Title: Runnymede and Lincoln Fair: A Story of the Great Charter

Author: John G. Edgar
Author of introduction, etc.: L. K. Hughes
Editor: Ernest Rhys

Release date: January 9, 2015 [EBook #47923]
Most recently updated: January 25, 2021

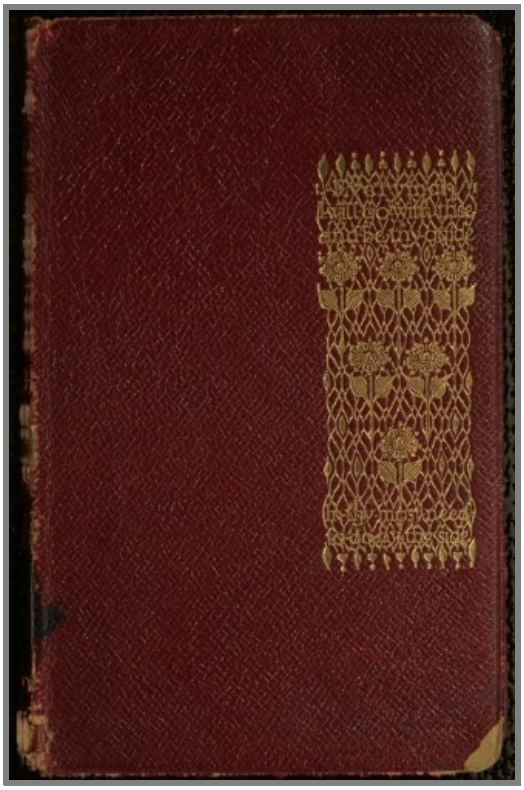
Language: English

Credits: Produced by Shaun Pinder, Chuck Greif and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

Some typographical errors have been corrected; a list follows the text.

Contents.

(etext transcriber's note)



EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY
EDITED BY ERNEST RHYS

FICTION

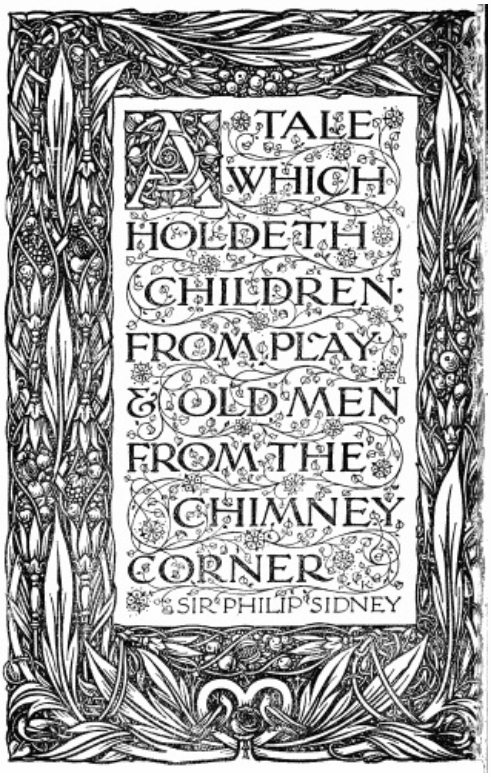
RUNNYMEDE
AND LINCOLN FAIR
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
L. K. HUGHES

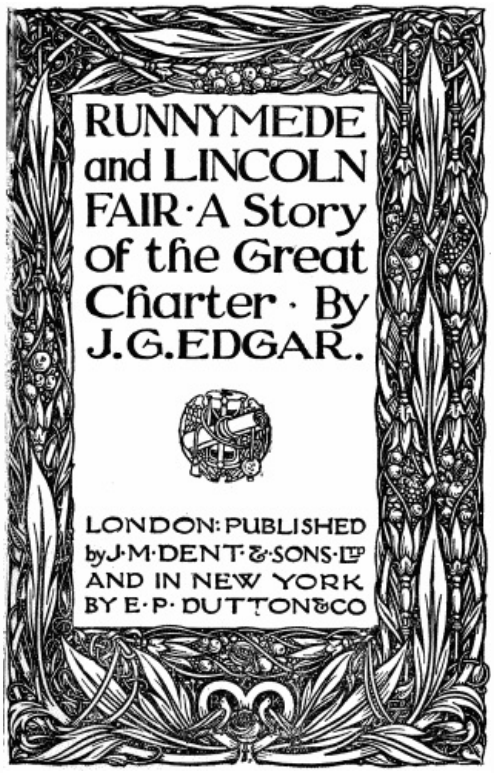
THE PUBLISHERS OF *EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY* WILL BE PLEASED TO SEND FREELY TO ALL APPLICANTS A LIST OF THE PUBLISHED AND PROJECTED VOLUMES TO BE COMPRISED UNDER THE FOLLOWING THIRTEEN HEADINGS:

TRAVEL ❦ SCIENCE ❦ FICTION
THEOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY
HISTORY ❦ CLASSICAL
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
ESSAYS ❦ ORATORY
POETRY & DRAMA
BIOGRAPHY
REFERENCE
ROMANCE

IN FOUR STYLES OF BINDING: CLOTH, FLAT BACK, COLOURED TOP; LEATHER, ROUND CORNERS, GILT TOP; LIBRARY BINDING IN CLOTH, & QUARTER PIGSKIN

LONDON: J. M. DENT & SONS, LTD.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.





First Issue of this Edition 1908
Reprinted 1914

INTRODUCTION

Runnymede and Lincoln Fair was the last story drawing upon the wars and great affairs of English history which its author was destined to write. Like *Cressy and Poictiers*, which is already included in "Everyman's Library," and which preceded it by some three years in its original issue, it first ran as a serial through the magazine particularly associated with Edgar—the *Boys' Own Magazine*; it was first published as a separate book in 1866.

Some further particulars of the brief career of its writer may be added to what has already been told of him in the earlier volume. John George Edgar was the fourth son of the Rev. John Edgar of Hutton in Berwickshire, who was said to be a representative of the ancient family of Edgar of Wedderlie, settled for ages in the parish of Westruther in that county. There seems to be some disagreement as to the date of his birth. The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1864 and Cooper's *Biographical Dictionary* give it as 1834, but James Hannay in *Characters and Criticisms*, published in 1865, says that Edgar was born in the year 1827. From Edgar's literary record and subsequent career one is inclined to believe the latter version the more correct; and to further quote Hannay: "He was educated at Coldstream school under a man of good local reputation, Mr. Richard Henderson, and the Latin he acquired there proved of great value to him afterwards, in reading the old mediæval chronicles. He went to a commercial situation in Liverpool in 1843; and in 1846 left Liverpool for the West Indies, where he remained till 1848. Returning to Liverpool in the last-mentioned year, he resumed his Liverpool duties till 1852, when he settled in London."

Thenceforward Edgar deserted commerce and devoted himself to literature, and in little more than ten years he wrote some sixteen volumes, intended mainly for the reading and entertainment of boys. He was the first editor of *Every Boy's Magazine*, and its constant contributor. Nor was that the only periodical to which he contributed; we find his name in other journals, and he occasionally wrote political articles, from a typically conservative point of view; but, as Hannay says, Edgar was always "rather a writer of books than a journalist. He studied his subjects for their own sake, and then made what literary use he could of them; but he was little interested in the general pursuits of the literary world proper, and profoundly indifferent to the arts by which literary advancement is sometimes pursued there. Indeed, his appearance in the modern metropolitan world of wags and cynics and tale-writers had something about it that was not only picturesque but unique. He came in among those clever, amusing, and essentially modern men like one of Scott's heroes. Profoundly attached to the feudal traditions,—a Tory of the purest Bolingbrokian School, as distinct from the Pittite Tory or modern Conservative, and supporting these doctrines with a fearless and eccentric eloquence, to which his fine person and frank and gallant address gave at once an easy and a stately charm,—he represented in London the Scot of a past age.... He made serious preparation for a book on the barons' war, in which he was to take the side of the English monarchy, and which would have certainly exhibited admirable knowledge, and talents for investigation and description, that must have commanded an attention which his previous performances had been too modest even to desire to invite."

Edgar died of congestion of the brain on April 15, 1864, and his remains lie buried in Highgate Cemetery.

That an author of so much power and promise should have had to end there, half-way, at that comparatively early age, is the more to be lamented, because it was due to the physical carelessness which often wrecks men to whom nature has given a splendid constitution. According to Hannay, Edgar presumed too much on his strength: "He thought it would fight him through anything, so after a bout of solitary literary labour, during which he had lived *more suo* upon tea and tobacco, he was attacked with brain fever. He would not believe it serious, nor would he send for advice till it was too late."

When Edgar wrote *Runnymede and Lincoln Fair*, he filled a gap in English historical fiction. Scott had left the period untouched, and Shakespeare, as a dramatist, had naturally preferred to dwell on the deeds and characters of individuals, rather than on the political controversies of John and his subjects.

Yet the thirteenth century is one of the most important and interesting periods in English history; but it was not an age of chivalry and romance, and this must be borne in mind when we are obliged to admit that *Runnymede and Lincoln Fair* does not rank so high as *Cressy and Poictiers* as a work of fiction. Moreover, there is no contemporary chronicler so vivacious and romantic as Froissart for the novelist to draw upon.

The historical literature of the time of Magna Charta is largely monastic, and Edgar follows pretty closely the chronicles of Roger of Wendover and his editor and continuator, Matthew Paris, who was the greatest of the thirteenth-century chroniclers. But he has drawn on various sources besides, among which are the *Memoriale* of Walter of Coventry, the annals of Waverly, Dunstable, and other monasteries, the chronicle of Ralph of Coggeshall, a full and important chronicle giving many details. For the description of London which Edgar made use of to such advantage he was indebted to *The Life of Thomas à Becket* by a twelfth-century writer, William Fitzstephen.

The hero of the tale, Oliver Icingla, in so far as being the descendant of Saxon chiefs, and of the house of De Moreville, gives us the keynote of the period—the amalgamation of the two races, Saxon and Norman, to form an English nation. Towards the close of the twelfth century a new language began to be formed, a blending of Anglo-Saxon and Norman; and by the end of the thirteenth century the last manifest difference of race, the distinctive peculiarities of dress, had passed away. But in character Icingla does not represent this fusion of the races. He does not join the united barons and English people in the struggle for national freedom, but appears as a champion of the royal cause; and later, of England against the foreigners.

One cannot help perceiving, as one reads the story, that the sympathy of the author is chiefly with the crown. Walter Merley is the only Norman noble of the king's adversaries whom he would have us admire. This is also the tone of Roger of Wendover, who calls the leaders of the barons "the chief promoters of this pestilence." Yet according to Matthew Paris, who is very fair and just, with all his enthusiasm, the barons were not all rogues. He gives the following incident which Edgar has omitted in connection with the siege of Rochester:—"One day during the siege of Rochester Castle, the king and Sauvery were riding round it to examine the weaker parts of it, when a crossbowman in the service of William d'Albini saw them, and said to his master, 'Is it your will, my lord, that I should slay the king, with this arrow which I have ready?' To this William replied, 'No, no; far be it from us, villain, to cause the death of the Lord's anointed.' The crossbowman said, 'He would not spare you in a like case.' To which the knight replied, 'The Lord's will be done. The Lord disposes events, not he.... This circumstance was afterwards known to the king, who, notwithstanding this, did not wish to spare William when his prisoner, but would have hung him had he been permitted."

In the opening chapters of his story Edgar gives an idea of the turbulent state of the country just after the battle

of Bouvines—the defeat to which, according to the historians, England owes its Magna Charta. The barons had now the upper hand. John was crestfallen, and “concealed his hatred of the barons under a calm countenance,” says Matthew Paris.

When describing the great day of Runnymede, Edgar shows that he did not consider the resistance to royal tyranny to be a constitutional and really national movement. The reader is frequently reminded that the barons were fighting for their own selfish ends.

The period of cruelty and ravage between Runnymede and the battle of Lincoln is enlivened by touches of romance, and exploits such as those of William de Collingham, which remind us of Robin Hood, but all the more interesting because Collingham is a historical character mentioned by the contemporary writers. Roger of Wendover says, “A young man named William, refusing to make his fealty to Louis, collected a company of a thousand crossbowmen, and taking to the woods and forests with which that part of the country[1] abounded, he continued to harass the French during the whole war, and slew many thousands of them.”

[1] Sussex.

Edgar’s description of the sea-fight between Hubert de Burgh and Eustace the Monk is much the same as that given by the chroniclers, but he omits the answer of the nobles who, when Hubert proposed that they should go to meet the French fleet, said: “We are not sailors, pirates, or fishermen, do you go therefore and die.”

So also in his account of Lincoln Fair, and of the rising of Fitzarnulph and the citizens of London, he still keeps close to the old chronicle of Wendover; especially is he in his element on Lincoln Fair day, and able to give full rein to his patriotic fire, the essential point of which, in his case, as in that of the chronicler, was loyalty to the king. But Edgar adds to Roger’s account when he introduces us to Nichola de Camville, whose story is given by Walter of Coventry.

Finally, when the temporary peace was established, Edgar concludes his tale in the conventional way, dear to novel readers in every age, with the rescue of the heroine by the hero, and the “living happy ever after.”

Hannay says of Edgar’s style: “It is not a showy style; but it is singularly clear, masculine, and free from every trace of literary impurity or fashionable affectation.” It is certain that he was at his best when describing boyish adventures or historic events. Beatrix de Moreville’s only essential place in the story is as an object of admiration for Oliver Icingla, thereby causing the former friends, Oliver and Fitzarnulph, to become romance-rivals as well as political opponents. It is not, in truth, of such as Beatrix de Moreville that the great heroines are made. With Wolf, the son of Styr, the author is, on the contrary, much more at home; and he makes us at last as interested as he was himself in the boy who was the loyal servant of his master.

Edgar, with his strong conservative instinct and his feeling for the old chroniclers, had much to aid him in his special service of making history into pure story. If he had gone on to write the major work he had planned on the subject of this last story of his, he might have left a more solid fame behind him. His story will help, as it is, to send other students and writers to review the turbulent reign of that John whom he over-estimated.

L. K. HUGHES.

April 1908.

The following are the published works of John George Edgar:—

Biography for Boys, 1853; The Boyhood of Great Men, 1853; History for Boys, 1855; Boy Princes, 1857; The Heroes of England, 1858; The Wars of the Roses, 1859; The Crusades and the Crusaders, 1860; Cavaliers and Roundheads, 1861; Sea Kings and Naval Heroes, 1861; Memorable Events of Modern History, 1862; Danes, Saxons, and Normans, 1863; Cressy and Poictiers (in Beeton’s *Boys’ Own Magazine*, 1863), 1865; Historical Anecdotes of Animals, 1865; Runnymede and Lincoln Fair, 1866.

CONTENTS

AND LINCOLN FAIR

A STORY OF THE GREAT CHARTER

CHAPTER I

A SQUIRE AND A CITIZEN

It was the eve of Christmas in the year 1214, when John was King of England; and, albeit England was on the verge of a sanguinary civil war, which was to shake the kingdom to its centre, and cause infinite suffering to families and individuals, London—then a little city, containing some forty thousand inhabitants, and surrounded by an old Roman wall, said to have been built by the Emperor Constantine—wore quite a holiday aspect, when, as the shades of evening were closing over the banks of the Thames, a stripling of eighteen, or thereabouts, walked up one of the long, narrow streets—some of which, indeed, were so narrow that the inmates, when they ascended to the house-tops, could converse and even shake hands with their opposite neighbours—and knocked loudly at the gate of a high house. It had the appearance of being the abode either of some great noble in attendance on the court, or one of those mediæval merchants who called themselves "barons," and boasted of such wealth as few of the feudal nobles could call their own. In fact, it was the residence of the Fitzarnulphs, the proudest, richest, and most influential of the citizens of London.

The stripling was of gallant bearing and fair to look upon. He was tall, though not so tall as to be in any way remarkable; and his person, well proportioned and compactly formed, indicated much strength, and promised much endurance. His countenance, which was set off with a profusion of fair hair and a growing moustache, was frank and open—so frank and open, indeed, that it seemed as if you might have read in his clear blue eye every working of the mind; and he had neither the aquiline features nor air of authority which distinguished the Norman warriors, young and old. His dress, however, was similar to that which a Norman squire—a De Vesci or a De Roos—would have worn; and he had the air, the manner, and the style of one who had been early apprenticed to arms, and trained in feudal castles to perform the feats of chivalry on which the age set so high a value. Nor was it clear that he had not been engaged in other than the mimic warfare of the tiltyard. More than one scar—none of them, fortunately, such as to mar his beauty—told of fields on which warriors had fought desperately for victory and for life.

Admitted after some delay into the courtyard, and, after passing through it, into the interior of the high house at the gate of which he had knocked, the squire was ceremoniously conducted through what might be called the great hall of the mansion, and received in a small comfortably matted and heated chamber by a person somewhat his senior, who wore the gabardine of a citizen, and on his dark countenance a look of abstraction and gloom, which contrasted remarkably with the lightness and gaiety of his visitor. Wholly unaffected by this difference, however, the squire held out his hand, grasped that of the young Londoner, and said in a voice, not musical indeed, but joyous and hearty—

"Constantine Fitzarnulph, I greet thee in the name of God and of good St. Edward."

"Oliver Icingla!" exclaimed the citizen, taken by surprise. "Do I, in truth, see you, and in the body? Ere this I deemed you were food for worms."

"By the Holy Cross, Constantine," replied the squire, "you do see me in the body. I have, it is true, passed through many adventures and perils, seeing I am but a youth; but as for being food for worms, I have as yet no ambition to serve that purpose, being, as is well known to you, the last of my line, and in no haste, credit me, to sing '*Nunc Dimittis*' till I have done something to employ the tongues of minstrels."

"Of what adventures and perils speak you?" asked the citizen somewhat jealously; for he himself had passed through neither, save in his visions by day and his dreams by night.

