trifling to us."

"He was particular enough where they concerned the honour of God, or where they formed a part of some symbolism which the alteration would cause to be wrongly interpreted so as to teach untruth. But for all else, he let them go, and so did our Lord. When Aaron explained why he had not eaten the goat of the sin-offering, Moses was content. Nor did Christ condemn David the King, but excused him, for eating the shewbread. I am sure Moses would have baptised me this morning, without waiting for sponsors or Lucca oil. This is a very silly world; I should have thought the Church might have been a trifle wiser, and really it seems to have less common sense of the two. How could I have found sponsors, I should like to know? I know nobody but you and Christian."

"They told us, when we were baptised, that the Church did not allow a husband and wife to be sponsors to the same person. So we could not both have stood for you. It would have had to be Christian and Rudolph, and some other

woman.”

“Rudolph! That baby! (Note 1.) Would they have let him stand?”

“Yes—if you could not find any one else.”

“And promise to bring me up in the Catholic faith? Well, if that is not rich!—when I have got to bring him up! I will tell you what, David—if some benevolent saint would put a little common sense into the Church, it would be a blessing to somebody. ‘The Church!’ I am weary of that ceaseless parrot scream. The Church stands in the way to Jesus of Nazareth, not as a door to go in, but as a wall to bar out. I wish we had lived in earlier days, before all that rubbish had had time to grow. Now, mind you,” concluded Countess, as she rose to go to bed, “David and Christian, I don’t mean to be bothered about this. Don’t talk to me, nor to Rudolph, nor to any body else. I shall read the Book, and teach him to do it; but I shall not pray to those gilded things; and he shall not. What Gerhardt taught is enough for him and me. And remember, if too much be said, the King’s officers may come and take every thing away. I do not see that it is my duty to go and tell them. If they come, let them come, and God be my aid and provider! Otherwise, we had better keep quiet.”

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Note 1. That little children were at times allowed to be sponsors in the Middle Ages, is proved by the instance of John Earl of Kent in 1330, whose brother and sister, the former probably under ten years of age, and the latter aged only eighteen months, stood sponsors for him. (*Prob. aet. Johannis Com. Kant.*, 23 Edward Third, 76.)

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## Chapter Eleven.

### Well Met.

“O God, we are but leaves upon Thy stream,  
Clouds in Thy sky.”

Dinah Mulock.

A busy place on a Monday morning was Bread Street, in the city of London. As its name denotes, it was the street of the bakers; for our ancestors did not give names, as we do, without reason, for mere distinction’s sake. If a town gate bore the name of York Gate, that was equivalent to a signpost, showing that it opened on the York road. They made history and topography, where we only make confusion.

The fat, flour-besprinkled baker at the Harp, in Bread Street, was in full tide of business. His shelves were occupied by the eight different kinds of bread in common use—wassel, used only by knights and squires; cocket, the kind in ordinary use by smaller folk; maslin, a mixture of wheat, oats, and barley; barley, rye, and brown bread, the fare of tradesmen and monks; oaten, the food of the poorest; and horse bread. There were two or three varieties finer and better than these, only used by the nobles, which were therefore made at home, and not commonly to be found at the baker’s: simnel, manchet or chet, and paynemayne or *pain de main* (a corruption of *panis dominicus*). We read also of *pain le Roi*, or the King’s bread, but this may be paynemayne under another name. Even in the large towns, at that time, much of the baking was done at home; and the chief customers of the bakers were the cookshops or eating houses, with such private persons as had not time or convenience to prepare their own bread. The price of bread at this time does not appear to be on record; but about seventy years later, four loaves were sold for a penny. (Note 1.)

The cooks, who lived mainly in Eastcheap and along the water-side, of course had to provide bread of various kinds, to suit their different customers; and a young man, armed with a huge basket, came to have it filled with all varieties. Another young man had entered after him, and now stood waiting by the wall till the former should have finished his business.

“Now then,” said the baker, turning to the man in waiting, as the other trudged forth with his basket: “what shall I serve you with?”

“I don’t want you to serve me; I want to serve you,” was the answer.

The baker looked him over with a good-natured but doubtful expression.

“Want to serve me, do you? Whence come you?”

“I’m an upland man.” (From the country.)

“Got any one to speak for you?”

“A pair of eyes, a pair of hands, a fair wit, and a good will to work.”

The fat baker looked amused. “And an honest repute, eh?” said he.

“I have it, but I can’t give it you, except from my wife, and I scarcely suppose you’ll be satisfied to go to her for my character.”

“I’m not so sure of that!” laughed the baker. “If she’d speak truth, she could give you the character best worth having of any.”

“She never yet spoke any thing else, nor did I.”

“*Ha, jolife!*—you must be a fine pair. Well, now, speak the truth, and tell me why a decent, tidy-seeming young fellow like you can’t get a character to give me.”

“Because I should have to put my wife in peril, if I went back to do it,” was the bold answer.



"Ha, so!" Such a possibility, in those rough days, was only too apparent to the honest baker. "Well, well! Had to run from a bad master, eh? Ay, ay, I see."

He did not see exactly the accurate details of the facts; but the applicant did not contradict him.

"Well! I could do with another hand, it's true; and I must say I like the look of you. How long have you been a baker's man?"

"When I've been with you seven days, it'll be just a week," was the humorous reply.

"What, you've all to learn? That's a poor lookout."

"A man that has all to learn, and has a will to it, will serve you better than one that has less to learn, and has no will to it."

"Come, I can't gainsay that. What have you been, then?"

"I have been watchman in a castle."

"Oh, ho!—how long?"

"Fifteen years."

"And what gives you a mind to be a baker?"

"Well, more notions than one. It's a clean trade, and of good repute; wholesome, for aught I know: there's no killing in it, for which I haven't a mind; and as folks must eat, it does not depend on fashion like some things. Moths don't get into bread and spoil it, nor rust neither; and if you can't sell it, you can eat it yourself, and you're no worse off, or not much. It dries and gets stale, of course, in time: but one can't have every thing; and seems to me there's as little risk in bread, and as little dirt or worry, as there is in any thing one can put one's hand to do. I'm not afraid of work, but I don't like dirt, loss, nor worry."

The fat baker chuckled. "Good for you, my lad!—couldn't have put it better myself. Man was made to labour, and I like to see a man that's not afraid of work. Keep clear of worry by all means; it eats a man's heart out, which honest work never does. Work away, and sing at your work—that's my notion: and it's the way to get on and be happy."

"I'm glad to hear it; I always do," said the applicant. "And mind you, lad,—I don't know an unhappier thing than discontent. When you want to measure your happiness, don't go and set your ell-wand against him that's got more than you have, but against him that's got less. Bread and content's a finer dinner any day than fat capon with grumble-sauce. We can't all be alike; some are up, and some down: but it isn't them at the top of the tree that's got the softest bed to lie on, nor them that sup on the richest pasties that most enjoy their supper. If a man wants to be comfortable, he must keep his heart clear of envy, and put a good will into his work. I believe a man may come to take pleasure in any thing, even the veriest drudgery, that brings a good heart to it and does his best to turn it out well."

"I am sure of that," was the response, heartily given.

The baker was pleased with the hearty response to the neat epigrammatic apothegms wherein he delighted to unfold himself. He nodded approval.

"I'll take you on trial for a month," he said. "And if you've given yourself a true character, you'll stay longer. I'll pay you—No, we'll settle that question when I have seen how you work."

"I'll stay as long as I can," was the answer, as the young man turned to leave the shop.

"Tarry a whit! What's your name, and how old are you?"

"I am one-and-thirty years of age, and my name is Stephen."

"Good. Be here when the vesper bell begins to ring."

Stephen went up to Cheapside, turned along it, up Lady Cicely's Lane, and out into Smithfield by one of the small posterns in the City wall. Entering a small house in Cock Lane, he went up a long ladder leading to a tiny chamber, screened-off from a garret. Here a tabby cat came to meet him, and rubbed itself against his legs as he stooped down to caress it, while Ermine, who sat on the solitary bench, looked up brightly to greet him.

"Any success, Stephen?"

"Thy prayer is heard, sweet heart. I have entered the service of a baker in Bread Street,—a good-humoured fellow who would take me at my own word. I told him I had no one to refer him to for a character but you,—I did not think of Gib, or I might have added him. You'd speak for me, wouldn't you, old tabby?"

Gib replied by an evidently affirmative "Me-ew!"

"I'll give you an excellent character," said Ermine, smiling, "and so will Gib, I am sure."

The baker was well satisfied when his new hand reached the Harp exactly as the vesper bell sounded its first stroke at Saint Mary-le-Bow.

"That's right!" said he. "I like to see a man punctual. Take this damp cloth and rub the shelves."

"Clean!" said he to himself a minute after. "Have you ever rubbed shelves before?"

"Not much," said Stephen.

"How much do you rub 'em?"

"Till they are clean."

"You'll do. Can you carry a tray on your head?"

"Don't know till I try."

"Best practise a bit, before you put any thing on it, or else we shall have mud pies," laughed the baker.

When work was over, the baker called Stephen to him.

"Now," said he, "let us settle about wages. I could not tell how much to offer you, till I saw how you worked. You've done very well for a new hand. I'll give you three-halfpence a-day till you've fairly learnt the trade, and twopence afterwards: maybe, in time, if I find you useful, I may raise you a halfpenny more: a penny of it in bread, the rest in money. Will that content you?"

"With a very good will," replied Stephen.

His wages as watchman at the Castle had been twopence per day, so that he was well satisfied with the baker's proposal.

"What work does your wife do?"

"She has none to do yet. She can cook, sew, weave, and spin."

"I'll bear it in mind, if I hear of any for her."

"Thank you," said Stephen; and dropping the halfpenny into his purse, he secured the loaves in his girdle, and went back to the small screened-off corner of the garret which at present he called home.