"I would fain not appear vainglorious," answered the squire, smiling, "and, therefore, I care not to recount my own exploits. But you know that, when I was withdrawn from your companionship, and from the lessons in grammar and letters, to which, be it confessed, I never took very kindly, I entered the castle of my mother's remote kinsman, William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, and there, not without profit, served my apprenticeship to chivalry. But no sooner did I attain the rank of squire than I began to sigh for real war, and such fields of fight as, for years, I had been dreaming of. And it chanced that about that time Don Diego Perez, a knight from Spain, reached the castle of Salisbury with tidings that Alphonso of Castille was hard pressed by the Moors, and like to lose his kingdom if not aided by the warriors of Christendom. On hearing Don Diego's report I and others in my Lord of Salisbury's household, with the noble earl's sanction, accompanied the knight to Castille; and I fought at Muradel on that day when the Christian chivalry swept the Moorish host before them as the wind does leaves at Yule."

"In good faith?"

"In good faith, Constantine," continued the squire. "But it speedily appeared that we had done our work too well, and routed the Moors so thoroughly that there was no likelihood of reaping more honour or more profit under King Alphonso's banners; and I was even thinking of going to the Holy Land to fight for the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, when news reached the court of Castille that King John had allied himself with the Emperor of Germany and the Count of Flanders to oppose the King of France, and that my Lord of Salisbury was leading an English force to join them; and I and others resolved thereupon to hasten where blows were like to be going; and we made our way, through countless perils, to the great earl's side on the very day when the two armies—one headed by the Emperor Otho, the other by King Philip—drew up in battle array between Lille and Tournay."

"By St. Thomas!" exclaimed the citizen with a sneer, "you soon learned to your cost that you had better have gone elsewhere."

"Nay, nay," replied the squire sharply—for the sneer of the citizen had not been unobserved—"it is the fortune of warriors to know defeat as well as victory, and we did all that brave men could do on that August day—now four months since—when we came face to face with the French at the bridge of Bovines. It was a long and furious battle; but, from the first, fortune favoured the French, and, when all was lost, my Lord of Salisbury yielded his sword to the Bishop of Beauvais, a terrible warrior, who fought not with a sword, lest he should be accused of shedding men's blood, but with a mighty club, with which he smashed at once head-piece and head. For my own part," added the squire carelessly, as one who did not relish speaking of himself, "I fought till I was sore wounded in the face and beaten down; and I should have been trodden under foot but for the earl, who, like a noble warrior as he is, looked to my safety; so I accompanied him into captivity; and, when he covenanted for his own ransom, he, at the same time, paid mine for my mother's sake, and here I am in England safe and sound; but, I almost grieve to add, hardly a free man."

“Not a free man, Oliver Icingla? How cometh that?” asked the citizen.

“Even in this wise, Constantine,” answered the squire. “It seems that the king, in order to settle his disputes with the barons, has demanded some of the sons or kindred of each as hostages, and my kinsman, Hugh de Moreville, who scandalously withholds from my mother the castle and manors which she inherited, and which my father enjoyed in her right, albeit he has never before troubled himself much about my existence, suddenly bethinks him that I shall serve his purpose on this occasion, and has named me to the king.”

“And will you go, Oliver Icingla? Will you put yourself into the lion’s den?”

“Ay, man, as blithely as ever lover went to his lady’s bower.”

“And place yourself at the disposal of a tyrant—a cruel, remorseless, hateful tyrant, who murdered his own nephew, Arthur of Brittany, who hanged twenty-six Welsh boys, who poisoned the daughter of that noble man, Robert Fitzwalter, and who allowed the wife and children of William de Braose to perish of hunger in the dungeons of Windsor?”

The squire changed colour, and his lip quivered nervously.

“Fables, Constantine!” exclaimed he, recovering his serenity with an effort, and tossing his head disdainfully backwards—“fables devised by Philip of France and the barons of England to justify their own selfish and ambitious schemes, and such as ought never to gain credit with a person such as thou. But let French kings and Norman barons make dupes and tools of whom they may, I swear by the Holy Cross that never shall Oliver Icingla be either their dupe or their tool. So help me God and good St. Edward!”

And, as he spoke these words with flashing eye, the squire drew his sword and reverently kissed the cross on its hilt.

“Oliver Icingla,” said the citizen, after a pause, during which he eyed his visitor keenly, “if I comprehend thee aright, thou dreamest, as I believe thy fathers ever did, of the restoration of the Anglo-Saxon race to power in England?”

“And if I do, who has a better right?—I, an Icingla, with the blood of Cerdic in my veins?”

“Dreams, Oliver, vain dreams,” replied the citizen. “This is not the age of Hereward, and every chance is gone; and, but for being blinded by hereditary prejudices, you would see, as plainly as you now see me, that your race is vanquished once and for ever.”

“Constantine,” said the squire sadly and thoughtfully, “the words you have spoken, harsh as they may sound in the ear of an Icingla, are partly words of truth and soberness, but only in part. This is not, indeed, the age of Hereward; nor did I, even in my most enthusiastic moments, dream of raising the old cry, ‘Let every man that is not a nothing, whether in the town or in the country, leave his house and come!’ and attempting to make England what it was before Duke William prevailed at Hastings over the usurper Harold. But let me tell you, wise as you deem yourself, that, when you speak of the ancient race as vanquished for ever, you therein greatly err. A great race, like a great family, is never wholly done till it is extinct; and I tell you, for your instruction, ill as you may like to hear the truth, that this Anglo-Saxon race which you mention so contemptuously has been rising, is rising, and will continue to rise, and increase in influence, till Providence grants us a king under whose auspices will reappear, in more than its ancient vigour, the England that disappeared after the death of the Confessor.”

“The past cannot be recalled, and the future is with God and His saints,” said the citizen gravely; “and, for the present, the king and the barons are at daggers drawn, and may any day appeal to the sword; and, when the crisis comes—and I care not how soon—be it mine to persuade the citizens of London to take part against the king, who is a false tyrant, and with the barons, who are true men. Oliver Icingla, I would to God you were of our determination; for I perceive that, under a light and gay demeanour, you hide an ambitious soul and an imagination that can conjure up a future—mayhap, the ingenuity that could fashion a future in spite of fate.”

“Constantine,” interrupted the squire solemnly, “even now you remarked that the future was with God and His saints.”

“True,” replied the citizen; “but, be that as it may, ally yourself with me at this crisis, and give me your hand in token of good faith, and I will reveal projects which would make thee and me great, and bring both king and barons to our feet.”

The squire smiled at the citizen’s somewhat wild enthusiasm, and shook his head.

“Farewell, Constantine,” said he, stretching out his hand. “I know not how all this may end; but one thing I feel strongly: that there can be no alliance between you and me. However, as the shadows are falling, and the ways are somewhat perilous, I must mount and ride homeward, so as to reach our humble dwelling ere the night sets in; and so, Constantine, again I say farewell, and in whatever projects your ambition involves you, may God and the saints have you in their keeping!”

And thus closing an interview which neither of them regarded without a feeling of disappointment, the squire and the citizen parted, and soon after Oliver Icingla was riding on a black horse of high mettle through Ludgate, while Constantine Fitzarnulph, surrounded by his household, sat gloomily at his board, revolving schemes both dark and dangerous. Their next interview was to take place under circumstances infinitely more tragic.

CHAPTER II

THE ICINGLAS

For a century after the Norman Conquest, continental visitors, in journeying through England as it then was, were surprised, ever and anon, after passing the strong fortresses—heavy, massive, and frowning—with which the Norman conquerors had crowned every height, to come upon lonely two-storied houses, quite unfortified, standing in parks of ancient oaks, amidst which swine fed and kine grazed. These were the dwellings of such of the Anglo-Saxons of rank as had escaped the Norman sword or the exile which to many of them was worse than death; not mighty chiefs like Edwin, and Morcar, and Cospatrick, but thanes who had been too proud to march under the banner of the son of Godwin, and who, pluming themselves on the purity of their lineage and adherence to the customs of their forefathers, refrained from moving for years out of the shadow of their ancestral oaks, or taking any part in the new England which the Conquest had brought into existence. Rendered irritable by jealousy, irascible by oppression, and eccentric by isolation, these men were still grumbling against Norman tyranny, and indulging their souls with vague projects for the emancipation of their race, when the second Henry, son of the Empress Maude, and the first Plantagenet who reigned in England, took possession of the throne.

The accession of Henry was hailed with delight by the English nation. The people, long trodden down and oppressed, remembering that he was descended, through his grandmother “the good Queen Maude,” from the old Saxon kings, regarded him as one of themselves in blood, called him “the English king,” and, deeming him the natural enemy of the Norman barons, looked upon him as the man to redress all their grievances and avenge all their wrongs. Naturally enough, the Saxon chiefs sympathised with the sentiments of their countrymen on the occasion; and among those who emerged from obscurity to do homage to the young Plantagenet was the heir of the once rich and grand house of Icingla.

In the great Anglo-Saxon days the Icinglas had been powerful princes, and had mingled their blood by marriage with the royal race of Cerdic; but fortune had not smiled on their house, and as their wealth diminished so did their influence and importance. It was a characteristic of Anglo-Saxon society that good blood counted for little or nothing save when its possessor retained the means to support high rank and indulge in lavish hospitality. Gold and land were everything. A man born a ceorl might rise to be an earl, and lead armies; while men whose fathers had been princes, if they became poor, sank into contempt, and sometimes descended to the rank of ceorl. The downfall of the Icinglas had not been so humiliating; and at the time of the Conquest they found themselves possessed of a small estate and an unpretending house on the borders of the great forest of Middlesex, where for generations they vegetated, taking no part in political movements or conspiracies, but brooding over their wrongs, real or imaginary, consoling themselves with their hereditary traditions, sneering at the new men by whose lands their little domain was encompassed, and looking very contemptuously from among their trees on that world in which they were precluded from acting a part.

But once attracted from obscurity by King Henry, the Icinglas underwent a marvellous change. Steady of heart, strong of hand, and with a natural sagacity which contact with the world soon brightened into political intelligence, they were just the men whom the Plantagenet kings delighted to honour, and in all their struggles they served Henry and his son, Richard Cœur de Lion, with courage and fidelity. Nor did their services go unrewarded. On returning from his crusade and his captivity, Richard gave Edric Icingla the hand of Isabel de Moreville, an heiress of that great Norman family which in the twelfth century held baronies on both sides of the Tweed; and the Anglo-Saxon warrior, having fought well for the lion-hearted king on many a field, died bravely under his banner in the last battle in which he encountered Philip Augustus.

Four sons had blessed the union of Edric Icingla and Isabel de Moreville, and it seemed that fortune was at length inclined to favour that ancient Saxon line. Death, however, claimed three of the sons as its prey while they were yet in childhood, and when Isabel found herself a widow, only the youngest—Oliver by name—survived to cheer her hopes and demand her vigilance. And it soon looked as if the boy had not been born under a lucky star. Early in the reign of King John, when the strong hand was the most convincing argument, Hugh de Moreville, his maternal kinsman, claimed him as a ward, and contrived, as the lad’s guardian, to possess himself of the castles of Chas-Chateil and Mount Moreville, and the many rich manors which his mother had inherited; and so weak was the law in enforcing the claims of the unprotected against barons who recognised no law but the length of their swords, and no other rule of conduct save when under the influence of remorse, that the idea of Hugh de Moreville ever restoring them to the rightful heir was one hardly to be entertained. It was not, however, impossible; and Dame Isabel Icingla, without ceasing to cherish hope of one day seeing justice done to her son, passed her life—solitary and somewhat sad—in the queer old house under whose roof the Icinglas had for generations sat secure while dynasties were changing and political storms were raging around them.

Very soon after the death of her husband, Dame Isabel took the vow of perpetual widowhood, and assumed the russet gown to indicate to the world that her resolution not to venture again on matrimony was fixed. Her whole interest therefore centred in her son, and her whole attention was given to render him worthy of his name and birth. Not that this lady sympathised strongly with the traditions and sentiments of the family into which she had married. Far from it. She was Norman in everything but the name. Her features, her heart, her prejudices, and her opinions were all such as distinguished the conquering race; and if Oliver Icingla had—to use the homely phrase—“taken after his mother,” he would have presented a very different appearance from that which he did present when introduced to the reader in the streets of ancient London, and he would have expressed very different sentiments from those which he did express in his brief, but not unimportant, conversation with Constantine Fitzarnulph.

But Oliver was an Icingla in look, and thought, and word, and enthusiastic for the race to which he belonged; but, given to reflection and contemplation, he well knew, young though he was, that all violent attempts to better the condition of the English could only end in failure and ruin, and that the rise of the Anglo-Saxons—if they were to rise—could only be accomplished by patience and by gradual degrees. In the struggle which was impending between a Plantagenet king and the Norman barons, he would never, if free to act on his own impulses and reason, have hesitated to adhere to the crown; and the only mortification which he felt was that he was to be conducted to the Tower as a hostage—perhaps to become a prisoner, and even a victim—when he would have gone thither voluntarily to offer his sword to fight for the crown which had been worn by Alfred the Great and Edward the Holy. Dame Isabel

did not, however, take the same view of the question; and when informed that Oliver, so lately freed from captivity, was required as a hostage, she wrung her hands and looked the picture of woe.

“Alas, alas!” she exclaimed, raising her eyes towards heaven, “what sin have my ancestors committed, that I am required to surrender mine only son into the keeping of a man whose hands are red with the blood of his own nephew?”

“Fear not for me, lady and mother,” exclaimed Oliver, touched with her grief. “I shall be as secure in the king’s palace as in our own ancient hall, and I doubt not as kindly treated; for, doubtless, King John knows better what a stout warrior is worth than to do aught to forfeit his claim to the service of the sword with which Edric Icingla cut his way to fame and fortune.”

CHAPTER III

AN UNBIDDEN GUEST

Oakmede, the home of the Icinglas, was situated fully twelve miles to the north of ancient London; and though Oliver, after passing the Priory of the Knights of St. John, and the great suburban mansion of the De Clares, at Clerkenwell, spurred on his black steed—which, somewhat fancifully, he had named Ayoub, after the father of the Sultan Saladin—the sun had long set, and darkness had overshadowed the earth, ere he drew near to the dwelling of his fathers.

It was not altogether pleasant to be abroad and unattended under such circumstances, for the robber and the outlaw, then numerous in England, haunted the neighbourhood of the metropolis, as many a benighted wayfarer knew to his cost. But Oliver thought little of danger from robber or outlaw, so much occupied was his mind with the perils he was likely to encounter in his capacity of hostage for Hugh de Moreville, a man whom he doubted and dreaded. Notwithstanding the tone he had assumed in conversing with Constantine Fitzarnulph, Oliver did not relish the prospect that lay before him; and the idea of a long captivity—supposing that to be the worst—desolated his soul. Moreover, the fate of the Welsh hostages to whom Fitzarnulph had alluded recurred to his memory, and he almost felt inclined to fly. Indeed, he could not but perceive that De Moreville would certainly benefit by his death, and that it was the interest of the Norman baron to get rid of a person whose claims to the castle and baronies which he held for the present might one day become irresistible.

It was with such gloomy thoughts haunting his mind that Oliver Icingla rode homewards over ground hard as iron, for the frost was so keen that in many places the Thames was frozen over. The moon had risen, and was shining through the leafless trees on the grass, as he turned out of what is now the great north road, and dashed into the woodland that skirted the great forest of Middlesex, crossed, not without difficulty, a brook covered with ice slippery as glass, descried lights in the distance, and, riding down a glade that served as an avenue, approached Oakmede. Lights glimmered from the outhouses and the orchard, and an alarm-bell was ringing; for the hinds, as was their custom on that night, were wassailing the fruit-trees with cyder, and wishing them health in the coming year, and the bell was rung to scare away the demons while the process was going on.

Oakmede, notwithstanding the changes that for a century and a half had been taking place in the architecture and domestic life of England, stood in very much the same condition as it had done at the time of the Conquest, and said little for the taste or the ambition of its owners. It was a rude structure, partly of timber, partly of brick, with several outbuildings and a large courtyard, to which there was access by strong wooden gates—the whole being surrounded with a deep ditch or fosse, fortified with palisades. But such as the place was, the Icinglas had ever been proud to call it their own; and with a degree of satisfaction which he might not have felt if it had been the haughtiest and strongest of feudal castles, like Lewes, or Warwick, or Kenilworth, Oliver halted and wound his horn. After a little delay the drawbridge was lowered, and he rode through the great wooden gate into the courtyard, and dismounted at the door. As he did so he was met by a boy of sixteen, whose dress of scarlet, striped with yellow, was such as to make the squire stare with surprise, and then laugh merrily.

“Wolf, son of Styr,” exclaimed he at length, “what frenzy has prompted thee to don such garments at sober and homely Oakmede? Bear in mind, varlet, that we are not now capering gaily at the court of King Alphonso. Beshrew me, Wolf, if men will not think that you are going on a masquerade when they see you thus attired in our peaceful hall.”

“Patience, my young master,” replied the varlet, with a glance full of significance; “we have guests.”

“Guests at Oakmede!” said Oliver, with some surprise.

“Ay, guests,” repeated the varlet, “and one guest of quality especially, who, an’ I err not, will be freer than welcome.”

“Varlet,” said Oliver, drawing himself up haughtily, “your tongue outruns your discretion. Guests of quality will ever be welcome at Oakmede, so long as they demean themselves with courtesy; and woe betide the guest, however high his rank or sounding his name, who shall venture to demean himself otherwise than courteously under the roof of the Icinglas, while the honour of their name is in my keeping! But of whom speak you?”

“Of the Lord Hugh de Moreville, who has been here for hours.”

Oliver’s countenance fell; he breathed hard, and his manner was uneasy. Recovering himself, however, he said, with a sigh—

“What! Hugh de Moreville at Oakmede? A prodigy, by my faith! But, in the quality of guest, even my kinsman must be made welcome; wherefore, Wolf, see that the knaves lose no time in placing the supper on the board. Let not this Norman lord have cause to impeach our hospitality.”

Without wasting more time in words, Oliver Icingla hastened to his chamber, rapidly made such changes in his dress as he deemed necessary for the occasion, hastily spoke a few words of comfort to his mother, who, after a brief interview, had left the presence of her kinsman with grief at her heart and tears in her eyes, and then repaired to the hall, where the tables were ready spread for the evening meal of the household and the guests. At the lower end, several men-at-arms, who had formed Hugh de Moreville’s train, lay on the benches, and lounged around the ample fire of wood that blazed and crackled up the huge chimney, and threw its light over the smoke-begrimed hall. On the daïs, or elevated part, sat the Norman baron, with a countenance which denoted some impatience and much ill humour.

Hugh de Moreville was a feudal magnate living in an age when feudal magnates deemed themselves born to do whatever their inclination dictated; and he had the aspect and manner of a man who believed himself entitled to act without restraint, and to make others bend to his will, no matter through what sacrifice of their own feelings or interests. Nor was he often baffled in the objects on which he set his heart. Few, indeed, who knew him as he now was at the age of forty-two, with an iron frame and an iron will, could think, without tremor, of opposing that man, with his haughty bearing, his aquiline features, his proud eye, his elevated eyebrows, his nostrils breathing anger, and his hand so ready to shed blood. But Oliver Icingla, in the home of his fathers, was sustained by more than feudal pride; and it was without the least indication of doubt or dismay, or a consciousness of inferiority in any respect, that he walked to the daïs, and held out his hand to the Norman baron.

“My lord and kinsman,” said he, “you are welcome to our poor house.”

“By St. Moden!” exclaimed De Moreville, with a flashing eye, “I cannot but think that it would have been more to the purpose had you been here to welcome me on my arrival.”

“In truth, my lord,” replied Oliver, calmly and earnestly, “I deeply grieve that I should have been absent on such an occasion. But I did not dream that our humble dwelling was to be honoured with such a guest, otherwise I should not have failed you. However, as the proverb says, ‘Better late than never.’ Wherefore, I pray you, accept my excuses in the spirit in which they are offered, and let the heartiness of my welcome atone for any delay in giving it. Ho, there, knaves! place the supper on the board, that our noble guest may taste of such good cheer as the house affords.”

“Kinsman,” said Hugh de Moreville, apparently somewhat surprised at Oliver’s bearing, “nothing less than a weighty matter could have brought me hither at this season, and I have come at no small inconvenience. Now I was careful to give you timely advertisement that any day you might be required to go to the king’s court; and I entreat you to tell me, for I am curious to know, what weighty business could have taken you to London at a time when I had signified that at any hour you might receive a summons to repair to the king’s palace as a hostage?”

Oliver bent his brows sternly, and his cheek reddened; but he made an effort to be calm, and succeeded.

“My lord,” said he, “I will deal plainly with you, and answer as frankly as you could desire. I did understand that I was to be delivered over as a hostage to the king for your good faith, and, albeit at the time I would much liefer, had my own inclinations been consulted, have remained a free man; yet, after much pondering the business, I deemed it better not to kick against the pricks; wherefore I am ready to go to King John whenever you wish. But, meanwhile, desiring to speak with my Lord of Salisbury, under whose banner I have ridden, I deemed that there was no indiscretion in going to London with that intent; nor do I now consider that I have erred therein. As ill luck would have it, I found that the earl had left the king’s court to keep the festival of Christmas in his own Castle of Salisbury, and I returned hither to await your summons, which, I repeat, I am ready to obey. My lord, I have said.”

“Youth!” exclaimed De Moreville, regarding his young kinsman not without astonishment at his audacity, “you speak boldly—too boldly, methinks, for one of your years; and I warn you, for your own sake, to be more discreet. But enough of this for the present: to-morrow you depart hence. Meanwhile, I have that to say which is for your ear alone; and, seeing that supper is on the board, I will not delay your eventide meal.”

Occupying two chairs of carved oak, Oliver and De Moreville took their places on the daïs; and the persons of inferior rank having ranged themselves at the lower end, above and below the salt, supper began. But it was a dull meal. Dame Isabel, who, now that her son’s departure for the court was imminent, indulged her grief and gave way to forebodings, did not appear, and the young host and his baronial guest ate their supper almost in silence. Some faint attempts Oliver did make at conversation, but refrained on perceiving that De Moreville, whose temper had been severely tried by their previous interchange of sentiments, answered sullenly and in monosyllables. Oliver could not but ask himself how all this was to terminate.

At length supper came to an end, and De Moreville, assuming a conciliatory manner, and speaking in a kindly tone, expressed his wish to resume the conversation which the meal had interrupted; and, at a sign from Oliver, the domestics disappeared from the hall to spend Christmas Eve elsewhere, the Norman baron’s men-at-arms following the example.

“Oliver,” began De Moreville, with an effort to be familiar and kinsmanlike, “you are about to be placed in a position of great responsibility.”

“On my faith, my lord,” replied Oliver jocularly, “I scarce comprehend you. For to me it seems that I am to be quite passive in the matter; and I frankly own that I little relish the prospect of being mewed up and placed in jeopardy merely to serve the convenience of another.”

“Nevertheless,” continued De Moreville, speaking more deliberately than was his wont, “you will be in a position in which you may make or mar your fortune. You must understand that, in sending you as a hostage to the king, I expect you to attend faithfully to my interest.”

“In what respect, my lord?” asked Oliver gravely.

“Listen, and I will explain,” answered De Moreville, drawing his chair nearer that of his young host. “You know enough, at least, of the struggle between the king and the barons to be aware that it is one of life and death. Now it happens—so faithless is this king—that no man can trust his word, and no man can even guess what a day may bring forth. Mark well everything that happens; keep eye and ear open to all that takes place around you; and if it appears to you that the king meditates treachery, or harbours ill designs towards me and those with whom I am leagued, lose no time in conveying intelligence to me. I will provide the means of speedy communication.”

Oliver’s lip curled with disdain.

“Do you comprehend me?” asked De Moreville quickly.

“My lord,” replied Oliver, after a pause, during which he drew a long breath, “I would fain hope you do not mean my father’s son to play the part of a spy?”

“Nay, nay,” exclaimed De Moreville, his bronzed visage suddenly flushing; “you are hasty; you start aside like a young charger frightened by its own shadow. I ask nothing but what it becomes you to do as my kinsman and my ward. I have said that this is a struggle of life and death; and, such being the case, it is needful to walk warily; and I only ask you so to play your part as to prove yourself worthy of my confidence, and to merit the protection and good-will of the barons of England.”

“But,” said Oliver, after some hesitation, during which De Moreville eyed him narrowly, “remember that I am an Englishman by birth and by descent, and suppose that, in this contest, my sympathies are with the king of England, and not with the Norman barons?”

“By the bones of St. Moden!” exclaimed De Moreville, his nostrils distending and his eyes glittering; “in that case I should assuredly say that you are too much of a madman to merit aught but pity.”

“My lord,” said Oliver calmly, “forbear from using language which only tends to exasperate, and let me speak my mind frankly. My sympathies—so far as they are in operation—are assuredly not with the barons; nor, considering who I am, can I be expected to regard them save as foes of my race. For yourself,” continued the squire, “I say this: you have been a hard guardian, reaping where you have not sowed, and gathering where you have not reaped. But of that I make no complaint, seeing that, I doubt not, you have acted according to law; and now that you

ask me to surrender my liberty at your pleasure, I do not refuse. I am ready to go as your hostage to the king. But," added he warmly, "my honour and my conscience are mine own; and, by the Holy Cross! an Icingla cannot violate the dictates of honour and conscience at the bidding of any Norman baron. I have said."

De Moreville did not reply. He did not even attempt to reply. But he sat for some time gazing at Oliver as if petrified with astonishment. At length he recovered sufficiently to speak of the necessity of repose; and the domestics having been summoned, and the grace cup served, he was marshalled to "the guest room" by the steward of Dame Isabel's household. Oliver, however, did not follow the example of his Norman kinsman. Long he sat musing over his position, and marvelling to what fortune it would lead—long after the "Yule log" had been placed on the hearth, and the house was hushed in repose, and even till midnight, did he reflect on the past and speculate as to the future. Then at the hour when, on Christmas Eve—according to the superstition of the period—the ox and the ass knelt down, and the bees sang psalms in adoration of the Redeemer of mankind, Oliver Icingla sought his chamber, prayed earnestly for spiritual guidance in his perplexity, threw himself on his couch, and, in spite of all annoyances, slept the sound and refreshing sleep of youth and health.

At early morn Oliver was aroused from a pleasant dream of gay and sunny Castille by a knock at the door of his chamber, and Wolf, the varlet, entered.

"My young master," said the boy, "the Norman lord is already astir and impatient for thy coming; and since it seems that go to the king's court thou must—be thou willing or unwilling—I would that I could be permitted to go in thy company."

"Nay, Wolf, boy," replied Oliver sadly, "that cannot be. Besides, I know not into what dangers you might be led. For myself, I would ten times rather take my chance again face to face with the Moors and the French than risk all I dread. I know not what snare I may fall into, and your presence would but encumber me in case of the worst."

Wolf smiled. "Heardest thou never," asked he, "of the mouse that gnawed the toils of the lion, and set the lion free?"

"I know the fable," answered Oliver, "and I comprehend your meaning. But I fear me that if I am caught in the toils they will be too tough for thy teeth. So no more of this. Whatever danger may await me I must face alone. But be of good cheer. Should fortune befriend me, as she may chance to do, I will forthwith send for you. Meanwhile, see to my good steed Ayoub, that he be fitly caparisoned to take the road when it pleases my Norman kinsman to place his foot in the stirrup. Begone!"

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTMAS

I HAVE mentioned that, long before Oliver Icingla retired to rest on Christmas Eve, the “Yule log” was placed on the hearth in the old hall of Oakmede. It was an important ceremony with the English of that generation—a ceremony the consequences of which they did not lightly regard. If the log continued to burn during the whole night and through all the ensuing day, the fact of its burning was deemed a happy prognostic for the family; if it was consumed or extinguished, the circumstance of its consumption or extinction was regarded as ominous of evil. Great, therefore, was the consternation in the home of the Icinglas when it was discovered, on the morning of Christmas Day, that the “Yule log” lay on the hearth half consumed, but burning no longer; and the intelligence on being conveyed to Dame Isabel filled her mind with the most gloomy forebodings as to the fate of her son; for the Norman lady, after living long among Saxons, had caught all their superstitions, and she had brooded so long in solitude over her sorrows that she had grown more superstitious than the Saxons themselves.

Oliver Icingla was not much influenced by omens. Still his mind was ill at ease, and he did not think of his journey and its destination without considerable apprehension of suffering for the sake of a kinsman for whom, after the conversation of the previous evening, he had less liking than ever, and on whose conduct he looked with grave suspicion. No sign of apprehension, however, did he allow to escape him; but, having made the necessary preparations for his departure, and instructed Wolf, the varlet, to have the black steed saddled and bridled, he indicated his readiness to take the road as soon as it was De Moreville’s will and pleasure to set forth for London. Grim, haughty, and evincing no inclination to renew the irritating discussion that had been so unpleasantly interrupted, the Norman baron only replied by a nod, but immediately issued such orders as speedily brought his men-at-arms, mounted, into the courtyard, one of them leading the baron’s charger, harnessed and caparisoned.

Before Oliver Icingla departed under De Moreville’s auspices, Dame Isabel, having taken leave of her son, summoned her kinsman to her presence in language which made the haughty Norman soliloquise in a strain much less complimentary to womankind than quite became a man who wore golden spurs and had taken the vows of chivalry.

“Kinsman,” began the lady, taking his hand and keenly scrutinising his countenance as she spoke, “you are about to conduct my son to a place where I cannot but think that he will be much exposed to peril. Bear in mind that I do hold you answerable should evil in consequence befall him.”

“Madame,” replied De Moreville, averting his face with an impatient gesture, “your fears master your judgment.”

“I place my chief affiance in God,” continued the lady, “and my next in you as my kinsman; so deceive me not.”

“Fear nothing, madam,” replied De Moreville, his heart slightly touched; “your son will be as safe as in your own hall.”

“Answer me this question, then,” said Dame Isabel in an earnest and excited tone. “Is it true, or is it not true, that when Llewellyn of Wales gave twenty-eight sons of Welsh chiefs to King John as surety for his good faith, and when Llewellyn afterwards broke into rebellion, King John caused the hostages to be hanged at Nottingham?”

De Moreville was perplexed in the extreme. He felt that he was in a dilemma. If he answered “Yes,” what would that woman think but that he was leading her son away as a sheep is led to the slaughter? If he answered “No,” how pitiful and contemptible would seem the policy of himself and the confederate barons, who had industriously propagated a rumour so damaging to the king’s character for humanity! In his embarrassment De Moreville remained silent.

“My lord, why answer you not?” exclaimed the lady in peremptory accents. “I ask again, is it true, or is it not true, that the Welsh hostages were hanged by command of the king?”

“Madam,” replied De Moreville, when thus pressed, “I know not. I have heard, indeed, that they were hanged, but I cannot speak with certainty as to the truth of the rumour.”

Dame Isabel raised her eyes imploringly to heaven, changed colour, and fell swooning into the arms of her women. Ere she recovered, De Moreville had gained the courtyard, mounted his charger, and, with Oliver riding mutely by his side, taken his way slowly up the glade and over the frost-bound sward towards the great northern road.

And Oliver’s heart was sad; and as he turned his head to look once more at the home of his fathers he could not help contrasting his departure with that which had taken place when, full of life, and hope, and ambition, he left Oakmede, after a brief visit, to embark for Spain. But as the horsemen set their faces towards London his spirits began to rise, for everywhere that day the signs and sounds of joy and rejoicing met the eye and ear, and the faces of the populace of every village and hamlet through which they passed wore an expression of contentment and jollity.

In the reign of King John, indeed, as in modern days, no national holiday nor any festival of the Christian Church was the occasion of so much merriment and festivity in England as Christmas. Even May Day, when the inhabitants of every town and village “brought the summer home,” and lads and lasses danced with jocund glee around the maypole, and even Midsummer Eve, or the vigil of St. John the Baptist, when great fires were kindled to typify the saint of the day, who has been described as “a burning and shining light,” were held to be of quite inferior importance by the people over whom the Plantagenets reigned. Nowhere throughout Europe was Christmas so joyously and so thoroughly celebrated. Other nations in Christendom did, indeed, show their respect for the anniversary of their Redeemer’s birth with sincere and praiseworthy enthusiasm. But between England and other countries there was this remarkable distinction, that while foreigners commemorated the annually returning season chiefly with devotional exercises, Englishmen of all ranks gave themselves up to jollity, and good fellowship, and good cheer.

No sooner, indeed, did the Christmas holidays, after being long wearied for, arrive, than, from Cornwall to the borders of the Tweed, labour ceased and care was thrown to the winds, and from end to end the land rang with gladness and song. On St. Thomas’s Day began the nocturnal music called “waits,” which continued till Christmas, and everywhere carols were trolled and masquerades performed. The towns assumed a sylvan aspect, and the churches were converted into leafy tabernacles, and in the streets standards were set up and decked with

evergreens, and around them young and old danced joyously to music.

Nor was it only in streets and public places that mirth and joviality prevailed. Far otherwise was the case. The houses were decked with branches of holly and ivy for the occasion, and in the abodes of the wealthy, at least, there was no lack of good cheer. Amid frolic and jest large and luxurious dishes were not forgotten or neglected, especially the boar's head, which was brought to the board and placed thereon in a large silver platter to the sound of musical instruments. But the good cheer was by no means confined to the wealthy. Even the poorest did not on such a day lack the opportunity of being blithe and merry.

Nevertheless Christmas did not pass without its terrors to the superstitious—in that, as in every age, a large proportion of the population. It was believed that at night demons were abroad and on the watch for their prey, and that men were suddenly metamorphosed into wolves, who were called "were-wolves," and who raged more fiercely against the human race and all creatures not fierce by nature than even the ferocious animals whose shape they were made to assume, attacking houses, tearing down the doors, destroying the inmates, descending into the cellars, drinking mead and beer, and leaving the empty casks heaped one upon another.

In broad daylight, however, and especially where men assembled in crowds to celebrate Christmas, neither the bold nor the timid, who were superstitious, cared much for preternatural terrors; and as Hugh de Moreville and Oliver Icingla entered Ludgate and ascended the hill, and passed the spot where the grand church since known as Old St. Paul's was about to rise from the ruins of the Temple of Diana, no thought of demons or of were-wolves damped the enjoyment of the Londoners. And loud was the mirth and high the excitement of the populace as through the crowded streets, where standards pierced the sky and evergreens waved and rustled in the frosty atmosphere, slowly and with stately tread rode the Norman baron and the English squire till they reached the Tower, and reined up their steeds, and halted before the great fortress of the metropolis.

CHAPTER V

THE TOWER OF LONDON

ASSOCIATED in the minds of Englishmen with traditions of the Roman conquest of Britain, and with the history of the Norman conquest of England, the Tower of London frowned gloomily, and almost menacingly, on the capital which it had been reared to protect against possible invaders. Indeed, by the Londoners the Tower was regarded with a suspicious eye as a stronghold which might, when occasion served, be used by the rulers of England against their subjects, and especially against the city, which was in the habit of assuming the airs of a free republic in the very face of a monarchy, too proud even to submit, without manifest impatience, to the feudal and ecclesiastical trammels in which it had been involved since the Conquest. But never had the feeling of jealousy been stronger, or more likely to find expression in words, and lead to consequences dangerous to the throne, than at the period when King John kept his Christmas in the Tower, and when Hugh de Moreville, accompanied by Oliver Icingla, presented himself at the great gate to the west of the building, and demanded to be admitted.

It was at this moment that De Moreville, turning on his saddle, and looking Oliver full in the face, took occasion to refer to the subject which, on the previous evening, had kindled the Saxon's ire, and brought the conversation to a sudden close, and on which they had not once touched, even distantly, during their journey.

"Young man," said the Norman baron grimly, and with frowning brow, "I would fain have so instructed you to act your part within these walls that your residence at the king's court might have proved to your own advantage, and for the welfare of others; but my friendly intent has been baffled by your heat and unreasonable pride. One question, however, on the subject ere we part. You have rejected my counsel. May I ask if, under the influence of temptation or threats, you are capable of betraying it?"