It was not long before the worthy baker found Stephen so useful that he raised his wages even to the extravagant sum of threepence a day. His wife, too, had occasional work for Ermine; and the thread she spun was so fine and even, and the web she wove so regular and free from blemishes, that one employer spoke of her to another, until she had as much work as she could do. Not many months elapsed before they were able to leave the garret where they had first found refuge, and take a little house in Ivy Lane; and only a few years were over when Stephen was himself a master baker and pastiller (or confectioner), Ermine presiding over the lighter dainties, which she was able to vary by sundry German dishes not usually obtainable in London, while he was renowned through the City for the superior quality of his bread. Odelin, the fat baker, who always remained his friend, loved to point a moral by Stephen's case in lecturing his journeymen.

"Why, do but look at him," he was wont to say; "when he came here, eight years ago, he scarcely knew wassel bread from cocket, and had never seen a fish pie save to eat. Now he has one of the best shops in Bread Street, and four journeymen under him. And how was it done, think you? There was neither bribery nor favour in it. Just by being honest, cleanly, and punctual, thorough in all he undertook, and putting heart and hands into the work. Every one of you can do as well as he did, if you only bestir yourselves and bring your will to it. Depend upon it, lads, 'I will' can do a deal of work. 'I can' is very well, but if 'I will' does not help him, 'I can' will not put many pennies in his pocket. 'I can'—'I ought'—'I will'—those are the three good fairies that do a man's work for him: and the man that starts work without them is like to turn out but a sorry fellow."

It was for Ermine's sake, that he might retain a hiding place for her if necessary, that Stephen continued to keep up the house in Ivy Lane. The ordinary custom was for a tradesman to live over or behind his shop. The excuse given out to the world was that Stephen and his wife, being country people, did not fancy being close mewed up in city streets; and between Ivy Lane and the fresh country green and air, there were only a few lanes and the city walls.

Those eight years passed quietly and peacefully to Stephen and Ermine. A small family—five in number—grew up around them, and Gib purred tranquilly on the hearth. They found new friends in London, and thanked God that He had chosen their inheritance for them, and had set their feet in a large room.

At that time, and for long afterwards, each trade kept by itself to its own street or district. The mercers and haberdashers lived in West Chepe or Cheapside, which Stephen had to go down every day. One morning, at the end of those eight years, he noticed that a shop long empty had been reopened, and over it hung a newly-painted signboard, with a nun's head. As Stephen passed, a woman came to the door to hang up some goods, and they exchanged a good look at each other.

"I wonder who it is you are like!" said Stephen to himself.

Then he passed on, and thought no more about her.

On two occasions this happened. When the third came, the woman suddenly exclaimed—

"I know who you are now!"

"Do you?" asked Stephen, coming to a halt. "I wish I knew who you are. I have puzzled over your likeness to somebody, and I cannot tell who it is."

The woman laughed, thereby increasing the mysterious resemblance which was perplexing Stephen.

"Why," said she, "you are Stephen Esueillechien, unless I greatly mistake."

"So I am," answered Stephen, "or rather, so I was; for men call me now Stephen le Bulenger. But who are you?"

"Don't you think I'm rather like Leuesa?"

"That's it! But how come you hither, old friend? Have you left my cousin? Or is she—"

"The Lady Derette is still in the anchorhold. I left her when I wedded. Do you remember Roscius le Mercer, who dwelt at the corner of North Gate Street? He is my husband—but they call him here Roscius de Oxineford—and we have lately come to London. So you live in Bread Street, I suppose, if you are a baker?"

Stephen acknowledged his official residence, mentally reserving the private one, and purposing to give Ermine a hint to confine herself for the present to Ivy Lane.

"Do come in," said Leuesa hospitably, "and let us have a chat about old friends."

And lifting up her voice she called—"Roscius!"

The mercer, whom Stephen remembered as a slim youth, presented himself in the changed character of a stout man of five-and-thirty, and warmly seconded his wife's invitation, as soon as he recognised an old acquaintance.

"I'm glad enough to hear of old friends," said Stephen, "for I haven't heard a single word since I left Oxford about any one of them. Tell me first of my brother. Is he living and in the old place?"

"Ay, and Anania too, and all the children. I don't think there have been any changes in the Castle."

"Uncle Manning and Aunt Isel?"

"Manning died three years ago, and Isel dwells now with Raven and Flemild, who have only one daughter, so they have plenty of room for her."

"Then what has become of Haimet?"

"Oh, he married Asselot, the rich daughter of old Tankard of Bicester. He lives at Bicester now. Romund and Mabel are well; they have no children, but Haimet has several."

"Both my cousins married heiresses? They have not done badly, it seems."

"N-o, they have *not*, in one way," said Leuesa. "But I do not think Haimet is bettered by his marriage. He seems to me to be getting very fond of money, and always to measure everything by the silver pennies it cost. That's not the true ell-wand; or I'm mistaken."

"You are not, Leuesa. I'd as soon be choked with a down pillow as have my soul all smothered up with gold. Well, and how do other folks get on?—Franna, and Turguia, and Chembel and Veka, and all the rest?"

"Turguia's gone, these five years; the rest are well—at least I don't recall any that are not."

"Is old Benefei still at the corner?"

"Ay, he is, and Rubi and Jurnet. Regina is married to Jurnet's wife's nephew, Samuel, and has a lot of children—one pretty little girl, with eyes as like Countess as they can be."

"Oh, have you any notion what is become of Countess?"

"They removed from Reading to Dorchester, I believe, and then I heard old Leo had divorced Countess, and married Deuslesalt's daughter and heir, Drua. What became of her I don't know."

"By the way, did either of you know aught of the Wise Woman of Bensington? Mother Haldane, they used to call her. She'll perhaps not be alive now, for she was an old woman eight years gone. She did me a good turn once."

"I don't know anything about her," said Leuesa.

"Ah, well, I do," answered Roscius. "I went to her when our cow was fairy-led, twelve years gone; and after that for my sister, when she had been eating chervil, and couldn't see straight before her. Ay, she was a wise woman, and helped a many folks. No, she's not alive now."

"You mean more than you say, Roscius," said Stephen, with a sudden sinking of heart. What had happened to Haldane?

"Well, you see, they ducked her for a witch."

"And killed her?" Stephen's voice was hard.

"Ay—she did not live many minutes after. She sank, though—she was no witch: though it's true, her cat was never seen afterwards, and some folks would have it he'd gone back to Sathanas."

"Then it must have been that night!" said Stephen to himself. "Did she know, that she sent us off in haste? Was *that* the secret she would not tell?" Aloud, he said,— "And who were 'they' that wrought that ill deed?"

"Oh, there was a great crowd at the doing of it—all the idle loons in Bensington and Dorchester: but there were two that hounded them on to the work—the Bishop's sumner Malger, and a woman: I reckon they had a grudge against her of some sort. Wigan the charcoal-burner told me of it—he brought her out, and loosed the cord that bound her."

"God pardon them as He may!" exclaimed Stephen. "She was no more a witch than you are. A gentle, harmless old woman, that healed folks with herbs and such—shame on the men that dared to harm her!"

"Ay, I don't believe there was aught bad in her. But, saints bless you!—lads are up to anything," said Roscius. "They'd drown you, or burn me, any day, just for the sake of a grand show and a flare-up."

"They're ill brought up, then," said Stephen. "I'll take good care my lads don't."

"O Stephen! have you some children?—how many?"

"Ay, two lads and three lasses. How many have you?"

"We're not so well off as you; we have only two maids. Why, Stephen, I'd forgot you were married. I must come and see your wife. But I never heard whom you did marry: was she a stranger?"

Poor Stephen was sorely puzzled what to say. On the one hand, he thought Leuesa might safely be trusted; and as Ermine had already suffered the sentence passed upon her, and the entire circumstances were forgotten by most people, it seemed as if the confession of facts might be attended by no danger. Yet he could not know with certainty that either of his old acquaintances was incorruptibly trustworthy; and if the priests came to know that one of their victims had survived the ordeal, what might they not do, in hatred and revenge? A moment's reflection, and an ejaculatory prayer, decided him to trust Leuesa. She must find out the truth if she came to see Ermine.

"No," he said slowly; "she was not a stranger."

"Why, who could it be?" responded Leuesa. "Nobody went away when you did."

"But somebody went away before I did. Leuesa, I think you are not the woman who would do an old friend an ill turn?"

"Indeed, I would not, Stephen," said she warmly. "If there be any secret, you may trust me, and my husband too; we would not harm you or yours for the world."

"I believe I may," returned Stephen. "My cousin Derette knows, but don't name it to any one else. My wife is—Ermine."

"Stephen! You don't mean it? Well, I am glad to know she got safe away! But how did you get hold of her?"

Stephen told his story.

"You may be very certain we shall not speak a word to injure Ermine," said Leuesa. "Ay, I'll come and see her, and glad I shall be. Why, Stephen, I thought more of Ermine than you knew; I called one of my little maids after her. Ermine and Derette they are. I can never forget a conversation I once had with Gerard, when he took me back to the Castle from Isel's house; I did not think so much of it at the time, but it came to me with power afterwards, when he had sealed his faith with his blood."

"Ah! there's nothing like dying, to make folks believe you," commented Roscius.

"Can't agree with you there, friend," answered Stephen with a smile. "There is one other thing, and that is living. A man may give his life in a sudden spurt of courage and enthusiasm. It is something more to see him spend his life in patient well-doing through many years. That is the harder of the two to most."

"Maybe it is," assented Roscius. "I see now why you were so anxious about old Haldane."

"Ay, we owed her no little. And I cannot but think she had some notion, poor soul! of what was coming: she was in such haste to get us off by dawn. If I had known—"

"Eh, what could you have done if you had?" responded Roscius. "Wigan told me there were hundreds in the crowd."

"Nothing, perchance," answered Stephen sadly. "Well! the good Lord knew best, and He ordered matters both for us and her."

"Wigan said he thought she had been forewarned—I know not why."

"Ay, I think some one must have given her a hint. That was why she sent us off so early."

"I say, Stephen," asked Roscius rather uneasily, "what think you did become of that cat of hers? The thing was never seen after she died—not once. It looks queer, you know."

"Does it?" said Stephen, with a little laugh.

"Why, yes! I don't want to think any ill of the poor old soul—not I, indeed: but never to be seen once afterwards—it *does* look queer. Do you think Sathanas took the creature?"

"Not without I am Sathanas. That terrible cat that so troubles you, Roscius, sits purring on my hearth at this very moment."

"You! Why, did you take the thing with you?"

"We did. It came away in Ermine's arms."

"Eh, Saint Frideswide be our aid! I wouldn't have touched it for a king's ransom."

"I've touched it a good few times," said Stephen, laughing, "and it never did aught worse to me than rub itself against me and mew. Why, surely, man! you're not feared of a cat?"

“No, not of a real cat; but that—”

“It is just as real a cat as any other. My children play with it every day; and if you’ll bring your little maids, I’ll lay you a good venison pasty that they are petting it before they’ve been in the house a Paternoster. Trust a girl for that! Ah, yes! that was one reason why I thought she had some fancy of what was coming—the poor soul begged us to take old Gib. He’d been her only companion for years, and she did not want him ill-used. Poor, gentle, kindly soul! Ermine will be grieved to hear of her end.”

“Tell Ermine I’ll come to see her,” said Leuesa, “and bring the children too.”

“We have a Derette as well as you,” replied Stephen with a smile. “She is the baby. Our boys are Gerard and Osbert, and our elder girls Agnes and Edild—my mother’s name, you know.”

As Stephen opened the door of his house that evening, Gib came to meet him with erect tail.

“Well, old fellow!” said Stephen, rubbing his ears—a process to which Gib responded with loud purrs. “I have seen a man to-day who is afraid to touch you. I don’t think you would do much to him—would you, now?”

“That’s nice—go on!” replied Gib, purring away.

Leuesa lost no time in coming to see Ermine. She brought her two little girls, of whom the elder, aged five years, immediately fell in love with the baby, while the younger, aged three, being herself too much of a baby to regard infants with any sentiment but disdain, bestowed all her delicate attentions upon Gib. Stephen declared laughingly that he saw he should keep the pasty.

“Well, really, it does look very like a cat!” said the mercer, eyeing Gib still a little doubtfully.

“Very like, indeed,” replied Stephen, laughing again. “I never saw anything that looked more like one.”

“There’s more than one at Oxford would like to see you, Ermine, and Stephen too,” said Leuesa.

“Mother Isel would, and Derette,” was Ermine’s answer. “I am not so sure of any one else.”

“I am sure of one else,” interpolated Stephen. “It would be a perfect windfall to Anania, for she’d get talk out of it for nine times nine days. But would it be safe, think you?”

“Why not?” answered Roscius. “The Earl has nought against you, has he?”

“Oh no, he has nought against me; I settled every thing with him—went back on purpose to do so. I was thinking of Ermine. The Bishop is not the same (Note 2), but for aught I know, the sumners are.”

“Only one of them: Malger went to Lincoln some two years back.”

“Well, I should be glad not to meet that villain,” said Stephen.

“You’ll not meet him. Then as to the other matter, what could they do to her? The sentence was carried out. You can’t execute a man twice.”

“That’s a point that does not generally rise for decision. But you see she got taken in, and that was forbidden. They were never meant to survive it, and she did.”

“I don’t believe any penalty could fall on her,” said Roscius. “But if you like, I’ll ask my cousin, who is a lawyer, what the law has to say on that matter.”

“Then don’t mention Ermine’s name.”

“I’ll mention nobody’s name. I shall only say that I and a friend of mine were having a chat, and talking of one thing and another, we fell a-wondering what would happen if a man were to survive a punishment intended to kill him.”

“That might serve. I don’t mind if you do.”

The law, in 1174, was much more dependent on the personal will of the sovereign than it is now. The lawyer looked a little doubtful when asked the question.

“Why,” said he, “if the prisoner had survived by apparent miracle, the chances are that he would be pardoned, as the probability would be that his innocence was thus proved by visitation of God. I once knew of such a case, where a woman was accused of murdering her husband; she held her mute of malice at her trial, and was adjudged to suffer *peine forte et dure*.”

When a prisoner refused to plead, he was held to be “mute of malice.” The *peine forte et dure*, which was the recognised punishment for this misdemeanour, was practically starvation to death. In earlier days it seems to have been pure starvation; but at a later period, the more refined torture was substituted of allowing the unhappy man on alternate days three mouthfuls of bread with no liquid, and three sips of water with no food, for a term which the sufferer could not be expected to survive. At a later time again, this was exchanged for heavyweights, under which he was pressed to death.

“Strange to say,” the lawyer went on, “the woman survived her sentence; and this being an undoubted miracle, she received pardon to the laud of God and the honour of His glorious mother, Dame Mary. (Such a case really happened at Nottingham in 1357.) But if you were supposing a case without any such miraculous intervention—”

“Oh, we weren’t thinking of miracles, any way,” answered Roscius.

"Then I should say the sentence would remain in force. There is of course a faint possibility that it might not be put in force; but if the man came to me for advice, I should not counsel him to build much upon that. Especially if he happened to have an enemy."

"Well, it does not seem just, to my thinking, that a man should suffer a penalty twice over."

"Just!" repeated the lawyer, with a laugh and a shrug of his shoulders. "Were you under the impression, Cousin Roscius, that law and justice were interchangeable terms?"

"I certainly was," said Roscius.

"Then, you'd better get out of it," was the retort.

"I daren't take Ermine, after that," said Stephen, rather sorrowfully, "The only hope would be that she might be so changed, nobody would know her; and then, as my wife, she might pass unharmed. But the risk seems too great."

"She's scarcely changed enough for that," replied Leuesa. "Very likely she would not be recognised by those to whom she was a comparative stranger; but such as had known her well would guess in a moment. Otherwise—"

"Then her name would tell tales," suggested Stephen.

"Oh, you might change that," said Roscius. "Call her Emma or Aymeria—folks would never think."

"And tell lies?" responded Stephen.

"Why, you'd never call that telling lies, surely?"

"It's a bit too like it to please me. Is Father Dolfin still at Saint Frideswide's?"

"Ay, he's still there, but he's growing an old man, and does not get outside much now. He has resigned Saint Aldate's."

"Then that settles it. He'd know."

"But he's not an unkindly man, Stephen."

"No, he isn't. But he's a priest. And maybe the priest might be stronger than the man. Let's keep on the safe side."

"Let us wait," said Ermine quietly.

"I don't see how waiting is to help you, unless you wait till every body is dead and buried—and it won't be much good going then."

"Perhaps we may have to wait for the Better Country. There will be no sumners and sentences there."

"But are you sure of knowing folks there?"

"Saint Paul would scarcely have anticipated meeting his friends with joy in the resurrection if they were not to know each other when they met. There are many passages in Scripture which make it very plain that we shall know each other."

"Are you so sure of getting there yourself?" was the query put by Roscius, with raised eyebrows.

"I am quite sure," was Ermine's calm answer, "because Christ is there, and I am a part of Christ. He wills that His people shall be with Him where He is."

"But does not holy Church teach rather different?" (Note 3.)

Stephen would fain have turned off the question. But it was answered as calmly as before.

"Holy Church is built on Christ our Lord. She cannot therefore teach contrary to Him, though we may misunderstand either."

Roscius was satisfied. He had not, however, the least idea that by that vague term "holy Church," while he meant a handful of priests and bishops, Ermine meant the elect of God, for whom His words settle every question, and who are not apt to trouble themselves for the contradictions either of priests or critics. "For the world passeth away, and the lust thereof"—the pleasures, the opinions, the prejudices of the world—"but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

The times of Henry Second knew neither post-offices nor carriers. When a man wanted to send a parcel anywhere, he was obliged to carry it himself or send a servant to do so, if he could not find some acquaintance journeying in that direction who would save him the trouble.

A few weeks after Stephen had come to the conclusion that he could not take Ermine to Oxford, he was passing down Bread Street to his shop early one morning, when Odinel hailed him from the door.

"Hi, Stephen! Just turn in here a minute, will you?—you don't happen to be going or sending up into the shires, do you, these next few days?"

"Which of the shires?" inquired Stephen, without committing himself.

"Well, it's Abingdon I want to send to—but if I could get my goods carried as far as Wallingford, I dare say I could

make shift to have them forwarded.”

“Would Oxford suit you equally well?”

“Ay, as well or better.”

Stephen stood softly whistling for a moment. He might work the two things together—might at least pay a visit to Derette, and learn from her how far it was safe to go on. He felt that Anania was the chief danger; Osbert would placidly accept as much or as little as he chose to tell, and Isel, if she asked questions, might be easily turned aside from the path. Could he be sure that Anania was out of the way, he thought he would not hesitate to go himself, though he no longer dared to contemplate taking Ermine.

“Well, I might, mayhap, be going in that direction afore long,—I can’t just say till I see how things shape themselves. If I can, I’ll let you know in a few days.”

“All right! I’m in no hurry to a week or two.”

Stephen meditated on the subject in the intervals of superintendence of his oven, and serving out wassel and cocket, with the result that when evening came, he was almost determined to go, if Ermine found no good reasons to the contrary. He consulted her when he went home, for she was not at the shop that day. She looked grave at first, but her confidence in Stephen’s discretion was great, and she made no serious objection. No sooner, however, did the children hear of such a possibility as their father’s visiting the country, than they all, down to three-year-old Edild, sent in petitions to be allowed to accompany him.

“Couldn’t be thought of!” was Stephen’s decided though good-tempered answer: and the petitioners succumbed with a look of disappointment.