"My lord, may God and the saints forbid!" answered Oliver hastily. "Whatever was spoken on the subject was spoken in confidence, and the brave man does not betray the guest seated at his board, and under the rose on his own roof-tree. I pledge my word—I swear to you. But it needs not. You have the honour of an Icingla on which to rely, and the honour of an Icingla is of more worth, in such a case, than assurances or oaths. I have said."

"It is well," said De Moreville, who, in spite of his efforts to appear calmly indifferent, could not conceal the relief which he experienced as he listened. "But deem not," added he, "that I fear aught for myself, or that any breach of confidence on your part could pass unpunished. Breathe within these walls but one word of what I spake with your welfare in view, and, by St. Moden, your doom is fixed!"

As De Moreville spoke the massive gates were thrown open, and the baron and the squire rode into the courtyard, and, dismounting, surrendered their steeds to the attendants.

"Follow me," said De Moreville, somewhat contemptuously, "and I will conduct you to the king's presence. I trust," added he, with a smile of peculiar significance, "that you will find his company more to your taste than mine. Nay, blanch not. Arthur of Brittany found him a kind uncle, and Arthur's sister, Eleanor the Fair, who pines as a captive in Bristol Castle, has reason to bless his name."

Oliver shuddered at De Moreville's tone and manner; and, as the baron's words sank instantly and deeply into his heart, visions of the dungeon and the gallows rose before his imagination. Not more gloomy could have been his presentiments had some magician, supposed capable of foretelling the future, whispered in his ear the warning inscribed by the Florentine poet over the portals of the infernal regions, "Leave all hope behind."

But he had now gone too far either to draw back or hesitate; and with a heart as sad as if he had been entering the fabled hall of Eblis, he followed his Norman kinsman till he found himself within the walls which were subsequently so richly adorned by the artists who flourished under the patronage of Henry of Winchester and Eleanor of Provence with the story of Antiochus, but which, in the days of John, were less tastefully decorated.

It was near the hour of dinner, and the king and his courtiers were about to feast in a way worthy of the season and the day; and the great hall of the Tower was crowded with lords of high rank and ladies of rare beauty. Rich and splendid were the dresses which they wore. Indeed, accustomed as Oliver had been for a brief period to the court of Castile, the scene now presented would, under ordinary circumstances, have dazzled his eye and raised his wonder. Courtiers with long hair artificially curled and bound with ribbons, and wearing jewelled gloves and gay mantles, and full flowing robes, girded at the waist with richly-ornamented belts, talked affectedly to ladies not less gaily, but more gracefully, dressed than the other sex, and wearing round the waist girdles sparkling with gold and gems.

But all this display made little impression on Oliver as De Moreville led him to the upper end of the hall; for there, occupying an elevated chair of oak, carved and ornamented, sat a person who eclipsed all present in the magnificence of his attire, and awed all present by an air of superiority which long years of power and authority had made part of himself. He was about fifty years of age, and his hair was grey, almost white; and his countenance was that of a man who had suffered much from care and regret—perhaps something also from remorse. But he was still vigorous, and his form, which, though not tall, was strong and compact, appeared still capable of enduring fatigue in case of necessity. His raiment was gorgeous, and literally glistened and shone with precious stones. He wore a red satin mantle embroidered with sapphires and pearls, a tunic of white damask, with a girdle set with garnets and sapphires; while the baldric, that crossed from the left shoulder to sustain his sword, was set with diamonds and emeralds, and his white gloves were ornamented, one with a ruby, the other with a sapphire. Such were the aspect and dress of him who, surrounded by courtiers and jesters, lorded it over the gay and somewhat gaudy company which kept the Christmas of 1214 in the Tower of London.

As Hugh de Moreville and Oliver Icingla, guided by a gentleman attached to the royal household, walked up the hall and approached the elevation of the daïs, this personage, whose array was so magnificent, and whose air was so imperious, turned round and directed, first at one and then at the other, a glance which indicated so clearly that his sentiments towards them were the very reverse of favourable, that Oliver halted in alarm, and for a moment or two stood staring wildly before him with his hand on the hilt of his sword. Before him, and regarding him with a scowl which would have made even nobler and more refined features unpleasant to look upon, and with an eye that glared on him as the tiger glares when about to spring on its victim, was the prince for the sake of whose crown he had scorned the friendship of Fitzarnulph and defied the enmity of De Moreville. It was the man to whose tender mercies he was now to be intrusted. It was King John.

CHAPTER VI

KING JOHN

On the 27th of May, 1199, the Abbey of Westminster was the scene of an impressive ceremony. On that day, and in that edifice, a man of thirty-two years of age was solemnly crowned King of England, and took the oaths to govern justly. He had seen much of life, enjoyed considerable experience in affairs of state, and was not deficient in intellectual culture. Moreover, he had the advantage of a healthy and vigorous frame, and of a countenance sufficiently well formed to be thought handsome. But on his face there appeared an expression, now of dissolute audacity, now of sullen temper, which might have made an intelligent spectator presage that, ere long, the cry of "Long live the king!" would give way to the stern shout of "Death to the tyrant!"

The personage who had the distinction of being on that memorable occasion "the observed of all observers" was John of Anjou, the youngest of the five sons who sprang from the marriage of the second Henry and Eleanor of Guienne. Of the five sons, four had gone the way of all flesh. William died in childhood; Henry died of fever while in rebellion against his father; Geoffrey was trampled to death while taking part in a tournament at Paris; Richard expired of a mortal wound inflicted by the arrow of Bertrand de Gordon, while he was besieging the castle of Chalus; and John, as the survivor, claimed not only the kingdom of England, but that vast Continental empire which the first of our Plantagenet kings had extended from the Channel to the Pyrenees.

Matters, however, did not go quite smoothly; nor was John without a rival. Some months after his elder brother, Geoffrey, was killed in the tournament at Paris, Geoffrey's widow, Constance of Brittany, gave birth to a son, to whom the Bretons, in honour of the memory of their mythical hero, gave the name of Arthur. King Richard was well inclined towards his nephew, and anxious to educate the boy to succeed him. But Constance, a weak and somewhat vicious woman, refused to place her son in the custody of Cœur de Lion, who, in consequence, recognised John as his heir. Nevertheless, on Richard's death, the people of Anjou and Brittany proclaimed young Arthur as their sovereign; and Constance, carrying him to the court of Paris, placed him under the protection of Philip Augustus. But Philip, after making great professions, and promising to give Arthur one of his daughters in marriage, concluded a treaty with John in 1200, and, without scruple, sacrificed all the boy's interests.

And now John's throne seemed secure; and both the crown of England and the coronal of golden roses—the diadem of Normandy—sat easily on his brow; but at this juncture his indiscretion hurried him into a matrimonial project which cost him dear.

It was the summer of 1200, and John made a progress through Guienne to receive the homage of that province. In Angoulême, at a great festival given in his honour, his eye was attracted and his imagination captivated by Isabel, daughter of the count of that beautiful district—a lovely nymph not more than sixteen. John became passionately enamoured; and as "maidens, like moths, are caught by glare," Isabel to be "a crowned queen" was "nothing coy." It is true that there were serious obstacles in the way of a matrimonial union. John had previously been married to a daughter of the Earl of Gloucester, and Isabel affianced to Count Hugh de la Marche. But the obstacles were not deemed insuperable; for the Church had forbidden John to take home his bride, on account of their nearness of kin; and he, as sovereign of Angoulême, had power to break the link which bound the fair heiress to the man to whom she had been betrothed. Moreover, the parents of the young lady encouraged John's passion; and, all difficulties having been got over for the time being, John and Isabel were united at Bordeaux, and sailed for England. On their arrival a grand council was held at Westminster; and Isabel of Angoulême, having been acknowledged as queen, was formally crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

So far all went smoothly. But, ere a year elapsed, the royal pair were alarmed with rumours of a formidable confederacy. Hugh de la Marche, who had, not without indignation, learned that his affianced bride was handed over to another, first challenged John to mortal combat, and, on the challenge being declined, took up arms to avenge the wrong he had sustained. Accompanied by his tender spouse, John repaired to the Continent to defend his dominions, and visited the court of Paris. Philip Augustus received and entertained the King and Queen of England with royal magnificence, and professed the strongest friendship. But no sooner had they turned their backs than Philip, who was a master of kingcraft, resolved on John's ruin, and allied himself closely with John's foes.

It would seem that the darling object of Philip Augustus was to make France the great monarchy of Europe; and he was bent, therefore, on humbling the pride and appropriating the Continental territory of the Plantagenets. In the days of Henry and of Richard, Philip's efforts had been almost barren of results. But against an adversary like John he had little doubt of achieving substantial successes, and of being able to seize the territory which had gone from the kings of France with Eleanor of Guienne. While John, under the impression that Philip was his stanch friend, was parading, with indiscreet bravado, before the eyes of his Continental subjects, Philip recalled Arthur of Brittany, now fifteen years of age, to the French court, and again espoused his cause.

"You know your rights," said Philip, "and you would like to be a king?"

"Assuredly I would," answered the boy.

"Well," said Philip, "I place two hundred knights under your command. Lead them into the provinces which are your birthright, and I will aid you by invading Normandy."

At the head of a little army Arthur raised his banner, and, marching into Guienne, boldly attacked Mirabeau, where his grandmother, Queen Eleanor, was then residing, and succeeded in taking the town. But Eleanor, retreating to the citadel, defied the besiegers, and sent to inform John of her peril.

At that time John was in Normandy, and, without loss of a day, he marched to his mother's rescue, entered Mirabeau in the night, totally routed his enemies, and, having taken Arthur prisoner, conveyed him to Falaise. From Falaise he was removed to Rouen, and soon after the body of a youth was seen by some fishermen of the Seine, ever and anon rising, as it seemed, out of the water, as if supplicating Christian burial. On being brought ashore the body was recognised to be that of Arthur of Brittany, and it was secretly interred in the Abbey of Bec.

Whether Arthur had been killed by King John and flung into the Seine, or whether he had fallen into the river and been drowned while attempting to escape from the castle of Rouen, remains an historic mystery. But neither the Bretons nor Philip Augustus expressed any doubt on the subject. Within a week after the tragical event the Bretons demanded justice on the head of the murderer; and Philip summoned John, as one of his vassals, to appear before

the Twelve Peers of France, and answer to the charge. Without denying the jurisdiction of the court, John declined to appear unless granted a safe conduct; and, the Twelve Peers having pronounced sentence of death and confiscation, Philip took up arms to execute the sentence, and seized cities and castles in such numbers, that, ere long, John retained little or nothing of the Continental empire of the Plantagenets, save Bordeaux, and a nominal authority in Guienne. One effort he did make to redeem his fortunes. But, losing heart and hope, he abandoned the struggle, and, returning to England, entered on that contest with the Church which was destined to involve him in ruin.

In the year 1205, Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, departed this life, and in his place the monks of Canterbury elected Reginald, their prior, to the vacant see. The king, however, far from sanctioning their choice, insisted on elevating John Grey, Bishop of Norfolk, to the primacy; and the dispute between the monks and the crown was referred to Innocent III., one of those popes who, like Hildebrand and Boniface VIII., deemed it their mission “to pull down the pride of kings.” In order at once to show his impartiality and his power, Innocent set aside the man nominated by the monks and the man nominated by the king, and gave the archbishopric to Stephen Langton, a cardinal of English birth, who was then at Rome. The monks, in consequence, found themselves in an awkward predicament. However, they were under the necessity of doing as the Pope ordered. In vain they talked of their scruples and fears, and protested that they could do nothing without the royal sanction. When urged, only one monk stood firm; all the others, out of deference to the head of the Church, confirmed the nomination of Stephen Langton.

When John learned what steps had been taken in contravention to his authority, his rage knew no bounds; and, in his excitement, he bethought him of punishing the monks for their servility to the Pope. Accordingly he sent two knights to seize the convent and drive the monks out of their cloisters; and the unfortunate men were expelled at the point of the sword. But the king soon discovered that this had been rashly done. Indeed, the Pope no sooner became aware of his wishes being treated with such disrespect than he sent three bishops to threaten John and his kingdom with an interdict if he did not yield; and all the other bishops coming to the king, implored him on their bended knees to save himself from the evil that was threatened by accepting Stephen Langton as primate, and allowing their monks to return to their convent and take possession of their property. John stood upon his dignity, and refused to bend an inch. In vain Innocent demanded redress, and indulged in threats of bringing spiritual artillery into play. The king, who believed he had justice and law on his side, and who believed also that, if supported by his subjects, he had little to fear in a contest with the court of Rome, boldly answered with defiance; and at length, in 1208, Innocent laid the kingdom under interdict, preparatory to excommunicating the king, in the event of his continuing refractory.

The papal interdict plunged England in gloom, and caused the utmost consternation. The churches were closed; no bell was tolled in their steeples; no services were performed within their walls; and the sacraments were administered to none but infants and the dying. Marriages and churchings took place in the porches of churches; sermons were preached on Sundays in the churchyards; and the bodies of the dead were interred silently and in unconsecrated ground. No bells summoned the living to their religious devotions, and no mass or prayer was offered for the souls of the departed. After this had continued for some time, Innocent finding that John gave no indications of a desire to yield, formally excommunicated the king, absolved his subjects from their allegiance, and exhorted all Christian princes to aid in dethroning him. Philip Augustus did not require much prompting. Willingly and readily he assembled a fleet at the mouth of the Seine, and mustered an army to invade England. John was exceedingly nervous about the future. Indeed, it is said that, in his alarm, he sent ambassadors to ask the aid of the Moorish King of Granada. If so, the mission came to nought. However, an English fleet crossed the Channel, and, after destroying the French squadrons in the Seine, burned the town of Dieppe, and swept the coast of Normandy. Even at that early period of our history, the naval power of England was not to be resisted.

It was, no doubt, regarded as a great triumph over the Pope and the King of France. Nevertheless, John was in no enviable frame of mind; for Innocent was bent on vengeance, and Philip Augustus showed the utmost eagerness to be the instrument of inflicting it. At the same time an enthusiast, known as Peter the Hermit, who fancied he had the gift of prophecy, predicted that, ere the Feast of Ascension, John should cease to reign; and the king, menaced by his barons, gave way to doubt and dread, and began to entertain the idea of saving himself by submitting. A way of reconciliation was soon opened.

It was the month of May, 1213, and John, then suffering from anxiety and ill health, was residing at Ewell, near Dover, when Pandolph, the papal legate, arrived in England, and sent two Knights of the Temple to ask a private interview with the king. “Let him come,” replied John; and Pandolph, coming accordingly, made such representations that the king promised to obey the Pope in all things, to receive Stephen Langton as primate, and to give complete satisfaction for the past. Of course, Pandolph expressed his gratification at the turn affairs were taking; and, after John had, in the Temple Church, at Dover, surrendered his kingdom to the Pope, and agreed to hold it as a fief of the Holy See, the legate passed over to France, and intimated to Philip Augustus that the King of England was under the special protection of the Church, and that he was not to be meddled with. In fact, it now appeared that John had, by yielding to the papal power, freed himself from his troubles; and perhaps he flattered himself that he should henceforth govern in peace, and have everything his own way. If so, he was very much mistaken. Between the Plantagenet kings and the Anglo-Norman barons there had never existed much good feeling; and between John and the barons, in particular, there existed a strong feeling of hostility. Even when he was engaged in his contest with the Pope, the great feudal magnates of England gave indications of their determination to set the royal authority at defiance; and, ere the inglorious close of that contest, they had made up their minds either to rule England as they liked, or to plunge the country into a civil war. Affairs were rapidly approaching a crisis at the Christmas of 1214—that Christmas when Hugh de Moreville conducted Oliver Icingla as a hostage to the Tower of London.

CHAPTER VII

A MAN OF THE FOREST

FEW days were merrier in ancient England than the first day of the year. Not so fatigued with the celebration of Christmas as to be incapable of continuing the festivity, the inhabitants—especially the young—welcomed the new year with uproarious mirth.

Even before the Saxon, or Dane, or Norman had set foot in Britain—even before the apostles of Christianity had found their way to our shores—the season had been the occasion of religious rites and observances. It is well known that, on the last night of the year, the Druids were in the habit of going into the woods, cutting the mistletoe off the oak with golden bills, bringing it next morning into the towns, distributing it among the people, who wore it as an amulet to preserve them from danger, and performing certain pagan rites, which were gradually turned by the early Church into such exhibitions as the "Fête des Fous," performed by companies of both sexes, dressed in fantastic garments, who ran about on New Year's Day, asking for gifts, rushing into churches during the services of the vigils, and disturbing the devout by their gestures and cries.

In England, on New Year's Day, it was customary for every one who had it in his power to wear new clothes; and unfortunate was deemed the wight who had not the means that day of indulging in some luxury of the kind. Now, on the 1st of January in the year 1215—a year destined to be memorable in the annals of England—Wolf, the varlet, had been provided with garments more befitting the sobriety observed in the house of Dame Isabel Icingla than the scarlet striped with yellow, in which he had strutted at the court of Castile; and, prompted by the vanity natural to youth, he resolved on displaying his finery at the cottage inhabited by his father, Styr, the Anglo-Saxon.

And the cottage of Styr, which stood about a mile from Oakmede, was not without its pretensions. Indeed, it was a palace compared with the squalid huts in which most of the labouring peasantry of England then herded; for Styr, in his youth, had served the Icinglas with fidelity in peace and war, and they had not proved forgetful of his services. Moreover, it was rumoured that Styr had dealings with outlaws, and that, at times, he so far forgot himself as to take out his crossbow on moonlight nights with an eye to the king's deer. But, however that may have been, food in abundance, and, on such occasions as holidays, good cheer in plenty, and tankards of foaming ale, were found under Styr's roof; and he could tell of war and of battles, especially of that last battle in which Richard Cœur de Lion defeated Philip Augustus, and in which Edric Icingla fell with his back to the ground and his feet to the foe. Listening to stories of the past, and singing some songs he had learned in Spain, Wolf found the hours glide away rather swiftly, and the day was far spent when he rose to leave.