“I might perchance have taken Gerard,” Stephen allowed to his wife, out of the boy’s hearing: “but to tell truth, I’m afraid of Anania’s hearing his name—though, as like as not, she’ll question me on the names of all the children, and who they were called after, and why we selected them, and if each were your choice or mine.”

“Better not, I think,” said Ermine, with a smile. “I almost wish I could be hidden behind a curtain, to hear your talk with her.”

Stephen laughed. “Well, I won’t deny that I rather enjoy putting spokes in her wheels,” said he.

The next morning he told Odinel to make up his goods, and he would carry them to Oxford on the following Monday.

Odinel’s parcel proved neither bulky nor heavy. Instead of requiring a sumpter-mule to carry it, it could readily be strapped at the back of Stephen’s saddle, while the still smaller package of his own necessaries went in front. He set out about four o’clock on a spring morning, joining himself for the sake of safety to the convoy of travellers who started from the Black Bull in the Poultry, and arrived at the East Gate of Oxford before dark, on the Tuesday evening. His first care was to commit Odinel’s goods to the safe care of mine host of the Blue Boar (Note 4) in Fish Street, as had been arranged. Here he supped on fried fish, rye bread, and cheese; and having shared the “grace-cup” of a fellow-traveller, set off for Saint John’s anchorhold. A young woman in semi-conventual dress left the door just as he came up. Stephen doffed his cap as he asked her—“I pray you, are you the maid of the Lady Derette?”

“I am,” was the reply. “Do you wish speech of her?”

“Would you beseech her to let me have a word with her at the casement?”

The girl turned back into the anchorhold, and the next minute the casement was opened, and the comely, pleasant face of Derette appeared behind it. She looked a little older, but otherwise unaltered.

There was nothing unusual in Stephen’s request. Anchorites lived on alms, and were also visited to desire their prayers. The two ideas likely to occur to the maid as the object of Stephen’s visit were therefore either a present to be offered, or intercession to be asked and probably purchased.

“Christ save you, Lady!” said Stephen to his cousin. “Do you know me?”

“Why, is it Stephen? Are you come back? I *am* glad to see you.”

When the natural curiosity and interest of each was somewhat satisfied, Stephen asked Derette’s advice as to going further.

“You may safely go to see Mother,” said she, “if you can be sure of your own tongue; for you will not meet Anania there. She has dislocated her ankle, and is lying in bed.”

“Poor soul! It seems a shame to say I’m glad to hear it; but really I should like to avoid her at Aunt Isel’s, and to be able to come away at my own time from the Lodge.”

“You have the chance of both just now.”

Stephen thought he would get the worse interview over first. He accordingly went straight on into Civil School Lane, which ran right across the north portion of Christ Church, coming out just above Saint Aldate’s, pursued his way forward by Pennyfarthing Street, and turning up a few yards of Castle Street, found himself at the drawbridge leading to the porter’s lodge where his brother lived. There were voices inside the Lodge; and Stephen paused for a moment before lifting the latch.

“Oh dear, dear!” said a querulous voice, which he recognised as that of Anania, “I never thought to be laid by the heels like this!—not a soul coming in to see a body, and those children that ungovernable—Gilbert, get off that ladder! and Selis, put the pitchfork down this minute! Not a bit of news any where, and if there were, not a creature coming in to tell one of it! Eline, let those buttons alone, or I’ll be after—Oh deary dear, I can’t!”

Stephen lifted the latch and looked in. Anania lay on a comfortable couch, drawn up by the fire; and at a safe distance from it, her four children were running riot—turning out all her treasures, inspecting, trying on, and occasionally breaking them—knowing themselves to be safe from any worse penalty than a scolding, for which evidently they cared nothing.

“You seem to want a bit of help this afternoon,” suggested Stephen coolly, collaring Selis, from whom he took the pitchfork, and then lifting Gilbert off the ladder, to the extreme disapprobation of both those young gentlemen, as they showed by kicks and angry screams. “Come, now, be quiet, lads: one can’t hear one’s self speak.”

“Stephen! is it you?” cried Anania incredulously, trying to lift herself to see him better, and sinking back with a groan.

“Looks rather like me, doesn’t it? I am sorry to find you suffering, Sister.”

“I’ve suffered worse than any martyr in the Calendar, Stephen!—and those children don’t care two straws for me. Nobody knows what I’ve gone through. Are you come home for good? Oh dear, this pain!”

“No, only for a look at you. I had a little business to bring me this way. How is Osbert?”

“He’s well enough to have never a bit of sympathy for me. Where are you living, Stephen, and what do you do now?”

“Oh, up London way; I’m a baker. Have you poulticed that foot, Anania?”

“I’ve done all sorts of things to it, and it’s never—Julian, if you touch that clasp, I declare I’ll—Are you married, Stephen?”

“Married, and have one more trouble than you,” answered Stephen laughingly, as he took the clasp from his youthful and inquisitive niece; “but my children are not troublesome, I am thankful to say. I was going to tell you that marsh-mallows makes one of the finest poultices you can have. Pluck it when Jupiter is in the ascendant, and the moon on the wane, and you’ll find it first-rate for easing that foot of yours.—Gilbert, I heard thy mother tell thee not to go up the ladder.”

“Well, what if she did?” demanded Gilbert sulkily. “She’s only a woman.”

“Then she must be obeyed,” said Stephen.

“But who did you marry, for I never—Oh deary me, but it does sting!”

“Now, Anania, I’ll just go to the market and get you some marsh mallow; Selis will come with me to carry it. I’ve to see Aunt Isel yet, and plenty more. Come, Selis.”

“*Ha, chétife!*—you’ve no sooner come than you’re off again! Who did you marry? That’s what I want to know.”

“The sooner you get that poultice on the better. I may look in again, if I have time. If not, you’ll tell Osbert I’ve been, and all’s well with me.”

Stephen shut the door along with his last word, disregarding Anania’s parting cry of—“But you haven’t told me who your wife is!” and marched Selis off to the market, where he laded him with marsh mallow, and sent him home with strict injunctions not to drop it by the way. Then, laughing to himself at the style wherein he had disposed of Anania, he turned off to Turlgate Street (now the Turl) where Raven Soclin lived.

The first person whom he saw there was his cousin Flemild.

“Why, Stephen, this is an unexpected pleasure!” she said warmly. “Mother, here’s Cousin Stephen come.”

“I’m glad to see thee, lad,” responded Isel: and the usual questions followed as to his home and calling. But to Stephen’s great satisfaction, though Isel expressed her hope that he had a good wife, nobody asked for her name. The reason was that they all took it for granted she must be a stranger to them; and when they had once satisfied themselves that he was doing well, and had learnt such details as his present calling, the number of his family, and so forth, they seemed more eager to impart information than to obtain it. At their request, Stephen promised to sleep there, and then went out to pay a visit to Romund and Mabel, which proved to be of a very formal and uninteresting nature. He had returned to Turlgate Street, but they had not yet gone to rest, when Osbert lifted the latch.

“So you’re real, are you?” said he, laughing to his brother. “Anania couldn’t tell me if you were or not; she said she rather thought she’d been dreaming,—more by reason that you did not tarry a minute, and she could not get an answer to one question, though she asked you three times.”

Stephen too well knew what that question was to ask for a repetition of it “Nay, I tarried several minutes,” said he; “but I went off to get some marsh mallow for a poultice for the poor soul; she seemed in much pain. I hope Selis took it home all right? Has she got it on?”

“I think she has,” said Osbert. “But she wants you very badly to go back and tell her a lot more news.”

“Well, I’ll see,” replied Stephen; “I scarcely think I can. But if she wants news, you tell her I’ve heard say women’s head-kerchiefs are to be worn smaller, and tied under the chin; that’s a bit of news that’ll take her fancy.”

“That’ll do for a while,” answered Osbert; “but what she wants to know most is your wife’s name and all the children’s.”

“Oh, is that it?” said Stephen coolly. “Then you may tell her one of the children is named after you, and another for our mother; and we have an Agnes and a Derette: and if she wants to know the cat’s name too—”

Osbert roared. “Oh, let’s have the cat’s name, by all means,” said he; and Stephen gravely informed him that it was Gib.



As Agnes was at that time one of the commonest names in England, about as universal as Mary or Elizabeth now, Stephen felt himself pretty safe in giving it; but the name of his eldest son he did not mention.

"Well, I'd better go home before I forget them," said Osbert. "Let's see—Osbert, Edild, Agnes, and Derette—and the cat is Gib. I think I shall remember. But I haven't had your wife's."

"I'll walk back with you," said Stephen, evading the query; and they went out together.

"Stephen, lad," said Osbert, when they had left the house, "I've a notion thou dost not want to tell thy wife's name. Is it true, or it's only my fancy?"

"Have you?" responded Stephen shortly.

"Ay, I have; and if it be thus, say so, but don't tell me what it is. It's nought to me; so long as she makes thee a good wife I care nought who she is; but if I know nothing, I can say nothing. Only, if I knew thou wouldst as lief hold thy peace o'er it, I would not ask thee again."

"She is the best wife and the best woman that ever breathed," replied Stephen earnestly: "and you are right, old man—I don't want to tell it."

"Then keep thine own counsel," answered his brother. "Farewell, and God speed thee!"

Stephen turned back, and Osbert stood for a moment looking after him. "If I thought it possible," said the porter to himself,— "but I don't see how it could be any way—I should guess that the name of Stephen's wife began and ended with an *e*. I am sure he was set on her once—and that would account for any reluctance to name her: but I don't see how it could be. Well! it doesn't matter to me. It's a queer world this."

With which profoundly original and philosophical remark, Osbert turned round and went home.

"Well, what is it?" cried Anania, the moment he entered.

"Let me unlade my brains," said Osbert, "for I'm like a basket full of apples; and if they are not carefully taken out, they'll be bruised and good for nought. Stephen's children are called Edild, Agnes, Osbert, and Derette—"

"But his wife! it's his wife I want to know about."

"Dear, now! I don't think he told me that," said Osbert with lamb-like innocence, as if it had only just occurred to him.

"Why, that was what you went for, stupid!"

"Well, to be sure!" returned Osbert in meek astonishment, which he acted to perfection. "He told me the cat's name, if that will suit you instead."

"I wish the cat were inside you this minute!" screamed Anania.

"Thank you for your kind wishes," replied Osbert with placid amiability. "I'm not sure the cat would."

"Was there ever any mortal thing in this world so aggravating as a man?" demanded Anania, in tones which were not placid by any means. "Went down to Kepeharme Lane to find something out, and came back knowing ne'er a word about it! Do you think you've any brains, you horrid tease?"

"Can't say: never saw them," answered Osbert sweetly.

"I wonder if you have your match in the county!"

"Oh, I don't think there's any doubt of that."

"Well, at any rate, first thing to-morrow morning, if you please, back you go and ask him. And mind you don't let him slip through your fingers this time. He's as bad as an eel for that."

"First thing! I can't, Anania. The Earl has sent word that he means to fly the new hawks at five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Bother the—hawks! Couldn't you go again to-night?"

"No, they'll be gone to bed by now. Why, wife, what on earth does it matter to thee?"

Anania's reply to this query was so sharp a snarl that Osbert let her alone thereafter.

The next morning, when released from his duties, he went again to Kepeharme Lane—to hear that Stephen had set out on his return journey half-an-hour before. "Well, now, it's plain to me what *that* means!" announced Anania solemnly, when this distressing fact was communicated to her. "He's married somebody he's ashamed of—some low creature, quite beneath him, whom he doesn't care to own. That must be the explanation. She's no better than she should be; take my word for it!"

"That's quite possible," said Osbert drily. "There's another or two of us in that predicament."

Anania flounced over on her couch, thereby making herself groan.

"You are, and no mistake!" she growled.

"Father Vincent said, when he married us, that you and I were thenceforth one, my dearest!" was the pleasing response.

"What in the name of wonder I ever wished to marry you for—!"

"I will leave you to consider it, my darling, and tell me when I come back," said Osbert, shutting the door and whistling the *Agnus* as he went up Castle Street.

"Well, if you aren't the worst, wickedest, aggravatingest man that ever worried a poor helpless woman," commented Anania, as she turned on her uneasy couch, "my new boots are made of pear jelly!"

But it did not occur to her to inquire of what the woman was made who habitually tormented that easy-tempered man, nor how much happier her home might have been had she learnt to bridle her own irritating tongue.

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Note 1. Close Roll, 32 Henry Third. About 5 pence per loaf according to modern value.

Note 2. The Bishop of Lincoln who sat on the Council of Oxford was Robert de Chesney. He died on January 26th, 1168, and was succeeded by the King's natural son, Geoffrey Plantagenet, a child of only nine years of age. Such were the irregularities in the "apostolical succession" during the "ages of faith!"

Note 3. Even Wycliffe taught that no man could know whether he were elected to salvation or not.

Note 4. The Blue Boar in Saint Aldate's Street really belongs to a later date than this.

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## Chapter Twelve.

### Reunited.

"With mercy and with judgment  
My web of time He wove,  
And ay the dews of sorrow  
Were lustred with His love:  
I'll bless the hand that guided,  
I'll bless the heart that planned,  
When throned where glory dwelleth,  
In Immanuel's land."

Mrs Cousins.

It was a very tiny house in Tower Street, at the corner of Mark Lane. There were but two rooms—above and below, as in Isel's house, but these were smaller than hers, and the lower chamber was made smaller still by a panel screen dividing it in two unequal parts.

The front division, which was a very little one, was a jeweller's shop; the back was larger, and was the family living-room. In it to-night the family were sitting, for business hours were over, and the shop was closed.

The family had a singular appearance. It consisted of four persons, and these were derived from three orders of the animate creation. Two were human. The third was an aged starling, for whose convenience a wicker cage hung in one corner; but the owner was hopping in perfect freedom about the hearth, and occasionally varying that exercise by pausing to give a mischievous peck to the tail of the fourth, a very large white and tan dog. The dog appeared so familiarised with this treatment as scarcely to notice it, unless the starling gave a harder peck than usual, when he merely moved his tail out of its way, accompanying the action in specially severe cases by the most subdued of growls, an action which seemed to afford great amusement to that impertinent and irrepressible fowl.

The relationship of the human inhabitants of the little chamber would not have been easy to guess. The elder, seated on a cushioned bench by the fire, was one whose apparent age was forty or perhaps rather more. She was a woman of extremely dark complexion, her hair jet-black, her eyes scarcely lighter—a woman who had once been very handsome, and whose lost youth and beauty now and then seemed to flash back into her face, when eagerness, anger, or any other strong feeling lent animation to her features. The other was a young man about half her years, and as unlike her as he well could be. His long flaxen hair waved over a brow as white as hers was dark, and his eyes were a light clear blue. He sat on a stool in front of the fire, gazing into the charred wooden embers with intent fixed eyes. The woman had glanced at him several times, but neither had spoken for above half an hour. Now she broke the silence.

"Well, Ralph?"

"Well, Mother?" echoed the youth with a smile. Both spoke in German—a language then as unfamiliar in England as Persian.

"What are you thinking about so intently?"

"Life," was the ready but unexpected answer.

"Past, present, future?"

"Past and future—hardly present. The past chiefly—the long ago."

The woman moved uneasily, but did not answer.

"Mother, if I am of age to-day, I think I have the right to ask you a few questions. Do you accord it?"

"Ah!" she said, with a deep intonation. "I knew it would come some time. Well! what is to be must be. Speak, my son."

The young man laid his hand affectionately on hers.

"Had it not better come?" he said. "You would not prefer that I asked my questions of others than yourself, nor that I shut them in my own soul, and fretted my heart out, trying to find the answer."

"I should prefer any suffering rather than the loss of thy love and confidence, my Ralph," she answered tenderly. "To the young, it is easy to look back, for they have only just left the flowery garden. To the old, it may be so, when there is only a little way to go, and they will then be gathered to their fathers. But half-way through the long journey—with all the graves behind, and the dreary stretch of trackless heath before—Speak thy will, Ralph."

"Forgive me if I pain you, Mother. I feel as if I must speak, and something has happened to-day which bids me do it now."

It was evident that these words startled and discomposed the mother. She had been leaning back rather wearily in the corner of the bench, as one resting from bodily strain. Now she sat up, the rich crimson mantling her dark cheek.

"What! Hast thou seen—hast thou heard something?"

"I have seen," answered Ralph slowly, as if almost unwilling to say it, "a face from the long ago. At any rate, a face which carried my memory thither."

"Whose?" she said, almost in tones of alarm.

"I cannot tell you. Let me make it as plain as I can. You may be able to piece the disjointed strands together, when I cannot."

"Go on," she said, settling herself to listen.

"You know, Mother," he began, "that I have always known and remembered one thing from my past. I know you are not my real mother. Kindest and truest and dearest of mothers and friends you have been to me; my true mother, whoever and wherever she may be, could have loved and tended me no better than you. That much I know: but as to other matters my recollection is far more uncertain. Some persons and things I recall clearly; others are mixed together, and here and there, as if in a dream, some person, or more frequently some action of such a person, stands out vividly, like a picture, from the general haze. Now, for instance, I can remember that there was somebody called 'Mother Isel': but whether she were my mother, or yours, or who she was, that I do not know. Again, I recollect a man, who must have been rather stern to my childish freaks, I suppose, for he brings with him a sense of fear. This man does not come into my life till I was some few years old; there is another whom I remember better, an older friend, a man with light hair and grave, kindly blue eyes. There are some girls, too, but I cannot clearly recall them—they seem mixed together in my memory, though the house in which I and they lived I recollect perfectly. But I do not know how it is—I never see you there. I clearly recall a big book, which the man with the blue eyes seems to be constantly reading: and when he reads, a woman sits by him with a blue check apron, and I sit on her lap. Perhaps such a thing happened only once, but it appears to me as if I can remember it often and often. There is another man whose face I recall—I doubt if he lived in the house; I think he came in now and then: a man with brown hair and a pleasant, lively face, who often laughed and had many a merry saying. I cannot certainly remember any one else connected with that house, except one other—a woman: a woman with a horrible chattering tongue, who often left people in tears or very cross: a woman whom I don't like at all."

"And after, Ralph?" suggested the mother in a low voice, when the young man paused.

"After? Ah, Mother, that is harder to remember still. A great tumult, cross voices, a sea of faces which all looked angry and terrified me, and then it suddenly changes like a dream to a great lonely expanse of shivering snow: and I and some others—whom, I know not—wander about in it—for centuries, as it appears to me. Then comes a blank, and then—you."

"You remember better than I should have expected as to some things: others worse. Can you recollect no name save 'Mother Isel'?"

"I can, but I don't know whose they are. I can hear somebody call from the upper chamber—'Gerard, is that you?' and the pleasant-faced man says, 'Tell Ermine' something. That is what made me ask you, Mother. I met a man to-day in Cheapside who looked hard at me, and who made me think both of that pleasant-faced man, and also of the stern man; and as I had to wait for a cart to pass, another man and woman came and spoke to him, and he said to the woman, 'Well, when are you coming to see Ermine?' The face, and his curious, puzzled look at me, and the name, carried me back all at once to that house and the people there. He looked as if he thought he ought to know me, and could not tell exactly who I was. And just as I came away, I fancied I heard another word or two, spoken low as if not for me or somebody to hear—something about—'like him and Agnes too.' I wonder if I ever knew any one called Agnes? I have a faint impression that I did. Can you tell me, Mother?"

"I will tell thee, Ralph. But answer me first. Wert thou always called Ralph?"

"I cannot tell, Mother," replied the youth, with an interested look. "I fancy, somehow, that I once used to be called something not that exactly, and yet very like it. I have tried to recover it, and cannot. Was it some pet name used by somebody?"