"And so, Wolf," said Styr for the fifth or sixth time, "it is not, after all, to the wars to which the young Hlaford has gone?"

"No, in truth," replied Wolf, quickly, "or, credit me, he would not have left me behind. Little better than a prisoner is he, mewed up in the gloomy Tower, like bird in cage."

"But hark thee, Wolf," said the old man, "and I will tell thee a secret. Forest Will, or Will with the Club, as they call him, passed this way not later than yesterday."

"And who is this Forest Will—knowest thou, father?" asked Wolf, interrupting.

"Nay, lad, that is more than I can tell. Some say he is a great man whose life is forfeit to the law; others that he is a captain of forest outlaws. For my part, I know little more of him than do my neighbours; but this little I do know, that he is wondrous familiar with all that is doing, alike at the king's court and the castles of the barons—ay, even in foreign parts—and he foretells that, ere the harvest is ready for the sickle, there will be war."

"War in England?" said Wolf.

"Ay, war in England—and a bloody war to boot; and when swords are being drawn, King John will know better than to keep an Icingla from drawing his sword. Even mine must be scoured up if blows are to be going, and if King Harry's son has to defend himself against the men who have done all but crush our race to the dust."

And Styr bent his brows and clenched his hands as if eager for the battle, which, with the instinct of an old warrior, he scented from afar.

"Well, father," said Wolf, "I hope it will all turn out for the best; but what if my master took into his head to fight on the other side?"

"What if an Icingla took into his head to fight for Norman oppressors against an English king, the heir of the Athelings!" cried Styr, repeating his son's words. "Why, just this, that he might expect his ancestors to come out of their graves and cry 'shame' upon him."

"May the saints forefend!" exclaimed Wolf, almost as much terrified as if the Saxon chiefs alluded to had appeared before him in their shrouds. "But, come what may, I must even take my departure, for the hour grows late, and Dame Isabel is somewhat strict in her rules."

"The better for thee and others that live under the Hleafdian's roof," observed Styr.

It was about the fall of evening when Wolf left his father's tenement to return to Oakmede, and he hurried through the woodland and over the crisp ground that he might reach the hall of the Icinglas before the hour of supper, then an important meal under the roof of vanquished Saxon as well as victorious Norman, and especially in seasons of festivity. Notwithstanding the anxiety he felt about Oliver Icingla, and the disappointment he had experienced in not being allowed to accompany the young squire to the court or into captivity—just as might turn out—Wolf's heart was not heavy, and as he neared the old house of brick and timber, and anticipated the good cheer that awaited him, he began to believe that all would come right in the end, and whistled almost joyously as his spirits rose and he thought of the good time that was coming. Suddenly a hare crossed his path. "A bad omen," said Wolf, who had all the superstitious feelings of his race and country; and scarcely had he thus briefly soliloquised when his steps were arrested by a huge white bulldog which growled menacingly in his face, and by the voice of a man who leant against the trunk of a leafless oak.

"Wolf, boy, where is thy master?" said the man. "I have not seen him once of late, albeit he was wont to seek my company often enough."

Wolf turned to the speaker, and, as he found his sleeve grasped, appeared somewhat more awed than was

reasonable at finding himself alone with such a person and in such a place, and he would have been still more so had it been an hour after dark.

He was, so far as could be judged from his appearance, not more than thirty-five—that age which has been called “the second prime of man”—and had nothing about him to daunt or terrify a youth who, like Wolf, had been in Spain, and watched eagerly while grim warriors engaged in mortal combat. Indeed, the expression of his countenance was frank, and even kindly, and to the ordinary eye would have been prepossessing, while his figure was tall and of herculean strength, with mighty limbs, the arms long and muscular. His dress was that which might have been worn by any forester or forest outlaw, and he had a bugle-horn at his girdle, to which also was attached a heavy club of iron, which was likely, in his hands, to do terrible execution whenever necessity or inclination made him use it. But, as I have said, there was nothing in his appearance to excite alarm. Nevertheless, Wolf gazed on him with an awe that every moment increased, for he had often seen this person before, and knew him as Forest Will, or Will with the Club, whose existence was enveloped in mystery, but who was suspected of being a chief of outlaws, and by most people, particularly by Dame Isabel Icingla, deemed a dangerous man, with whom it was as impossible to hold converse without being led into mischief as to touch pitch without being defiled. Such being the case, Wolf felt almost as much alarmed as if Satan had suddenly started up in his path, and with difficulty mustered voice to say in a tremulous tone—

“I am in haste; I pray thee permit me to pass on my way.”

“Have patience and fear nothing,” said the man of the forest. “I asked thee what had become of thy master. I fain would see him.”

“May it please thee,” replied Wolf, after a pause, “my master has gone to the king’s court.”

“Gone to the king’s court! Oliver Icingla gone to the king’s court!” exclaimed the man of the forest, wonderingly. “What in the fiend’s name took him there?”

“In truth,” answered Wolf, slowly but gradually recovering his self-possession, “it was not of his own will that he went thither; but ‘needs must when the devil drives.’ He was conducted to the Tower of London as a hostage by his mother’s kinsman, the Lord Hugh de Moreville.”

“Ho, ho, ho!” cried the man of the forest, stamping his foot with anger and vexation; “I see it all. He is destined to feed the crows, if not saved by a miracle. I marvel much that a youth of his wit could be so blind as to be led by his false kinsman into such a snare. Hugh de Moreville,” he continued, speaking to himself, but still loud enough to be heard by Wolf, whose hearing was acute—“Hugh de Moreville gives Oliver Icingla to King John as a hostage for his good faith. Hugh breaks faith with the king and rises with the barons, and Oliver is hung up to punish Hugh’s perfidy, which is just what Hugh wants; and when peace is patched up between the king and the barons, and the past forgiven and forgotten, Hugh remains in undisputed possession of the castles and baronies, which otherwise he might one day have to surrender to the rightful heir at the bidding of the law. By the rood, this lord is wise in his own generation, and, doubtless, knows it; yet, had he asked my counsel, I could have shown him a less hazardous way to accomplish his wishes; for Hugh has but one daughter, who is marvellous fair to look upon; and the Icinglas, whatever their pride and prejudices as to race, are as wax in the presence of Norman women of beauty and blood. What thinkest thou the life of Master Oliver Icingla may be worth,” asked he, again addressing Wolf, “now that he is securely mewed in the Tower?”

“I know not,” said Wolf, mournfully. “I would fain hope my lady’s son is in no real danger.”

“Your lady,” continued the man of the forest, with an air of careless indifference, “relished not the thought of her son holding so much discourse as he was wont to do with one like me. Was it not so?”

Wolf hesitated.

“Nay, boy, speak, and fear not. Knowest thou not it is good to tell truth and shame the devil?”

“In good sooth, then,” replied Wolf, at length yielding to the pressure of his questioner, “I know right well that my lady did much fear that her son might be tempted into some enterprise perilous to his life.”

“Even so,” said the man of the forest; “and it is ever in this way that women err as to the quarter where danger lies; and now her noble kinsman has led her son into far greater peril than he was ever like to be exposed to in my company.”

“I grieve to hear thee speak of his danger in such terms,” said Wolf, gloomily.

“Matters may yet be remedied,” continued the man of the forest, “and I own I would do much for thy master. Would that this false step of his could have been prevented! Better far that he had taken to the greenwood or to the caves in the rocks, or roamed the sea as a pirate, than gone to the Tower as hostage for a kinsman who to treachery adds the cunning of a fox and the cruelty of a tiger.”

And, releasing Wolf’s sleeve, Forest Will, *alias* Will with the Club, turned on his heel, and, whistling on his dog, made for the forest, and disappeared.

Wolf, not much pleased with the interview, nor with himself for having been so confidential in his communications, pursued his way to Oakmede.

“On my faith,” said he to himself, as he came in sight of the house and breathed more freely, “that terrible man has well-nigh scared all the blood out of my body. May the saints so order it that I see his face no more!”

Wolf’s prayer, however, was not to be granted. It was not the last time that his eyes were to alight on the man of the forest; in fact, that person was to cut rather a prominent figure in the exciting scenes which were about to be enacted in England.

CHAPTER VIII

THE KING AND THE BARONS

I HAVE stated that between the Plantagenet kings of England and the Anglo-Norman barons there existed no particular sympathy; and considering who the Plantagenet kings were, and what was their origin, it need not be matter of surprise that they cherished something like an antipathy towards the feudal magnates whose ancestors fought at Hastings, and had their names blazoned on the grand roll of Battle Abbey.

It was in the ninth century, when Charles the Bald, one of the heirs of Charlemagne, reigned over France, that a brave and good man, named Torquatus, lived within the limits of the French empire, and passed his time chiefly in cultivating his lands and hunting in his woods. Torquatus had every prospect of living and dying in obscurity, without making his name known to fame. Happening, however, to be summoned to serve his sovereign in war, he gave proofs of such courage and ability that he rose high in the king's favour, and was for his valuable services rewarded with a forest known as the "Blackbird's Nest," and continued to serve Charles the Bald so stoutly and faithfully in the wars with the sea kings, that, when living, he won much renown among his contemporaries, and, when dead, was distinguished by the monkish chroniclers as "another Cincinnatus."

Tertullus, the son of Torquatus, inherited his father's talent and prowess, and did such good work in his day that he was rewarded for his signal services to Charles the Bald with the hand of Petronella, the king's kinswoman; and the heirs of Tertullus, ennobled by worthy exploits and by their Carlovingian blood, became Counts of Anjou and hereditary High Stewards of France. In fact, they had risen to a very high position among the princes of Continental Europe when, in 1130, Fulke, Count of Anjou, mourning the loss of a wife whom he had dearly loved, went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, wedded the heiress of one of the Baldwins, and ascended the throne which the early crusaders, under Godfrey of Bouillon, had set up in the holy city. But it was in England that the heirs of Torquatus and Tertullus were to figure most prominently, and it was with English history that their name was to be associated even as that of the Pope was with the Church.

Before setting out for the Holy Land, Fulke of Anjou bestowed his hereditary dominions on his son Geoffrey, a bold warrior and an accomplished gentleman, who, from wearing a sprig of flowering broom in his hat, instead of a feather, acquired the surname of Plantagenet. Fortune favoured Geoffrey of Anjou, and enabled him to form an alliance which made his descendants the greatest sovereigns in Christendom. Having attracted the attention and secured the friendship of Henry Beauclerc, King of England, he espoused Henry's daughter, Maude, the young widow of an Emperor of Germany. Naturally it was supposed that Maude, as her father's only surviving child, would succeed to England and Normandy on his death. But in that age the laws of succession were ill understood, and when Henry expired, his sister's son, Stephen, Count of Bouillon, seized the English throne, and, notwithstanding a terrible civil war, contrived to keep it during his life. All Maude's efforts to unseat him proved unavailing; and, weary of the struggle, she, about 1147, retired to the Continent, and endeavoured to console herself with sovereignty over Normandy.

But meanwhile Maude had become the mother of a son, who, as years passed over, proved a very formidable adversary. Henry Plantagenet was a native of Mantz, in Normandy, where he drew his first breath in 1133; but at an early age he was brought to England to be educated, and while passing his boyhood at Bristol, was made familiar with the country whose destinies he was one day to control. It was not, however, till, on the death of his father, he had become Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy, and, by his marriage with Eleanor of Guienne, Duke of Aquitaine and Poitou, that, in 1153, he landed in England with the determination of asserting his rights. At first a sanguinary struggle appeared imminent; but Stephen consented to a compromise, and, excluding his own son, acknowledged Henry as heir to the crown, stipulating, however, that he should wear it during his lifetime. Next year Stephen breathed his last, and Henry was crowned in the Cathedral of Winchester, which up to that date was regarded as the proper constitutional capital of England. A terrible task was before him.

At the time of Henry's coronation the condition of England was wretched in the extreme. Never, even in the worst days of the Norman Conquest, had life and property been so insecure. The laws were utterly impotent to protect the weak against the strong, and the barons set truth, honesty, and humanity at defiance; and, unless history lies, nothing could have been more outrageous than the conduct of the men whose sons afterwards, when they perceived that it was expedient to get the nation over to their side, found it convenient to affect so high a regard for "justice and righteousness."

"All was dissension, and evil, and rapine," says the Saxon chronicle, speaking of the reign of Stephen. "The great men rose against him. They had sworn oaths, but they maintained no truth. They built castles which they held out against him. They cruelly oppressed the wretched people of the land with his castle work. They filled their castles with devils and evil men. They seized those whom they supposed to have any goods, and threw them into prison for their gold and silver, and inflicted on them unutterable tortures. Some they hanged up by the feet. They threw them into dungeons with adders, and snakes, and toads. They made many thousands perish with hunger. They laid tribute upon tribute on towns and cities.... The land remained untilled, and the poor starved. To till the land was to plough the sea."

Such was the state of affairs with which the early Plantagenets had to deal, and such the men who, after having been cowed by the energy and genius of Henry and the vigour and courage of Richard, prepared to raise their banners and head their feudal array with the object of crushing John, whose imprudence and indolence made him a much less formidable adversary than either his father or his brother would have been. Moreover, he stood charged with crimes and follies which made the most loyal Englishman half ashamed of the royal cause.

It was in the midst of his struggles with Philip Augustus that John was first involved in disputes with the barons, on account of their positive refusal to accompany him to the Continent. On this point the barons appear to have been somewhat unreasonable; and John treated them with such hauteur that they announced his bearing quite intolerable. Gradually matters grew worse; and when John was in the midst of his quarrel with the Pope, the barons, believing that the time for retaliation had arrived, espoused the papal cause, and formed a conspiracy for seizing the king, and giving the crown to Simon de Montfort, a French nobleman who afterwards gained an unenviable notoriety as leader of the crusade against the unfortunate Albigenses. Moreover, the barons took great credit with the Pope for having forced John to surrender his crown to the legate. But no sooner did Innocent signify his intention of supporting the

king on his throne than the barons changed their tone, and made what political capital they could out of the humiliation which the king had brought upon England when he consented to become the vassal of Rome. Nor were other charges of a scandalous nature wanting to embitter the dispute and add to the exasperation. Almost every baron, in fact, had some complaint to make, and in particular the chiefs of the house of Braose, Fitzwalter, and De Vesci.

William de Braose was an Angevin noble of high rank, and Lord of Bramber, who unfortunately involved himself in a dispute with the crown about a debt which he would not or could not pay. At first De Braose was exiled to Ireland; but, having obtained the king's sanction to travel through the country to make up the sum, which was forty thousand marks, he availed himself of his liberty to escape to the Continent. His wife and children, however, were not so fortunate. While at Galway, endeavouring to embark for Scotland, they were arrested, brought as prisoners to Windsor, and confined in the castle. While in captivity the whole family died, and it was generally rumoured that they had been inhumanly starved to death.

Robert Fitzwalter was one of the proudest nobles in England, and Lord of Baynard's Castle, in London; and he had a daughter so celebrated for her beauty that she was called Maude the Fair. On this damsel John cast his eyes with evil intent. His advances were repelled. Maude the Fair died soon after, and the king was accused of having caused poison to be given to her in a poached egg.

Among Anglo-Norman barons, hardly one was more powerful than Eustace de Vesci, Lord of Alnwick, where he maintained great feudal state. Eustace had wedded Margery, daughter of William the Lion, King of Scots, and the Lady de Vesci was famous for her grace and beauty. Hearing of her perfections, the king contrived to get possession of her husband's ring and sent it with a message that she was immediately to repair to court if she wished to see her lord alive. Not having the slightest suspicion, the lady at once set out in haste; but, when on her journey, she accidentally met her husband, and, with the utmost surprise on her countenance, told him of the ring and the message she had received. Comprehending the whole, De Vesci sent his lady home, and took such measures that the king in a violent rage vowed vengeance, and the Northern baron, fearing for his life, fled from London.

Naturally enough, such scandals tended to deepen the resentment which the barons of England felt towards their king; and when affairs approached a crisis, the foremost and most resolute among John's enemies were Robert Fitzwalter and Eustace de Vesci.

It was in the summer of 1213 that matters began to assume such an aspect that the wise and prudent shook their heads and predicted a civil war. At that time John, bent on retrieving his disasters on the Continent, embarked for Jersey, after summoning the barons to follow. Instead of obeying, they assembled in London, and held a meeting at St. Paul's with the primate, who was devoted to their interests. On this occasion Stephen Langton produced the charter which Henry Beauclerc had promised to grant at his coronation, and which was understood to embody the laws popularly known as "The Laws of King Edward."

"My lords," said the primate, "I have found a charter of King Henry, by which, if you choose, you may recall the liberties of England to their former state."

Langton then read the document, and the barons responded with acclamations.

"Never," exclaimed they with one voice, "has there been a fitter time than this for restoring the ancient laws."

"For my part," said Langton, "I will aid you to the uttermost of my power."

And the primate having administered an oath by which they bound themselves to conquer or die, they dispersed.

Meanwhile John, having learnt what had taken place, landed from Jersey, and, with characteristic imprudence, began to ravage the lands of the malcontents with fire and sword. On reaching Northampton, however, he was overtaken by Langton, who protested loudly against the king's conduct, and threatened him with retaliation.

"Archbishop, begone!" said John, sternly. "Rule you the Church, and leave me to govern the State."

And, heedless of the warning, he carried the work of destruction as far as Nottingham.

But ere long events occurred which made John somewhat less confident. The defeat of his ally, the Emperor of Germany, at Bovines, ruined all his projects for recovering the ground he had lost on the Continent; and he was fain to conclude a peace with Philip Augustus on terms the reverse of flattering to his vanity, and return to England, where his enemies were every day becoming more determined to bring all disputes to a decisive issue.