"No. It was your own name—which Ralph is not."

"O Mother! what was it?"

"Wait a moment. Did you ever hear of any one called—Countess?"

She brought out the second name with hesitation, as if she spoke it unwillingly. The youth shook his head.

"Let that pass."

"But who was it, Mother?"

"Never mind who it was. No relative of yours—Rudolph."

"Rudolph!" The young man sprang to his feet. "That was my name! I know it was, but I never could get hold of it. I shall not forget it again."

"Do not forget it again. But let it be for ourselves only. To the world outside you are still 'Ralph.' It is wiser."

"Very well, Mother."

This youth had been well trained, and was far more obedient to his adopted mother than most sons at that time were to their real parents. With the Saxons a mother had always been under the control of an adult son; and the Normans who had won possession of England had by no means abolished either the social customs or modes of thought of the vanquished people. In fact, the moral ascendancy soon rested with the subject race. The Norman noble who dried his washed hands in the air, sneered at the Saxon thrall who wiped his on a towel; but the towel was none the less an article of necessary furniture in the house of the Norman's grandson. It has often been the case in the history of the world, that the real victory has rested with the vanquished: but it has always been brought about by the one race mixing with and absorbing the other. Where that does not take place, the conquerors remain dominant.

"Now, my son, listen and think. I have some questions to ask. What faith have I taught thee?"

"You have taught me," said Rudolph slowly, "to believe in God Almighty, and in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered on the cross to expiate the sins of His chosen."

"Is that the creed of those around us?"

"Mother, I cannot tell. One half of my brain answers, Ay, it is; but the other half says, No, there is a difference. Yet I cannot quite see what the difference is, and you have always so strictly forbidden me to speak to any one except yourself on religious subjects, that I have had no opportunity to learn what it is. Others, when I hear them talking to you, speak of God, of our Lord, and of our Lady, as we ourselves do: and they speak of the holy Apostles and others of whom we always read in the big book. Mother, is that the same big book out of which the grave-eyed man used to read? But they mention a great many people who are not in the book,—Martin, and Benedict, and Margaret, and plenty more—and they call them all 'Saint,' but I do not know who they were. You never told me about those people."

There was silence for a moment, till she said—"Thou hast learnt well, and hast been an obedient boy. In the years that lie before thee, thou mayest have cause to thank God for it. My questions are done: thou mayest ask thine."

"Then, Mother, who am I?" was the eager inquiry. "Thou art Rudolph, son of Gerhardt of Mainz, and of Agnes his wife, who both gave their lives for the Lord Christ's sake, fourteen years ago."

"Mother!—were my real parents martyrs?"

"That is the word which is written after their names in the Lamb's Book of Life. But in the books written by men the word is different."

"What is that word, then, Mother?"

"Rudolph, canst thou bear to hear it? The word is—'heretic'."

"But those are wicked people, who are called heretics!"

"I think it depends on who uses the word."

Rudolph sat an instant in blank silence.

"Then what did my father believe that was so wrong?"

"He believed what I have taught you."

"Then were they wicked, and not he?"

"Judge for thyself. There were about thirty of thy father's countrymen, who came over to this country to preach the pure Word of God: and those who called them heretics took them, and branded them, and turned them out into the snow to die. Would our Lord have done that?"

"Never! Did they die?"

"Every one, except the child I saved."

"And that was I, Mother?"

"That was thou."

"So I am not an Englishman!" said Rudolph, almost regretfully.

"No. Thou seest now why I taught thee German. It is thine own tongue."

"Mother, this story is terrible. I shall feel the world a worse place to my life's end, after hearing it. But suffer me to ask—who are you? We are so unlike, that sometimes I have fancied we might not be related at all."

"We are not related at all."

"But you are German?"

"No."

"You are English! I always imagined you a foreigner."

"No—I am not English."

"Italian?—Spanish?"

She shook her head, and turned away her face.

"I never cared for the scorn of these other creatures," she said in a low troubled voice. "I could give them back scorn for scorn. But it will be hard to be scorned by the child whom I saved from death."

"Mother! I scorn you? Why, the thing could not be. You are all the world to me."

"It will not be so always, my son. Howbeit, thou shalt hear the truth. Rudolph, I am a Jewess. My old name is Countess, the daughter of Benefei of Oxford."

"Mother," said Rudolph softly, "you are what our Lady was. If I could scorn you, it would not be honouring her."

"True enough, boy: but thou wilt not find the world say so."

"If the world speak ill of you, Mother, I will have none of it! Now please tell me about others. Who was Mother Isel?"

"A very dear and true friend of thy parents."

"And Ermine?"

"Thy father's sister—one of the best and sweetest maidens that God ever made."

"Is it my father that I remember, with the grave blue eyes—the man who read in the book?"

"I have no doubt of it. It is odd—" and a smile flitted over Countess's lips—"that all thou canst recollect of thy mother should be her checked apron."

Rudolph laughed. "Then who is the stern man, and who the merry one?"

"I should guess the stern man to be Manning Brown, the husband of Isel. The merry, pleasant-faced man, I think, must be his nephew Stephen. 'Stephen the Watchdog' they used to call him; he was one of the Castle watchmen."

"At Oxford? Was it Oxford, then, where we used to live?"

"It was Oxford."

"I should like to go there again."

"Take heed thou do not so. Thou are so like both thy father and mother that I should fear for thy safety. No one would know me, I think. But for thee I am not so sure. And if they were to guess who thou art, they would have thee up before the bishops, and question thee, and brand thee with the dreadful name of 'heretic,' as they did to thy parents."

"Mother, why would they do these things?—why did they do them?"

"Because they loved idols, and after them they would go. We worship only the Lord our God, blessed be He! And thou wilt find always, Rudolph, that not only doth light hate darkness, but the darkness also hateth the light, and tries hard to extinguish it."

"Yet if they worship the same God that we do—"

"Do they? I cannot tell. Sometimes I think He can hardly reckon it so. The God they worship seems to be no jealous God, but one that hath no law to be broken, no power to be dreaded, no majesty to be revered. 'If I be a Master,' said the Holy One by Malachi the Prophet, 'where is My fear?' And our Lord spake to the Sadducees, saying, 'Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?' They seem to be strangely fearless of breaking His most solemn commands—even the words that He spake to Moses in the sight of all Israel, on the mount that burned with fire. Strangely fearless! when the Master spake expressly against making the commands of God of no effect through man's tradition. What do they think He meant? Let them spill a drop of consecrated wine—which He never told them to be careful over—and they are terrified of His anger: let them deliberately break His distinct laws, and they are not terrified at all. The world has gone very, very far from God."

They sat for a little while in silence.

"Mother," said Rudolph at last, "who do you think that man was whom I met, that looked so hard at me, and seemed to think me like my parents? He spoke of 'Ermine,' too."

"I can only guess, Rudolph. I think it might be a son of Mother Isel—she had two. The Ermine of whom he spoke, no doubt, is some girl named after thine aunt. Perhaps it may be a child of their sister Flemild. I cannot say."

"You think it could not be my aunt, Mother? I should like to know one of my own kin."

"Not possible, my boy. She must have died with the rest."

"Are you sure they all died, Mother?"

"I cannot say that I saw it, Rudolph: though I did see the dead faces of several, when I was searching for thee. But I do not see how she could possibly have escaped."

"Might she not—if she had escaped—say the same of me?"

Countess seemed scarcely willing to admit even so much as this.

"It is time for sleep, my son," she said; and Rudolph rose, lighted the lantern, and followed her upstairs. The chamber above was divided in two by a curtain drawn across it. As Rudolph was about to pass beyond it, he stopped to ask another question.

"Mother, if I should meet that man again,—suppose he were to speak to me?"

A disquieted look came into the dark eyes.

"Bring him to me," she said. "Allow nothing—deny nothing. Leave me to deal with him."

Rudolph dropped the curtain behind him, and silence fell upon the little house in Mark Lane.

A few hours earlier, our old friend Stephen, now a middle-aged man, had come home from his daily calling, to his house in Ivy Lane. He was instantly surrounded by his five boys and girls, their ages between six and thirteen, all of whom welcomed him with tumultuous joyfulness.

"Father, I've construed a whole book of Virgil!"

"And, Father, I'm to begin Caesar next week!"

"I've made a gavache for you, Father—done every stitch myself!"

"Father, I've learnt how to make pancakes!"

"Father, I stirred the posset!"

"Well, well! have you, now?" answered the kindly-faced father. "You're all of you mighty clever, I'm very sure. But now, if one or two of you could get out of the way, I might shut the door; no need to let in more snow than's wanted.—Where's Mother?"

"Here's Mother," said another voice; and a fair-haired woman of the age of Countess, but looking younger, appeared in a doorway, drawing back the curtain. "I am glad you have come, Stephen. It is rather a stormy night."

"Oh, just a basinful of snow," said Stephen lightly. "Supper ready? Gerard—" to his eldest boy—"draw that curtain a bit closer, to keep the wind off Mother. Now let us ask God's blessing."

It was a very simple supper—cheese, honey, roasted apples, and brown bread; but the children had healthy appetites, and had not been enervated by luxuries. Conversation during the meal was general. When it was over, the three younger ones were despatched to bed with a benediction, under charge of their eldest sister; young Gerard seated himself on the bench, with a handful of slips of wood, which he was ambitiously trying to carve into striking likenesses of the twelve Apostles; and when the mother's household duties were over, she came and sat by her husband in the chimney-corner. Stephen laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Ermine," he said, "dear heart, wilt thou reckon me cruel, if I carry thy thoughts back—for a reason I have—to another snowy night, fourteen years ago?"

"Stephen!" she exclaimed, with a sudden start. "Oh no, I could never think *thee* cruel. But what has happened?"

"Dost thou remember, when I first saw thee in Mother Haldane's house, my telling thee that I could not find Rudolph?"

"Of course I do. O Stephen! have you—do you think—"

Gerard looked up from his carving in amazement, to see the mother whom he knew as the calmest and quietest of women transformed into an eager, excited creature, with glowing cheeks and radiant eyes.

"Let me remind thee of one other point,—that Mother Haldane said God would either take the child to Himself, or would some day show us what had become of him."

"She did,—much to my surprise."

"And mine. But I think, Ermine—I think it is going to come true."

"Stephen, what have you heard?"

"I believe, Ermine, I have seen him."

"Seen *him*—Rudolph?"

"I feel almost sure it was he. I was standing this morning near Chepe Cross, to let a waggon pass, when I looked up,

and all at once I saw a young man of some twenty years standing likewise till it went by. The likeness struck me dumb for a moment. Gerard's brow—no, lad, not thou! Thy mother knows—Gerard's brow, and his fair hair, with the very wave it used to have about his temples; his eyes and nose too; but Agnes's mouth, and somewhat of Agnes in the way he held his head. And as I stood there, up came Leuesa and her husband, passing the youth; and before I spoke a word about him, 'Saw you ever one so like Gerard?' saith she. I said, 'Ay, him and Agnes too.' We watched the lad cross the street, and parting somewhat hastily from our friends, I followed him at a little distance. I held him in sight as far as Tower Street, but ere he had quite reached Mark Lane, a company of mummers, going westwards, came in betwixt and parted us. I lost sight of him but for a moment, yet when they had passed, I could see no more of him—north, south, east, nor west—than if the earth had swallowed him up. I reckon he went into an house in that vicinage. To-morrow, if the Lord will, I will go thither, and watch. And if I see him again, I will surely speak."

"Stephen! O Stephen, if it should be our lost darling!"

"Ay, love, if it should be! It was always possible, of course, that he might have been taken in somewhere. There are many who would have no compassion on man or woman, and would yet shrink from turning out a little child to perish. And he was a very attractive child. Still, do not hope too much, Ermine; it may be merely an accidental likeness."

"If I could believe," replied Ermine, "that Countess had been anywhere near, I should think it more than possible that she had saved him."

"Countess? Oh, I remember—that Jewish maiden who petted him so much. But she went to some distance when she married, if I recollect rightly."

"She went to Reading. But she might not have been there always."

"True. Well, I will try to find out something to-morrow night."

The little jeweller's shop at the corner of Mark Lane had now been established for fourteen years. For ten of those years, David and Christian had lived with Countess; but when Rudolph was old enough and sufficiently trained to manage the business for himself, Countess had thought it desirable to assist David in establishing a shop of his own at some distance. She had more confidence in David's goodness than in his discretion, and one of her chief wishes was to have as few acquaintances as possible. Happily for her aim, Rudolph's disposition was not inconveniently social. He liked to sit in a cushioned corner and dream the hours away; but he shrank as much as Countess herself from the rough, noisy, rollicking life of the young people by whom they were surrounded. Enough to live on, in a simple and comfortable fashion—a book or two, leisure, and no worry—these were Rudolph's desiderata, and he found them in Mark Lane.

He had no lack of subjects for thought as he sat behind his tiny counter on the evening of the following day. Shop-counters, at that date, were usually the wooden shutter of the window, let down table-wise into the street; but in the case of plate and jewellery the stock was too valuable to be thus exposed, and customers had to apply for admission within. It had been a very dull day for business, two customers only having appeared, and one of these had gone away without purchasing. There was one wandering about outside who would have been only too glad to become a customer, had he known who sat behind the counter. Stephen had searched in vain for Rudolph in the neighbourhood where he had so mysteriously vanished from sight. He could not recognise him under the alias of "Ralph le Juwelier," by which name alone his neighbours knew him. Evening after evening he watched the corner of Mark Lane, and some fifty yards on either side of it, but only to go back every time to Ermine with no tale to tell. There were no detectives nor inquiry offices in those days; nothing was easier than for a man to lose himself in a great city under a feigned name. For Countess he never inquired; nor would he have taken much by the motion had he done so, since she was known to her acquaintances as Sarah la Juwelière. Her features were not so patently Jewish as those of some daughters of Abraham, and most people imagined her to be of foreign extraction.

"It seems of no use, Ermine," said Stephen mournfully, when a month had passed and Rudolph had not been seen again. "Maybe it was the boy's ghost I saw, come to tell us that he is not living."

Stephen was gifted with at least an average amount of common sense, but he would have regarded a man who denied the existence of apparitions as a simpleton.

"We can only wait," said Ermine, looking up from the tunic she was making for her little Derette. "I have asked the Lord to send him to us; we can only wait His time."

"But, Wife, suppose His time should be—never?"

"Then, dear," answered Ermine softly, "it will still be the right time."

The morning after that conversation was waning into afternoon, when Rudolph, passing up Paternoster Row, heard hurried steps behind him, and immediately felt a grasp on his shoulder—a grasp which seemed as if it had no intention of letting him go in a hurry. He looked up in some surprise, into the face of the man whose intent gaze and disconnected words had so roused his attention a month earlier.

"Caught you at last!" were the first words of his captor. "Now don't fall to and fight me, but do me so much grace as to tell me your name in a friendly way. You would, if you knew why I ask you."

The kindness and honest sincerity of the speaker's face were both so apparent, that Rudolph smiled as he said—

"Suppose you tell me yours?"

"I have no cause to be ashamed of it. My name is Stephen, and men call me 'le Bulenger.'"

"Have they always called you so?"

"Are you going to catechise me?" laughed Stephen. "No—you are right there. Fifteen years ago they called me 'Esueillechien.' Now, have you heard my name before?"

"I cannot say either 'yes' or 'no,' unless you choose to come home with me to see my mother. She may know you better than I can."

"I'll come home with you fast enough," Stephen was beginning, when the end of the sentence dashed his hopes down. "'To see your—mother!' That won't do, young man. I have looked myself on her dead face—or else you are not the man for whom I took you."

"I can answer you no questions till you do so," replied Rudolph firmly.

"Come, then, have with you," returned Stephen, linking his arm in that of the younger man. "Best to make sure. I shall get to know something, if it be only that you are not the right fellow."

"Now?" asked Rudolph, rather disconcertedly. He was not in the habit of acting in this ready style about everything that happened, but required a little while to make up his mind to a fresh course.

"Have you not found out yet," said Stephen, marching him into Saint Paul's Churchyard, "that *now* is the only time a man ever has for anything?"

"Well, you don't let the grass grow under your feet," observed Rudolph, laughing.

Being naturally of a rather dreamy and indolent temperament, he was not accustomed to getting over the ground with the rapidity at which Stephen led him.

"There's never time to waste time," was the sententious reply.

In a shorter period than Rudolph would have thought possible, they arrived at the corner of Mark Lane.

"You live somewhere about here," said Stephen coolly, "but I don't know where exactly. You'll have to show me your door."

"You seem to know a great deal about me," answered Rudolph in an amused tone. "This is my door. Come in."

Stephen followed him into the jeweller's shop, where Countess sat waiting for customers, with the big white dog lying at her feet.

"I'm thankful to see, young man, that your 'mother' is no mother of yours. Your flaxen locks were never cut from those jet tresses. But I don't know who you are—" he turned to her—"unless Ermine be right that Countess the Jewess took the boy. Is that it?"

"That is it," she replied, flushing at the sound of her old name. "You are Stephen the Watchdog, if I mistake not? Yes, I am Countess—or rather, I was Countess, till I was baptised into the Christian faith. So Ermine is yet alive? I should like to see her. I would fain have her to come forward as my witness, when I deliver the boy unhurt to his father at the last day."

"But how on earth did you do it?" broke out Stephen in amazement. "Why, you could scarcely have heard at Reading of what had happened,—I should have thought you could not possibly have heard, until long after all was over."

"I was not at Reading," she said in a constrained tone. "I was living in Dorchester. And I heard of the arrest from Regina."

"Do, for pity's sake, tell me all about it!"

"I will tell you every thing: but let me tell Ermine with you. And,—Stephen—you will not try to take him from me? He is all I have."

"No, Countess," said Stephen gravely. "You have a right to the life that you have saved. Will you come with me now? But perhaps you cannot leave together? Will the house be rifled when you return?"

"Not at all," calmly replied Countess. "We will both go with you."

She rose, disappeared for a moment, and came back clad in a fur-lined cloak and hood. Turning the key in the press which held the stock, she stooped down and attached the key to the dog's collar.

"On guard, Olaf! Keep it!" was all she said to the dog. "Now, Stephen, we are ready to go with you."

Olaf got up somewhat sleepily, shook himself, and then lay down close to the screen, his head between his paws, so that he could command a view of both divisions of the chamber. He evidently realised his responsibility.

Stephen had no cause to complain that Countess wasted any time. She walked even faster than he had done, only pausing to let him take the lead at the street corner. But when he had once told her that his home was in Ivy Lane, she paused no more, but pressed on steadily and quickly until they reached the little street. Stephen opened his door, and she went straight in to where Ermine stood.

"Ermine!" she said, with a pleading cadence in her voice, "I have brought back the child unhurt."

"Countess!" was Ermine's cry.

She took Ermine's hands in hers.

"I may touch you now," she said. "You will not shrink from me, for I am a Christian. But I have kept my vow. I have never permitted the boy to worship idols. I have kept him, so far as lay in my power, from all contact with those men and things which his father held evil. God bear me witness to you, and God and you to him, that the poor scorned Jewess has fulfilled her oath, and that the boy is unharmed in body and soul!—Rudolph! this is thine Aunt Ermine. Come and show thyself to her."

"Did I ever shrink from you?" replied Ermine with a sob, as she clasped Countess to her heart. "My friend, my sister!



As thou hast dealt with us outcasts, may God reward thee! and as thou has mothered our Rudolph, may He comfort thee! —O my darling, my Gerhardt's boy!—nay, I could think that Gerhardt himself stood before me. Wilt thou love me a little, my Rudolph?—for I have loved thee long, and have never failed, for one day, to pray God's blessing on thee if thou wert yet alive."