No sooner, indeed, had the Christmas of 1214 passed, and the year 1215 begun its course, than the barons came to London with a strong military force, and demanded an interview with the king. At first John was inclined to ride the high horse, and refuse them an audience; but, learning that they were strongly attended, he deemed it politic to temporise, and met them at the house of the Knights of the Temple. On finding himself face to face with his adversaries, and on being handed a petition embodying their demands, which were by no means trifling in extent, John attempted to intimidate them; but finding that his attempts were ineffectual, he asked them to allow the business on which they had come to lie over till Easter, that he might have time to give it his deliberate consideration. The barons hesitated. At length, however, they consented to the delay on condition that Archbishop Langton and the Earl of Pembroke were sureties for the king's good faith. The primate and the earl pledged themselves as was wished; and the king and the barons parted, each party distrusting the other, and vowing in their inmost souls never, while they had life and breath, to bate one jot or tittle of their pretensions.

CHAPTER IX

A BLOW IN SEASON

Oliver Icingla did not particularly relish his quarters in the Tower of London. At first, indeed, the sullen scowl with which he had been received by John, and the evident antipathy with which the king was disposed to regard him as a kinsman of Hugh de Moreville, rendered his residence in the great fortress of the metropolis the very reverse of agreeable. Even after he had made friends among the squires and gentlemen of the royal household, and began to feel more at home, he still found it impossible to think of himself otherwise than as a captive whom any outbreak on De Moreville's part might have the effect of consigning to the jailer or the hangman.

At length public affairs, which every day assumed a more menacing aspect, and everywhere excited the utmost interest and speculation, brought William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, to the court; and Oliver Icingla, encouraged by the patronage of the great earl, who told him to "fear nothing, for no evil should befal him," took heart, and learned to bear his lot with more patience. His position, however, was irksome; and, while all around were talking of the great events that were on the gale, and of the part which they expected to play therein, he durst not even calculate what the future might bring to him. Nevertheless he kept up his spirits, and indulged in the hope of fortune proving favourable; and he was coming to the conclusion that life in the Tower was not on the whole absolutely insupportable, when one morning, when winter had gone and spring had come, while walking in the gardens within the walls of the fortress he was met by Robert, Lord Neville, a young nobleman of great possessions in the North, and a strong adherent of the royal cause.

"Master Icingla," said Neville, kindly, "I grieve to see that you are more gloomy in your present position than your friends could desire, and I would fain do something, if I could, to make your life more cheerful. Now the king is about to ride forth to recreate himself with such sport as can be got in the forest of Middlesex; and, if it would pleasure you to be of the company, I doubt not my power to take you as my comrade."

"My lord," replied Oliver, to whom the invitation was a very pleasant surprise, "I thank you with all my heart. Nothing, in truth, would please me better than to have my foot once more in the stirrup, and to taste the pure air of the forest on whose verge I was reared."

Neville smiled, as if pleased with the gratitude which his offer had excited; and the young lord, whose pride was so proverbial that he was nicknamed "The peacock of the North," so managed matters, that, when he mounted in the courtyard of the Tower, where huntsmen and hounds were ready to accompany King John to the chase, Oliver Icingla had the satisfaction of vaulting on his black steed, Ayoub, to ride by his side.

At the same time John came forth with a hawk on his wrist, and amidst much ceremony mounted a white palfrey magnificently caparisoned. The king wore a splendid dress, and over it a scarlet mantle fastened with gems; for, from Geoffrey of Anjou to Richard III., every Plantagenet, with the exception of the first Edward, had a weakness for magnificence in the way of raiment; and John, like his son Henry, had the reputation of being the greatest dandy in his dominions. But, in spite of his royal state and his gorgeous attire, the king had the look of a man whose mind was ill at ease. The thoughtful German has said that the past or the future is written on every man's countenance; and perhaps, as John that day rode away from the Tower, and through the narrow streets of London, and out of the gate that led to the great forest, tenanted by deer and haunted by the bear, and the boar, and the wild bull, an acute observer might have read on his face, as in a book, signs of the working of a mind clouded with presentiments of the fate which, in spite of all his efforts and all his stratagems, was one day to overwhelm him in gloom and humiliation. But, if so, the melancholy was not contagious; and Lord Neville, at least, was gay as the lark at morn.

"Now, Master Icingla," said the young noble, turning to his companion as they entered the forest, "you feel the better for this change of scene, and begin to think, after all, that life is life, and has its sweets?"

"On my faith, my lord, I do," replied Oliver, with frank sincerity, "and beshrew me if I know how sufficiently to express my thanks to you, to whom I am indebted for a change so grateful to the heart and refreshing to the spirits."

"Nay, no thanks," said Neville, whose pride was great, but whose frankness was fully equal to his pride. "I am right well pleased to be of any service to you, and should look for as much at your hands were our positions reversed. I repeat," continued he, more earnestly, "that I cannot but grieve to see you so gloomy, after what my Lord of Salisbury said of your deservings, and I sympathise in some measure with your melancholy; for I, like yourself, albeit bearing the surname of my Norman grandmother, am genuine English in the male line. But, after all, your captivity, if captivity it can be called, is by no means severe, or such as ought to break the spirit; not to mention that, like everything in this world, it will come to an end. In truth," added the young lord, half laughing, "your kinsman, Hugh de Moreville, would seem to concern himself little how it ends with you, since it is rumoured—and I believe truly—that he has, under pretext of visiting the Castle of Mount Moreville, on the north of the Tweed, gone to the Scottish court at Scone, to tempt or bribe or bully Alexander, the young King of Scots, into an alliance with the confederate barons. So much for his good faith, for which you are a hostage!"

"Well, my lord," replied Oliver, not without a change of colour and a thrill of blood to his heart, "I never flattered myself with the notion that De Moreville would have any scruples about sacrificing me if I stood in the way of his own interests. However, my kinsman may even do his worst, since fate has brought me to this pass. A man can die but once, and the time is in the will of God. Had I, indeed, my own will, my death should neither take place in a dungeon nor on the gallows-tree, but on field of fight."

"Master Icingla," said Neville, smiling kindly as he spoke, "take comfort, and be guided by me. You will doubtless live to see, and survive, many foughten fields if you are discreet. But a truce to this talk for the nonce, for I perceive by the movements of the huntsmen that the dogs have scented game."

And Neville's instincts did not deceive him. Almost as he spoke, a buck, breaking from the thicket, dashed nimbly up a glade of the forest, closely pursued by the hounds, and instantly the attention of the king and his company was concentrated in the exciting chase. It was not of long duration, however; and ere noon the buck was pulled down by the hounds, and cut up with all the forms customary on such occasions, the king and his courtiers standing round, and the horses breathing after their hard run.

"A fat buck, by my Halidame!" exclaimed the Lord Neville.

"Ay, a fat buck, if ever there was one," responded King John. "You see," added he, merrily, as he glanced round

the circle—“you see how this buck has prospered, and yet I’ll warrant he never heard a mass.”

Now, ever since the time when John quarrelled with the Pope and sent ambassadors to the Moorish King of Granada, his respect for the faith of his fathers had been gravely doubted; and this speech, even if nothing were meant, was imprudent under the circumstances, and shocked the religious sentiments of many present. Some of the courtiers, indeed, accustomed to smile at every merry speech of their sovereign, smiled on this occasion also. But the majority looked serious, and Lord Neville, whose countenance became not only serious but sad, turned to Oliver Icingla.

“Far from discreet it is of our lord the king to speak in this fashion,” whispered he, “and enough, in the opinion of many, to bring a malison on the royal cause, which, certes, at this crisis needs all the aid which the saints are like to render it.”

Oliver bowed his head, as if in assent, but remained silent. Perhaps he did not think that a hostage was in duty bound to utter any criticisms on the expressions of a man in whose power he was; and the hunters turned their horses’ heads, and rode up the forest in the direction of London.

King John had not been inattentive to the effect which his remark as to the buck had produced, nor even to the low murmur of disapprobation it drew forth. On the contrary, he had been awake to all that passed, and could not but repent of having rashly uttered words which were so likely to be repeated to his disadvantage; and, as he reflected, his memory recalled a long array of similar imprudences, for almost every one of which he had been under the necessity of atoning. Haunted by such recollections, he rode forward as if to avoid conversation with his courtiers and comrades; and his desire to be alone was so manifest that they gradually fell behind, and allowed him to precede them at such a distance that he might indulge undisturbed in his reflections, whatever the colour of these might be.

And thus silently the hunting party made its way up the glades of the forest, the king riding in front on his white palfrey, with a hawk on his wrist and his mantle waving in the spring breeze. Suddenly, as the palfrey paced along, one of the forest bulls, with his eyes glaring fire, and mane and tail erect, excited by John’s scarlet mantle, rushed from among the trees, and almost ere he was aware of his danger, charged the king so furiously that the palfrey and he were instantly overthrown and rolled on the ground. Loud cries of astonishment and horror broke from the hunting party, but nobody was near enough to render the slightest assistance. Pausing for a moment and bellowing furiously, the bull made a rush to complete its work, and it seemed that John’s fate was to die on the spot. At that instant, however, from the other side of the glade sprang a man of mighty proportions, dressed as a forester, and attended by a huge dog barking fiercely, and without hesitation, apparently without fear, seized the bull by the horns. Terrible then was the struggle, and such as not one man in ten thousand could have maintained for a moment. But not even an inch of ground did the forester yield to his ferocious antagonist. Pressing back the bull’s head with an arm of iron, he grasped an iron club that was suspended from his belt, and dealt with all his might a blow on the animal’s vital part which brought it heavily to the ground, while a loud shout of relief and of admiration burst from the spectators. Next moment the forester’s dagger was plunged into the bull’s neck; the fierce animal was writhing convulsively in the agonies of death; and the king, unwounded but trembling with wonder, leant calmly with his back to a tree, as if he had merely been a spectator of the exploit that had been performed.

“Now, by my Halidame!” exclaimed Lord Neville, eyeing him with admiration, “the man who could do such a deed must have the courage of ten heroes in his heart, and the strength of ten gladiators in his arm.”

“My lord, you say truly,” replied Oliver Icingla, excitedly. “I know something of him, and if there is in broad England a man whose single hand could stay the rush of a hundred foes, it is Forest Will, or Will with the Club.”

It was at this moment that John, having risen to his feet, and assured himself that he was not seriously hurt, looked his preserver keenly in the face.

“By God’s teeth!” exclaimed the king, taken somewhat aback, “I surely dream. Is it William de Collingham that I see before me?”

“In truth, king,” answered the forester with a dauntless air, and something like a sneer on his handsome features, “I once bore the name which you have mentioned; but when you were pleased, in the plenitude of your power, to outlaw me and send me into exile, I dropped the Collingham, not caring to burden myself with the duties which bearing it involved, and I have since gone by whatever name my neighbours have thought fit to bestow on me.”

“William,” said the king, “I owe you a life, for you have saved mine this day.”

“Well, sire,” replied the outlaw, “I dare be sworn that it is more than those would have cared to do this day by whose counsel I was brought to ruin, and forced to herd with broken men.”

“By God’s teeth! you speak no more than the truth,” exclaimed John, before whose mind’s eye the outlaw’s word conjured up several of the barons, once in his favour, but now leagued for his destruction. “But let bygones be bygones. I now know you better, and will more value your services in time to come.”

The outlaw bent his strong knee to the king, and John’s eyes gleamed with satisfaction; for he knew that he had secured one ally who, in the approaching struggle, would serve him with a fidelity proof against trials and temptations.

But the good-humour which this consideration created in John’s breast was destined to be short-lived. Scarcely had he returned to the Tower of London when news of evil import reached him. It was to the effect that Alexander, King of Scots, had yielded to the persuasion of Hugh de Moreville, and formed an alliance, offensive and defensive, with the barons of England. John was vexed in the extreme; but the intelligence was so depressing that he was not violent, only vindictive.

“Alexander of Scotland, and the people whom he rules, shall have reason to rue his rashness. As for Hugh de Moreville, I will without delay show the world how I punish such treachery as his. Let his kinsman, Icingla, be forthwith seized and secured, lest he attempt to escape; for, by the light of Our Lady’s brow, he shall hang ere sunset!”

“Sire!” exclaimed Lord Neville in horror, “you would not hang Oliver Icingla? I will answer for his loyalty.”

“Answer for yourself, my Lord Neville,” said John, frowning sternly, for he was in that temper in which a man cannot distinguish friends from enemies, if they are unfortunate enough to cross his humour.

CHAPTER X

WILLIAM DE COLLINGHAM

THE name of William de Collingham was of high account in his day and generation. Moreover, his name occupies a conspicuous place in the history of the great contest which desolated England in the second decade of the thirteenth century.

It is difficult to decide whether the Collinghams were of Saxon or Danish origin. Most probably they were originally Danes, who landed with King Sweyn when he came, in 1004, to avenge the cruel massacre of his countrymen, and who, under the rule of Canute the Great, settled quietly in Yorkshire. However, Collingham himself was neither a Saxon nor a Dane, but an Englishman; and the armorial figure on his shield and white banner was a raven of fierce aspect in full flight, which, about the year 1216, became very terrible indeed to the enemies of England.

William de Collingham was chief of a family that had risen to baronial rank in England during the stirring reigns of Henry and Richard; and the two earliest of our Plantagenets had profited by their loyal services. Moreover, ten years before our story opens, William had been in favour with King John; and, being then a young and handsome chevalier of twenty-five who had proved his valour and prowess in the tilt-yard and in the wars carried on against Philip Augustus, he was held in much esteem in England. But William had since experienced, to his cost, the caprice of fortune. About 1205 he had the misfortune to be so far led astray by his imagination as to aspire to the affections of Eleanor, "the fair damsel of Brittany," sister of the ill-fated Arthur, and, in consequence, involved himself in serious trouble. Men jealous of his renown, and eager to seize his possessions, represented the affair in such a light that John,—to whom the existence of a daughter of his elder brother caused much anxiety, seeing that, according to the laws of succession, she had a legal claim to the crown which he wore—was frightened out of his propriety; and Collingham atoned for his too-romantic aspiration by banishment from the realm. One of his bitterest enemies was the queen.

Years, however, had passed; great changes had taken place; and William de Collingham's existence was almost forgotten even by John himself, when, on that spring day, the banished man rescued him from so terrible a danger. But the king was by no means sorry that Collingham was yet "in the flesh." Indeed, his presence was most welcome, for John's affairs had reached such a stage that every partisan was of consequence; and he did not think lightly of a follower so stout and so capable as Collingham of rendering loyal service, as his father had done before him. So Collingham exchanged his life in the forest for the king's court; and having, in the first place, saved Oliver Icingla by a word, began to exercise much influence over the warlike preparations which John was making with the object of defending himself and his crown against attack.

And, indeed, it was now clear that the barons were ready to go all lengths. In vain the king had taken the cross; in vain he sent to Rome and invoked the mediation of the Pope. Nothing daunted them. On Easter week they gathered from various quarters in Lincolnshire, assembled at Stamford, and from Stamford removed to Brackley with two thousand knights, who, with squires and men-at-arms, made up a formidable feudal army. At Brackley they halted to deliberate before laying siege to Northampton, which is situated about fifteen miles from Brackley.

Naturally enough, John felt much alarm when he learned that his enemies were at the head of such a force as he could not cope with; but at this crisis he was not deserted. Not only the Nevilles, but the great Earls of Pembroke and Salisbury and Warren remained faithful in the day of adversity; and faithful also remained many chevaliers and gentlemen, who, without any personal liking for John, and without any of the young Icingla's hereditary veneration for the memory of St. Edward, were yet determined to stand by the king and fight for the Confessor's crown. However, it was necessary to take some steps to avert civil war if possible; and John, having summoned Archbishop Langton, sent him, in company with Pembroke and Warren, to hold a conference with the barons at Brackley, and offer to refer their dispute to arbitration. But they found the insurgents in no compromising mood. Producing the petition which, on the day of Epiphany, had been presented to the king in the house of the Templars, they recited the chief articles.

"These are our claims," said the barons, sternly, as they handed the petition to Langton; "and, if we do not receive full satisfaction, we appeal to the God of Battles."

The primate and the two earls returned to the king, and Langton, with the petition in his hand, explained its contents, and related what the barons had said.

"By God's teeth!" exclaimed John, losing his temper, when calmness was so necessary, "I will not grant these men liberties which would make me their slave. Why do they not likewise demand my crown?"

Without delay Langton carried the king's answer to Brackley; and the barons, fortified by the counsels and support of the primate, resolved to hesitate no longer. Calling themselves "the army of God and the Church," they chose Robert Fitzwalter as their general-in-chief, and, raising the standard of revolt, advanced to Northampton in feudal array.

But Northampton did not, as they probably anticipated, open its gates to admit them. Defended by a strong castle, and walls built after the Conquest by Simon St. Litz, and strongly garrisoned with Royalists, the town held out gallantly, and for a whole fortnight defied all their assaults so successfully that they lost patience.

"We are wasting our strength here," said some, "and giving the king time to take measures for our destruction."

"Yes," said others, "let us on to Bedford, to which William Beauchamp will admit us without a blow."

Accordingly the barons raised the siege of Northampton, and marching to Bedford, of which William Beauchamp, one of their party, was governor, they took possession of the town. But John did not despair. A considerable body of mercenaries were now at his beck and call. William de Collingham was rallying archers to the royal standard; Pembroke, Warren, and Salisbury were mustering the fighting men of the districts subject to their sway; Lord Neville had hurried to his castle of Raby to summon the men of the North to the war. So long as London held out—and so far the Londoners seemed to look quietly on—there was still hope for the royal cause. Such was the state of affairs when an event occurred which changed the face of matters, and baffled all calculations.

It was Sunday, the 17th of May, 1215; and the king, having just heard morning mass, and summoned Oliver Icingla and other hostages, was informing them that their lives were forfeited by the rebellion of their kinsmen, and

that they could only save themselves by taking an oath to serve him faithfully in the war, when William de Collingham presented himself, pale and agitated, but endeavouring to be calm.

“Sire, sire,” said he, “all is lost!”

“What mean you?” asked John, in a voice tremulous with emotion, and dismay on every feature.

“Simply this, sire,” answered William; “the Londoners have proved traitors, and Robert Fitzwalter and his army are now in possession of the city.”

John rose, tottered, reseated himself, tore his hair, and uttered some wild words, as if cursing the hour in which he was born.

“By God’s teeth!” cried he, stamping violently, “I have never prospered since the day I was reconciled to the Pope.”

But fury and regret could avail the king nothing. Every gate was already in the custody of the insurgents; and from the castles of Baynard and Montfichet waved the standard of revolt.

CHAPTER XI

ANCIENT LONDON

At the opening of the thirteenth century, London, as I have already mentioned, was a little city, containing some forty thousand inhabitants, and surrounded by an old Roman wall, with seven double gates—the fortifications—being in parts much decayed. It was in the form of a bow and string, being much more extensive from east to west than from north to south, and narrower at both ends than at the middle; and the wall on the south side, along the bank of the Thames, was straight as a line, and fortified with towers, or bulwarks, in due distance from each other.

At that time London was considered one of the murkiest capitals in Europe. For the most part, the houses were mean, the lower stories built of plaster, and the upper, which were of timber, projecting over the lower; and, as has been observed, many of the streets were so narrow that the inhabitants, when they ascended to the roofs to breathe the fresh air, and look forth on the country, could converse with ease, and sometimes even shake hands.

Nevertheless, London was renowned for its wealth, and ever and anon the eye of a visitor was struck with some edifice rising with lofty dignity from among the dingy houses that lined the long narrow streets—the Tower Palatine, the Hospital of St. Katherine, the castles of Baynard and Montfichet, reared by Norman conquerors; the half-fortified mansions, inhabited by prelates and nobles when they were summoned to the king's court; the residences of the richer citizens, who derived from their trade incomes that enabled them to rival the nobles in splendour; and the thirteen conventual, and the hundred and twenty-six parish churches, which studded the city, and kept alive the flames of learning and religion.

Moreover, within and without the walls, there were chapelries, and gardens, and places pleasant to the gazer's eye. Orchards blossomed and apples grew where now are Paternoster Row and Ivy Lane, and to the north of Holborn, where, somewhat later, John de Kirkby built the palace for the Bishop of Ely; associated with the memory of John of Gaunt. Outside of Ludgate, and beyond the bridge that spanned the Fleet, and beyond the house of the Templars and Lincoln's Inn, the town residence of the Lacies, was the Strand, overgrown with bushes and intersected with rivulets, having on one side the river, where barges floated and salmon leaped and swans glided; and on the other, gardens and fields, dotted with suburban villas, and stretching away in one direction to the chase and palace of Marylebone, and the hills of Highgate and Hampstead; and in another by Clerkenwell and Islington to the great forest of Middlesex, which was not, however, disforested till 1218, when the citizens had an opportunity of purchasing land and building houses and greatly extending the suburbs.

Many and various were the sports and recreations in which the ancient Londoners indulged on high days and holidays. It is to be feared that they did yield in some measure to the temptations of the maypole, the tavern, the cockpit, the bull-ring, and the gaming-house, and even found their way at times to "the vaulted room of gramarye," in which the wizard exercised his art. But generally their recreations were of a manly and invigorating kind. They played football in the fields near the Holy Well, wrestled for the ram near Matilda's Hospital, in St. Giles's Fields, had horse-races and matches at quintain in Smithfield; and, when the Thames was frozen over, they tied sheep-bones to their feet—skates not having then come into fashion—and tilted against each other with staves in full career. Nor did they, at other times, neglect such aquatic exercises as were likely to train them to skill and hardihood. "A pole," says the chronicler, "is set up in the middle of the river, and a shield made fast thereto. Then a young man, standing in a boat, which, being rowed by oars and driven by the tide, glides swiftly on, while he with his lance hits the target as the boat passes by, when if he breaks his lance without losing his own footing he performeth well; but if, on the contrary, the lance remains unbroken, he will be tumbled into the water, and the boat passes on. Nevertheless, there are always two boats ready to succour him."

Around the walls of London were houses, and churches, and hospitals; and Fitzstephen, writing with the scene before his eye, tells us that "on all sides, without the suburbs, are the citizens' gardens or orchards." But of all the suburbs, Clerkenwell, where stood the Priory of the Knights of St. John, and the great mansion of the De Clares, was the fairest. In fact, Clerkenwell, then a village some distance from London, was one of the most picturesque places in England, having on every side but that towards the city the prospect of wooded hills and uplands, mingled with luxuriant verdure; while the river Holborn, its banks clothed with vines, wound among romantic steeps and secluded dells; and there, among glittering pebbles, was the fountain called "Fons Clericorum," from which the village took its name, because the youths and students of the city—and the schools of London were frequented by diligent scholars—were in the habit of strolling out, on summer evenings, to take the air and taste the water.

It was at Clerkenwell, in a pleasant garden, which, however, was evidently intended more for use than ornament, and flanked by an orchard, where fruit trees grew thick, and afforded shady walks for its musing and meditative owner, that the suburban villa of Constantine Fitzarnulph was situated; and it was there that, in the spring of 1215, the season of Lent being over, the young citizen gave a supper to some of the Londoners whose wealth and influence were greatest, such as the Hardels, the Basings, and the Fitz-Peters, the kind of men of whom, thirty years later, Henry III., when advised to sell his crown jewels, and told that, if no other purchaser could be found rich enough to buy them, the citizens of London could, exclaimed, "Yes, by God's head, I suppose that if the treasures of Augustus Cæsar were in the market, these clownish citizens, who call themselves barons, could lay down money enough to buy them." But in one respect Henry was wrong. The citizens of London were not "clowns;" their hospitality was proverbial, and intercourse with foreigners refined their manners and enlarged their minds. Neither in point of breeding or intelligence were the guests of Fitzarnulph at all inferior to the Bigods and Bohuns who set kings at defiance, and wedded kings' daughters.

Nor did the villa of the Fitzarnulphs lack any of the luxuries which at that period could be found in the castle of prince or feudal noble. In the hall where the guests were assembled appeared the enamelled work of Limoges, the linen of Ipres, then celebrated for its manufacture—hence "diaper"—and the products of Spain and Italy, and the spoils of Constantinople, recently seized and plundered by the crusaders under Baldwin of Flanders and Dandolo, the blind Doge of Venice. On the table, around which they sat on chairs curiously carved, were saltcellars of rare workmanship, and copper candlesticks, engraved and gilt, with enamel of seven colours let into the metal, and displaying figures of animals, and dishes, cups, and boxes ornamented like the candlesticks. The walls and wainscot were painted with subjects from history or fable; and more than one image and more than one picture recalled to memory the recent sack of that rich city on the Bosphorus to which the eye of Norman and Frank had for centuries

been longingly turned.

The supper was not placed on the board, but, according to the fashion of the day, served to the guests on spits. At first the company appeared under constraint and silent; but when supper was over, and the attendants were ordered to leave the apartments, and the doors were closed, so that the conversation might be strictly private, and when Fitzarnulph had pointed significantly to the rose on the roof-tree, surrounded with the legend—

"He who doth secrets reveal
Beneath my roof shall never live;"

and when the wine, which had neither been produced on the banks of the Holborn nor in the vineyards of Gloucester, flowed freely, their tongues were loosened, and they expressed themselves without hesitation as to the crisis which public affairs had reached, not by any means sparing King John, whose character they evidently viewed in the very worst light. Two of the party, however, preserved their discretion. One was Joseph Basing, a cautious man, who had been Sheriff of London in the previous year; the other a youth of patrician aspect, in a half-martial dress, with handsome features, and a keen eye which kindled with enthusiasm when noble words were spoken, and a proud lip which curled with scorn when a mean sentiment was expressed.

"Sirs," said Joseph Basing, after listening silently and with an air of alarm to remarks which, if repeated, might have cost ten lives, "I will not take upon me to dispute that there is some truth in much that has been said, and especially that, in the matter of taxes and imposts, the Londoners have of late had burdens laid on their shoulders which men cannot and ought not to bear with patience. Nevertheless, we must look before we leap, lest we should meet the fate of William Fitzozbert, who was hanged at the Nine Elms, in Richard's time, for calling himself King of the Poor, and speaking ill of the powers that be. For myself, I care not to place myself in jeopardy, even for the weal of my fellow-citizens, unless I see a way of getting safely out again; and, for the king, I believe it is said in Holy Writ, 'Curse not the king, no, not in thy thoughts, for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.' My masters, let us be cautious. King John may be less wise and less merciful than he might be; but a king's name is a tower of strength. He is still a king, and as yet lacks neither the will nor the power to punish those who rebel against him. Therefore, I say again, let us be cautious, and set not our lives rashly on the cast of the die."

A murmur, in which all present joined, intimated to Joseph Basing the dissatisfaction which his speech had excited. But, however timid as to his life, he was evidently not a man to surrender his judgment to his comrades merely to please them.

"Besides," continued he, speaking in a resolute tone, "who are these barons, that peaceful citizens should cry them 'God speed?' How and why did they cease to eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence? Who does not know that, up to the day when King Henry came to the throne, they taxed their ingenuity to invent instruments of torture to wring gold from their unoffending neighbours? and the Earl of Essex, who was rather better than his fellow-barons, used to send about spies to beg from door to door, that he might learn in what house there was any wealth to plunder. Verily, my masters, we ought to be careful lest we bring back such evil days, and find ourselves at the mercy of such ruthless men."

"Sir citizen," said the young noble, speaking for the first time, "these are old stories, and such crimes as you impute to the Earl of Essex cannot be laid to the charge of the barons forming the army of God and the Church."

Joseph Basing was about to answer sharply, but Constantine Fitzarnulph indicated by a gesture his desire to be heard, and there was silence.

"My friends," said Fitzarnulph, in a tone which he hoped would prevent any argument, "it seems to me that this discourse is unprofitable, and that it would be more to the purpose to come to a decision on the point we are met to decide. The barons calling themselves the army of God and the Church are at Bedford, ready to march to London, if assured of a favourable reception in the city. Such reception we here assembled have influence sufficient to secure, if we so will it; and there is here present a young Norman noble—Walter de Merley by name—who is ready to carry your decision to them as rapidly as horse can carry him. Is it your desire—yea or nay—that the army now at Bedford should march to London?"

Joseph Basing was silent: all the others with one accord shouted "Yea;" and, almost as the sound ceased, Walter de Merley, having exchanged signals with Fitzarnulph, vanished from the hall.

"By our Lady of Newminster," said the young warrior, as he mounted his steed and set its face towards Bedford, "it was no more than prudent to make these citizens pledge themselves to secrecy by an oath which they cannot break without risking eternal perdition. Not one of them but will waken up at sunrise to-morrow, repenting of and trembling at the recollection of the scene that has just been enacted."

And while he rode on, congratulating himself on the success of Fitzarnulph's attempts to induce the leading citizens of London to make the cause of the barons their own, the doors of Fitzarnulph's hall were thrown open; and wine and spices were served to the guests; and each departed to his own home to seek repose, and probably to dream of the danger in which he might be involved should the secret ooze out before the arrival of "the army of God and the Church."

CHAPTER XII

THE BARONS IN LONDON

FITZARNULPH'S project prospered.

Everything was managed with secrecy and success. On being assured that they might count on a hearty welcome from the Londoners, the barons left Bedford, and advanced to Ware, in Hertfordshire; and, while the royalists knew nothing of their movements, save from vague and uncertain rumours, they, on Saturday, the 16th of May, left Ware after sunset, and, marching all night, found themselves in the neighbourhood of the capital without a foe having appeared to notice their approach.

It was early on Sunday when the baronial warriors reached the walls of London, and Aldgate stood open to admit them. At the time, the inhabitants were for the most part at morning mass, and the nobles and their fighting men entered the city, and took possession of the gates, at each of which they posted parties of guards, almost ere their presence was suspected by the royalists, and long before their arrival was announced at the Tower. No sooner did they find themselves in undisputed possession of the capital, and assured of the support of the chief citizens, than they gratified the prejudices of the populace by falling upon a race who from their position always suffered early in civil commotions.

At that time the Jews were odious to Christendom, and doubtless did much to deserve hatred. But to no people in Europe was the Jew, with his sensual lip, his hook nose, his peculiar features, his high square yellow cap, and his russet gabardine, an object of so much dislike and distrust as to the English. For all this antipathy there were various reasons.

Almost every Jew was understood openly or secretly to revile and insult Christianity, and scarcely a year passed without some terrible charge being made against the race in this respect. One year it was said that a Jew had stabbed the Host; in the next that a Jew had defaced an image of the Virgin; in the third that a Jew had crucified a boy, in mockery of the Saviour. At the time of the Crusades such charges became more frequent than ever; for the Jews were believed to sympathise strongly with the Saracens, and to show their sympathy by furnishing arms to carry on the war, poisoning the wells and fountains at which the armed pilgrims were likely to quench their thirst, and sneering at the zeal which prompted Christians to "take the staff and sandal in superstitious penance, and walk afoot to visit the graves of dead men."

No doubt these circumstances would of themselves have rendered the Jew an object of hatred wherever he appeared; but there were other and very strong reasons for the detestation with which men of the Hebrew race were regarded by the multitude. Almost every Jew was rich, and a money-lender, and a usurer, and was in the habit of using his advantages in such a way as to grind the faces of men of all ranks who were under the necessity of coming to him for aid. Abbots and barons were his debtors; but it was not merely the inmate of the monastery and the castle who experienced his rapacity and atrocities. While the abbot pledged his plate, and the baron his armour and horses, the craftsman pledged his tools, the trader his wares, and the husbandman his ploughshare. Of course, all these men were frequently at the Jew's mercy, and most of them found, to their severe experience, that the mercy of a Jew was worse than the cruelty of a Christian.

No sooner, therefore, did the barons forming "the army of God and the Church" find themselves in London, and in a position to do whatever they pleased with the city, than they proceeded to pay off some of their debts to the Jews after a fashion which was little to the taste of the Israelites. Proceeding with such intent to the Jewry—the quarter set apart for and inhabited by the Jews, and remarkable as concerned the construction of the houses, which were of a peculiar style, with a chimney over the door, a mode of building to which the persecuted race were compelled to adhere, in order that their dwellings might be distinguished from those of Christians—they stopped at one of them, over which was inscribed in Hebrew characters, "This is the station or ward of Rabbi Moses, son of the honourable Rabbi Isaac," and, to the terror of the inmates, began to tear down the building, not forgetting in the meantime to look out for plunder, and to lay their hands on all that was not too hot or too heavy to carry away. Proceeding with the work of destruction, which some were foolish enough to mistake for doing God service, the baronial insurgents pulled down the houses of all the principal Hebrews, and had the stones carried away to repair the gates of London, especially Ludgate and Aldgate—which had so easily admitted them, but which they were determined should not admit any other armed force, save at their pleasure—rebuilding them after the Norman fashion, with small bricks and Flanders tiles. Nearly four centuries later, when Ludgate was pulled down, and when, to borrow the words of the poet,

> "The knights were dust,
> And their swords were rust—"

when their names were forgotten, and the places that had once known them knew them no more, and their lands had become the prey of the grooms and minions who pandered to the passions and obeyed the behests of the Tudor sovereigns, the stone which had been taken from the house of the Rabbi Moses was discovered, and the inscription interpreted—an interesting memorial of other days, and one which might have suggested salutary reflections.

Having dealt with the Jews, the Anglo-Norman barons, resolute in their plan of going all lengths till their demands were complied with, took two important steps. First, they wrote to all the lords and knights throughout England demanding aid, and declaring plainly their intention to regard as enemies and punish as traitors all who did not support "the army of God and the Church;" next, they boldly quashed all scruples as to assailing a feudal superior, and prepared to besiege the king in the Tower, and got ready their engines of war to commence operations. But by this time John's alarm had got the better of his rashness; and, changing his tactics, he, instead of bidding defiance to the confederates as before, determined on an attempt to delude them.

Fortunately for the king, the Earl of Pembroke, on learning that a crisis was imminent, had hastened to London; and the earl, being a man of such high character and unquestionable patriotism that he either had no personal enemies or only such as were ashamed to confess their enmity, was in a position to exercise great influence with both parties. He was quite firm in his support of the crown, and was one of those men who would have stood by it, even if it had hung on a bush; but at the same time he was zealous for liberty, and as anxious as any of the

confederate barons to have full securities for the liberty of Englishmen. When, therefore, Pembroke was summoned to John's presence, along with William de Hartarad, the king's cup-bearer, and Robert of London, a clerk of the Chapel Royal, he went with the intention of suggesting some such compromise as might prevent war and bloodshed.

"I now perceive," said John, more calmly than he was in the habit of speaking, "that my crown is at stake."

"Sire," replied Pembroke, with much more deference that he was wont to speak in the king's prosperity, "I grieve with all my heart that affairs have reached such a stage. But all is not yet lost; nor is there any reason to despair of getting over all difficulties, if God aids you. All may yet be saved by reasonable concessions."

"It is vain," replied John, "to speak of reasonable concessions now. When my foes are in the capital with arms and horses, and when they beleaguer my fortress with fighting men and engines of war, I know full well that neither Robert Fitzwalter nor any of his friends will listen to reason. Their answer, were you to address them in such a strain, would be '*Sit pro ratione voluntas.*' It is no time to hesitate. In another week the handwriting would be on the wall, and in a month my crown and sceptre would pass away. I have well considered the matter, and have not been unmindful of the duty I owe to my son. Wherefore I beseech thee to go to Fitzwalter and his confederates, and tell them that, if they will forbear from their attempt to take this place, I will be prepared to grant all their demands. Let them appoint the time and place for a conference. Go forthwith, my lord earl, and promise them every satisfaction. William de Hartarad and Robert of London will bear thee company; and may God speed you in your errand!"

And so the Earl of Pembroke, attended by the cup-bearer and the clerk, left the Tower, and was admitted to an interview with Fitzwalter and the barons; and the earl delivered the king's message, and added,—

"My lords, it remains for you to fix the time when and place where the conference is to be held."

And Robert Fitzwalter, after consulting his confederates, turned to Pembroke, and replied briefly and somewhat sternly—

"My lord earl, for the day of our conference with the king, we appoint the 15th of June, and, for the place, we name Runnymede."