"I think I shall not find it hard, Aunt Ermine," said Rudolph, as he kissed without knowing it that spot on Ermine's brow where the terrible brand had once been. "I have often longed to find one of my own kindred, for I knew that Mother was not my real mother, good and true as she has been to me."

Countess brought out from under her cloak a large square parcel, wrapped in a silken kerchief.

"This is Rudolph's fortune," she said.

Stephen looked on with some curiosity, fully expecting to see a box of golden ornaments, or perhaps of uncut gems. But when the handkerchief was carefully unfolded, there lay before them an old, worn book, in a carved wooden case.

Stephen—who could not read—was a little disappointed, though the market value of any book was very high. But Ermine recognised the familiar volume with a cry of delight, and took it into her hands, reading half-sentences here and there as she turned over the leaves.

"Oh, how have I wished for this! How I have wondered what became of it! Gerhardt's dear old Gospel-Book! Countess, how couldst thou get it? It was taken from him when we were arrested."

"I know it," answered Countess with a low laugh.

"But you were at Reading!" exclaimed Ermine.

"I was at Oxford, though you knew it not. I had arrived on a visit to my father, the morning of that very day. I was in the crowd around when you went down to the prison, though I saw none of you save Gerhardt. But I saw the sumner call his lad, and deliver the book to him, bidding him bear it to the Castle, there to be laid up for the examination of the Bishops. Finding that I could not get the child, I followed the book. Rubi was about, and I begged him to challenge the lad to a trial of strength, which he was ready enough to accept. He laid down the book on the window-ledge of a house, and—I do not think he picked it up again."

"You stole it, sinner!" laughed Stephen.

"Why not?" inquired Countess with a smile. "I took it for its lawful owner, from one that had no right to it. You do not call that theft?"

"Could you read it?"

"I could learn to do anything for Rudolph."

"But how did you ever find him?"

"We were living at Dorchester. Regina came to stay with me in the winter, and she told me that you were to be examined before the King and the bishops, and on what day. All that day I watched to see you pass through the town, and having prepared myself to save the child if I possibly could, when I caught a glimpse of Guelph, who was among the foremost, I followed in the rabble, with a bottle of broth, which I kept warm in my bosom, to revive such as I might be able to reach. Ermine, I looked in vain for you, for Gerhardt or Agnes. But I saw Rudolph, whom Adelheid was leading. The crowd kept pressing before me, and I could not keep him in sight; but as they went out of Dorchester, I ran forward, and came up with them again a little further, when I missed Rudolph. Then I turned back, searching all the way—until I found him."

"And your husband let you keep him?" asked Ermine in a slightly surprised tone.

"My oath let me keep him," said Countess in a peculiar voice.

"Are you a widow?" responded Ermine pityingly.

"Very likely," was the short, dry answer.

Ermine asked no more. "Poor Countess!" was all she said.

"Don't pity me for *that*," replied the Jewess. "You had better know. We quarrelled, Ermine, over the boy, and at my own request he divorced me, and let me go. It was an easy choice to make—gold and down cushions on the one hand, love and the oath of God upon the other. I never missed the down cushions; and I think the child found my breast as soft as they would have been. I sold my jewels, and set up a little shop. We have had the blessing of the Holy One, to whom be praise!"

"That is a Jewish way of talking, is it not?" said Stephen, smiling. "I thought you were a Catholic now."

"I am a Christian. I know nothing about 'Catholic'—unless the idols in the churches are Catholic, and with them I will have nought to do. Gerhardt never taught me to worship them, and Gerhardt's book has never taught it either. I believe in the Lord my God, and His Son Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel: but these gilded vanities are abominations to me. Oh, why have ye Christian folk added your folly to God's wisdom, and have held off the sons and daughters of Israel from faith in Messiah the King?"

"Ah, why, indeed!" echoed Ermine softly.

"Can you tell me anything of our old friends at Oxford?" asked Countess suddenly, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, we heard of them from Leuesa, who married and came to live in London about six years ago," said Stephen.

"Your people were all well, Countess; your sister Regina has married Samuel, the nephew of your uncle Jurnet's wife, and has a little family about her—one very pretty little maid, Leuesa told us, with eyes like yours."

"Thank you," said Countess in a tone of some emotion. "They would not own me now."

"Dear," whispered Ermine lovingly, "whosoever shall confess Christ before men,—not the creed, nor the Church, but Him whom the Father sent, and the truth to which He bore witness—him will He also confess before our Father which is in Heaven. And I think there are a very few of those whom He will present before the presence of His glory, who shall hear Him say of them those words of highest praise that He ever spoke on earth,—'She hath done what she could.'"

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### Historical Appendix.

The sorrowful story of Gerhardt's Mission is told by William of Newbury and Ranulph de Diceto. It seems strange that a company of thirty German peasants should have set forth to bring England back to the pure primitive faith; yet not stranger than that four hundred years earlier, Boniface the Englishman should have set out to convert Germany from heathenism. Boniface succeeded; Gerhardt failed. The reason for the failure, no less than for the success, is hidden in the counsels of Him who worketh all things according to His own will. The time was not yet.

It was in 1159 that this little company arrived in England, and for seven years they preached without repression. Gerhardt, their leader, was the only educated man amongst them, the rest being described as "rustic and unpolished." Some have termed them Publicani or Paulikians; whether they really belonged to that body is uncertain. William of Newbury says they were a sect which came originally from Gascony, and was scattered over Gaul, Spain, Italy, and Germany. They seem therefore to have been true descendants of the old Gallican Church—the Church of Irenaus and Blandina—which we know retained her early purity far longer than the Church of Rome. Their defence, too, when examined, was that of Blandina—"I am a Christian, and no evil is done amongst us."

Their preaching was singularly unsuccessful, if the monkish writers are to be trusted. "They added to their company, during a sojourn of some time in England, only one girl (*muliércula*), who, as report says, was fascinated by magic." Perhaps their work was of more value than appeared on the surface. After seven years of this quiet evangelising, the King and the clergy interfered. Considered as a "foreign sect," they were cited before a council held at Oxford in 1166, the King stating his desire neither to dismiss them as harmless, nor to punish them as guilty, without proper investigation.

Gerhardt was the chief spokesman. To the questions asked he replied that they were Christians, and "revered the doctrine of the Apostles," but he expressed abhorrence of certain Romish tenets—*e.g.*, Purgatory, prayers for the dead, and the invocation of saints. He is said to have shown detestation for the sacraments and for marriage: which, compared with similar accusations brought against the Albigenses, and their replies thereto, almost certainly means that he objected to the corrupt view of these institutions taken by Rome. If Gerhardt denied consubstantiation, baptismal regeneration, and the sacramental character of matrimony, the priests were sure to assert that he denied the sacraments and marriage. The Albigenses were similarly accused, and almost in the same sentence we are told that they had their wives with them. When "the Scriptures were urged against them," the Germans declined disputation. They probably saw that it would be of no avail. Indeed, what good could be gained by disputing with men who confessed that they received Scripture only on the authority of the Church (which they held superior to the Word of God), and who allowed no explanation of it save their own private interpretation?—who were so illogical as to urge that the Church existed before the Scriptures as a reason for her superiority, and so ignorant as to maintain that *pulāi adou* signified the power of Satan! Asked if they would do penance, the Germans refused: threatened with penalties, they held firm. Their punishment was terrible. They were, of course, by Rome's cruel fiction that the Church punishes no man, delivered over to the secular power; and the sentence upon them was that of branding on the forehead, their garments being cut down to the girdle, and being turned into the open fields. Proclamation was made that none should presume to receive them under his roof, nor "to administer consolation." The sentence was carried out with even more barbarity than it was issued, for Gerhardt was twice branded, on forehead and chin, all were scourged, and were then beaten with rods out of the city. No compassion was shown even to the women. Not a creature dared to open his door to the "heretics." Their solitary convert recanted in terror. But the Germans went patiently and heroically to their death, singing, as they passed on, the last beatitude—"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for My sake." Their suffering did not last long. It was in the depth of winter that they were cast out, and they soon lay down in the snow and yielded up their martyr-souls to God.

According to the monkish chroniclers, not one survived. But one elaborate argument may be found, by an eminent antiquary (*Archæologia*, nine 292-309), urging that survivors of this company were probably the ancestors of a mysterious group entitled "Waldenses," who appear in the Public Records in after years as tenants, and not improbably vassals, of the Archbishop of Canterbury. They paid to that See 4 shillings per annum for waste land; 3 shillings 4 pence for "half a plough of land of gable;" 5 shillings 4 pence at each of the four principal feasts, with 32 and a half pence in lieu of autumnal labours—*i.e.*, mowing, reaping, etcetera. When the Archbishop was resident on the manor of Darenth, they had to convey corn for his household, in consideration of which they received forage from his barns, and a corrody or regular allowance of food and clothing from a monastery. I am not competent to judge how far the contention of the writer is valid; but the possibility of such a thing seemed to warrant the supposition in a tale that one or two of the company might have escaped the fate which undoubtedly overtook the majority of the mission.

The story may be found in a condensed form in Milner's Church History, Three, 459.

Every one of the singular names, as well as prices, and various other details, has been taken from the Pipe Rolls of Henry Second, from the first to the twenty-seventh year. All the characters are fictitious excepting the Royal Family, the Earl and Countess of Oxford, the members of the Council, Gerhardt himself, and—simply as regards their existence—Osbert the porter, his wife Anania, and Aliz de Norton, who are entered on the Pipe Roll as inhabitants of Oxford at this date.

The language spoken at that time, whether French or English, would be wholly unintelligible to read, if enough of it had come down to us to make it possible to be written. It seemed best, therefore, to use ordinary modern English, flavoured with the Oxfordshire dialect, and now and then varied by antique expressions.

**The End.**

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ONE SNOWY NIGHT \*\*\*

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