CHAPTER XIII

EVACUATION OF THE TOWER

It was agreed between the Earl of Pembroke and Robert Fitzwalter that John should evacuate the Tower of London, without, however, handing it over to the barons. In fact, it was to remain in the custody of Stephen Langton till the king granted the demands of the confederate nobles; and, seeing that the Archbishop of Canterbury was a personage in whose good faith both parties might have confidence, no objections were openly made to this arrangement, though some of the royalists shook their heads and muttered discontent over their cups.

Without delay, however, John prepared to leave London for Windsor; and, forthwith, the neighbourhood of the Tower was the scene of such confusion as generally in that age prevailed when kings were about to remove from one residence to another. "When the king sets out in the morning," says Peter of Blois, "you see multitudes of people running up and down as if they were distracted—horses rushing against horses, carriages overturning carriages, players, cooks, confectioners, mimics, dancers, barbers, all making a great noise, and an intolerable jumble of horse and foot."

It was in the midst of this excitement and disorder that Oliver Icingla, while making ready to mount and accompany the king to Windsor, was summoned to the royal presence, and went in no joyous mood, being uncertain whether or not he might be handed over, without ceremony, to the executioner. The countenance of John, however, reassured him; and he began to hope that at length the king had been convinced that the royal cause was not likely to derive much benefit from the execution of a squire capable of wielding his sword against foes with courage and dexterity.

"Master Icingla," began John, apparently forgetting that he had once been on the point of sending the youth to the gallows, "you know, doubtless, in what peril you have been placed by the treachery of your kinsman, Hugh de Moreville?"

Oliver bent his head to indicate that he did, and, in spite of the position in which he stood, refrained, with no small difficulty, from denouncing De Moreville as the worst of humankind for having knowingly led him into a snare.

"Nevertheless," continued John, "I have, at the instance of the Lord Neville and William de Collingham, resolved to overlook your kinsman's treachery, so far as you are concerned; and I expect that you will show your sense of my clemency by your zeal and activity in my service. Nay, answer not. I comprehend what you would say; but listen. William de Collingham is about to ride for Savernake to conduct my lady the queen thence to Gloucester, and you will accompany him. He has a safe-conduct, and the errand is likely to entail no danger. But he does not return, and I would fain be assured that the journey has been accomplished in safety. Wherefore my command is this, that you hasten back without delay, and bring thy report to me at Windsor. And hark you, youth," added John, speaking in a low tone, "you, as I learn, know something of the country through which you are to pass, and have, likewise, as I hear, seen something of war in Spain and Flanders, and can guess by appearances what is going on—as regards preparations—in a country which war threatens with battles and sieges. Make the best use of your eyes wherever you pass, or wherever you halt, or wherever you lodge, and come not to me as if you had ridden blindfold through the land. Now away. Bear in mind what I have told you for your guidance, and, moreover, that a silent tongue makes a wise head."

Much relieved by the information that his life was no longer in danger, and elated at the prospect of such an adventure as escorting a queen, even as the companion of a man who, a few weeks earlier, had been a forest outlaw, Oliver Icingla hastened to array himself for the journey, and to mount his black steed, Ayoub; and when the king, and his knights, and squires, and standard-bearers, and multitudinous attendants, rode from the Tower and emerged from the gates of London, which John was not destined again to enter, William de Collingham, mounted and armed as became a knight, but still carrying with him the iron club which had distinguished him as a man of the forest, with the young English squire riding at his right hand and a band of stout horsemen at his back, preceded the royal array and took the nearest way to Wiltshire, with the object of reaching Savernake.

"By the mass!" exclaimed Collingham, suddenly breaking the silence he had hitherto maintained since leaving London; "I much marvel that the king, old and experienced as he is, and so much accustomed to deal with men—both priests and laymen—can credit the possibility of Stephen Langton restoring the Tower."

"And wherefore not?" asked Oliver, but with less surprise than might have been expected under the circumstances. "Is not my lord archbishop a man of honour and probity?"

"Tush!" replied Collingham, impatiently. "Stephen Langton is, no doubt, a good and honest man, as times go, and eager enough for the public weal. But he is heart and soul with Fitzwalter and De Vesci, and is either dictating their measures or doing their bidding. In neither case, credit me, will he ever again admit the king to London, save as the slave or tool of the confederates; and I see clearly that John has pride enough left never to come on such terms. By the mass, we are only at the beginning of this struggle; for I know that the king—albeit he seems now in their toils—will yet lead the confederates a dance on which they are far from counting; and, frankly, so far as they are concerned, I should not grieve on that account; for I sadly doubt their sincerity, albeit they bawl so loudly upon justice and righteousness."

"What, sir knight," asked Oliver, "deem you so lightly of their sincerity?"

"By my faith, I do," replied Collingham, bluntly; "and only give them credit for having a very sharp eye after their own interest. Never a word should we have heard from them of old charters and ancient laws but for the question of the scutages, with which the king was, doubtless, inclined to deal more severely than was prudent or politic."

"Explain more fully," said Oliver, who was interested in such conversation, and anxious to comprehend the merits of the controversy.

"By my faith, it is simple enough," resumed Collingham, who, however, it ought to be remembered, regarded several of the oligarchy as personal enemies, and was by no means likely to do full justice to their motives. "In the reign of King Henry the barons commuted their personal services for money, and, as they at first relished the system, and the scutages were moderate, they paid without trouble. But when John came to the throne the barons found that the scutages were vastly enhanced, and, what was still more, they had either to pay them, or found their

estates seized in default thereof; and so now they want so to manage matters as neither to render the personal services nor to pay the scutages, and every one of them to be king in his own territory. Hence all this cry about righteousness and freedom, with which they have bribed the clergy and fooled the citizens."

"But you hardly deem the struggle likely to end to their advantage?"

"No, by rood and mass! but, nevertheless, it may end to the advantage of the country, as many such contests have done before. But here, as my memory recalls to me, is the path which we have to pursue; and, as we part from the king for the time being, I take leave to thank the saints that you are safe and at liberty, and neither on gallows nor in dungeon; for, by the bones of Becket, you, Master Icingla, have had a narrow escape."

"And so hath King John," observed Oliver, quietly.

"The king!" exclaimed Collingham, starting with surprise. "How, sir squire, has the king had a narrow escape?"

"Even in this wise," answered Oliver, calmly. "If he had sent an Icingla to the gallows for the treachery of a Norman lord, not ten men of English race would have drawn their swords in defence of his crown."

Collingham smiled as if amused; and they rode on.

CHAPTER XIV

A HEROINE IN DANGER

It must not be supposed that the England of King John bore much more resemblance to the England of Queen Victoria than the London of Constantine Fitzarnulph to the London of our own day. It was a country with much waste land, immense and widely-extending forests, chiefly of beech and oak trees, in whose branches the hawk built, and from whose branches dropped acorns, on which herds of swine daily fed; and the forests were frequented by the bear, the wild boar, the wolf, and the wild bull, and not seldom tenanted by men without the pale of the law, and at war with society. Of course the aspect of the country was picturesque. Here was a Norman castle, there a Saxon hall; here a flourishing walled town, there a poor hamlet; here a rich monastery, there the cell of some hermit—the entire population not exceeding two millions. In fact, the eastern counties, from Lincoln to Sussex, were dreary swamps, almost undrained: and the whole of that once wealthy and great province beyond the Humber, known as "Northumbria," though gradually recovering, still bore terrible traces of the devastation wrought by the Conqueror.

It was, however, through the more fertile and less rugged part of England that William de Collingham and Oliver Icingla took their way, and for days rode on through bridle-roads which are now railways, and through forests which are now corn-fields, and past castle-protected hamlets which are now considerable towns. Nor were there many signs either in the appearance of the country or in the manner of the inhabitants to indicate that national affairs had reached a crisis which made civil war too probable. The herdsman drove out his cattle, the shepherd his sheep, and the swineherd his grunting herd; the charcoal-burner his cart, the waggoner his team of oxen; and the peasantry, in their smock-frocks, girt round the loins, and barely reaching to the knee, and their heads covered with a kind of hood—some of them with shoes and stockings, others with bare feet—went about their usual occupations as if peace had smiled on the land. Once the knight and squire met a pilgrim from the Holy Land carrying a palm-branch to deposit on the altar of his parish church, and other wayfarers whose errands, to judge by their looks, were equally peaceful.

"Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad;
Sometimes a curly shepherd lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad."

But it seemed as if the mandate sent throughout the land to lords and warriors to join the baronial standard had not been readily responded to, for hardly one band of armed men crossed their path. In fact, most people, except those who were very nearly concerned with the dispute between the king and the barons, were little disposed to involve themselves in a contest which was so problematical in its issue, and were rather inclined, so long as the contending parties left them at peace, to look quietly on, and await the result of a struggle which, they felt strongly, was too serious for them to take part in unless as a matter of necessity.

It was a warm day in the month of June, and the sun shone bright on woodland and plain, when Collingham and Oliver approached the royal palace in the forest of Savernake, where the wife of King John was then residing, and suddenly found themselves in the vicinity of a merry party of ladies, with hounds and hawks, and attended by falconers, huntsmen, and pages, and several men-at-arms to guard them from any danger that might present itself. The knight and the squire halted to survey the party and watch the sport; and, in truth, the temptation was well-nigh irresistible; for what with their rich dresses, their mettled palfreys, and their equestrian grace, the dames and demoiselles, whoever they might be, were somewhat fascinating to the eye of chevaliers. But one among them arrested Collingham's whole attention, and also, though a moment later, that of Oliver. She was a woman of thirty or thereabouts, with a fair and delicate complexion, an oval face, features of singular regularity and majesty, and a figure which, for grace and symmetry, might have compared to advantage with the finest creations of the sculptor. She wore a green habit which much became her, and a bonnet decked with plumes; and she rode, not a palfrey but a steed which, so far as spirit was concerned, seemed much fitter to have carried a warrior to battle-field than to amble with the fair being who was now restraining its fiery ardour with some difficulty, though evidently without trepidation.

"By the mass!" exclaimed Collingham, gazing very intently on this interesting personage, "I should know that face and figure. What if she were Queen Isabel?" asked he, laughing.

"On my faith!" exclaimed Oliver with enthusiasm, "she is fair and fascinating enough to be the Queen of Elfland. What if we approach nearer?"

"Nay, by no means," replied Collingham in a jocular tone; "now that you take her for a being of another world, I have no heart to intrude into her presence, lest the fate of Young Tamlane or of Actæon should befall me for a lighter fault."

"Actæon?" said Oliver, inquiringly. "I remember the story of Young Tamlane being carried away by the Queen of Faerie and her ladies into Elfland, and of his having a narrow escape of being devoured when the foul fiend visited that region to claim his tithe of the inhabitants. But," continued Oliver, musingly, "the name of the other dwells not in my memory. I pray you, sir knight, to inform me what manner of man he was, and what wondrous adventure befell him as you hint. Name you him Actæon?" added he, inquiringly.

"Yes. Heard you never of Actæon, of whom ancient writers tell a marvellous adventure, which I lately heard my Lord Neville relate when at the Tower? Well, be it known to you that this Actæon was a brave and accomplished knight, who loved dogs and the chase above all things; and one day, being eager in pursuing a stag, he came to a large meadow, surrounded, like this before us, with high trees, in which was a fountain where the goddess of chastity, whom they call Diana, was bathing with her nymphs, and that so suddenly that he was too far to retreat ere they were aware of his approach; and the goddess, to punish him for what was his misfortune and not his fault, cried out, 'Actæon, whoever sent thee here has no great love for thee; and for the outrage thou hast committed I will make thee perform a penance. I therefore change thee into the form of the stag thou hast this day hunted.' And," added Collingham, "he was instantly transformed into a stag."

"Ah," said Oliver, gravely, "I now remember me of having, in the days when I was being taught grammar and letters in the company of Constantine Fitzarnulph, heard or read something of this Actæon of whom you speak, and

also how other goddesses besides Diana were wont to change men whom they disliked into beasts, and women into birds; and I know full well that many believe that such things may have taken place when the world was full of pagans and idolaters; but, for my part, I hold such stories as mere fables, and such as ought not to weigh with a brave man who holds the Christian faith; and as touching the dame before us—be she goddess or Queen of Elfland—I must own she is parlous handsome, and bewitching to look upon."

"I gainsay not that," said Collingham, gazing at the person alluded to; "but," added he, "methinks that anyhow the fair lady has mistaken her strength of wrist and hand when she mounted a steed which peradventure Cœur de Lion had found less uneasy under him than he relished."

"In good faith," observed Oliver, gravely, "I cannot but deem that she is in more peril than she fancies."

At that moment, however, the hounds gave tongue, and the eyes both of knight and squire were attracted by a heron which arose from a sedgy pool. Immediately the lady whom they had been so attentively observing let loose her falcon, and, followed by the party, went off in pursuit, every eye directed towards the soaring heron and the wheeling falcon. Sharing the excitement, Collingham and Oliver Icingla set spurs to their horses and followed, but at such a distance as not to attract the observation of the party; and, while the ladies slackened their pace and reined in their steeds in a broad, grassy plain to watch the sport, the knight and squire halted at a spot where the plain was bounded by a rivulet, with steep and precipitous banks, haunted by the eagle, and the beaver, and the otter. And exciting was the spectacle which met their eye. Ascending in circles till they became mere specks, and almost disappeared in the sky, the heron and falcon excited the interest of the spectators to the highest degree, till, locked in a death struggle, they dropped screaming, leaving a track of plumes in the sky, and came down struggling almost on the head of the fair horsewoman, the falcon striking his claws into the heron's neck, almost under the feet of her horse. It was enough. The steed instantly became more refractory than before, bounded, plunged, and, wheeling round, broke away in spite of her efforts, and rushed wildly, with outstretched neck and tail erect, towards the most precipitous part of the bank on which Collingham and Oliver had taken their station. Both uttered a cry of horror. But the idea of rendering aid appeared so hopeless that Oliver could only mutter a prayer for Heaven to interpose. Collingham's presence of mind, however, did not desert him. Leaping from his charger at a bound, he placed himself at the root of a tree that grew near the verge of the precipice, and the steed came on, snorting fire. One chance only intervened between the lady and destruction. It was an awful moment for all concerned. But, even in this emergency, such was Collingham's nerve that his heart was steady and his hand firm. One bound, one grasp, one tremendous effort such as might have torn an oak-tree from the ground, and the steed, arrested in its headlong and terrible course, was thrown back on its haunches, and next moment the lady, saved from the danger which threatened her, was lifted by Oliver Icingla from its struggling limbs and laid gently on the grass, unhurt, but fainting from agitation and terror.

At this moment the pages, falconers, and demoiselles who formed the hunting party came gradually up; and, as means were taken to restore the fainting fair one to consciousness, Oliver, with much curiosity, asked a falconer—

"Who may she be?"

"Why, young gentleman," replied the falconer, looking rather suspiciously at his questioner, "I could have sworn that was a question which thou hadst no occasion to ask. Marry, I'll scarce credit but that thy comrade knew better when he put his life so freely in peril to save hers. Would he have done as much to save a milkmaid, thinkest thou?"

"Mayhap the knight would, and mayhap he does know somewhat of the lady he has rescued," remarked Oliver, not without exhibiting impatience that he, albeit a young warrior who had fought in Castile and Flanders, should thus be played with. "I can answer only for myself and my own knowledge, sir falconer; and I tell thee, on my faith, that I, on my part, am ignorant who the lady is."

"Why, then, I will tell thee, sir squire," said the falconer, eyeing Oliver with an air of good-humoured superiority; "she is no less a person than our Lady the Queen."

CHAPTER XV

ISABEL OF ANGOULÊME

It was not, as has been mentioned, under the very happiest auspices that King John, in the autumn of 1200, celebrated his marriage with Isabel of Angoulême, at Bordeaux, when he was rather more than double her age, and with a reputation and temper decidedly the worse for the wear.

Isabel, however, had just the kind of imagination to be dazzled by the brilliancy of her position as wife of a man on whose head had been placed, not only the crown of England, but the coronal of golden roses which formed the ducal diadem of Normandy, and who, moreover, was heir to the provinces over which the old Counts of Anjou and the old Dukes of Guienne had reigned with power and authority. At first, therefore, she was highly gratified with the fortunate accident which had thrown her in King John's way, and substituted him, as a husband, in the place of the Count de la Marche; and, after the royal pair came to England, matters went pleasantly enough for years, so far as could be judged by appearances, and Isabel became the mother of two sons and three daughters—Henry, the eldest of her children, being a native of Winchester, where he first saw the light in 1207, while his father was pursued by the enmity of the Pope, and threatened by the hostility of the French king and the Anglo-Norman barons.

So far life went smoothly enough, to all appearance, with the King and Queen of England. But ere long their domestic affairs assumed a much less satisfactory aspect. In fact, Isabel did not find her position quite the bed of roses she had probably anticipated when she consented, for the sake of a crown, to give the Count de la Marche the slip. With a temper which became worse under the influence of trials and reverses, John not only proved a very disagreeable companion to the young lady whom he had carried off, so much to the mortification of the Continental magnate to whom she was betrothed, but he involved himself with women of various ranks, whose memories are still preserved in chronicle or tradition—from Constance, Countess of Chester, to the miller's wife of Charlton, whose frailty is annually commemorated by the Horn Fair, at the Feast of St. Luke—in a series of vagrant amours, which, besides being of a scandalous kind, could not fail to wound the queen's vanity and alienate her regard. Moreover, the splendour which had tempted her was fast disappearing. The coronal of Normandy was gone; the crown of England was in great danger of following. It really must have seemed that the glory was departing from the House of Plantagenet; and, after many musings and reflections, Isabel, doubtless, began to think very pensively of the sacrifice she had made to unite her fate with one who showed so little respect for her feelings. Unfortunately, she was not a woman to act with much discretion and dignity in very trying circumstances; and the serious domestic quarrels of John and Isabel gave rise to rumours and stories which were far from raising the king's character for humanity, or the queen's reputation as a wife, in the opinion of the world. "His queen," says the chronicler, speaking of John, "hates him, and is hated by him, she being an evil-minded woman, often found guilty of crimes, upon which the king seized her paramours, and had them strangled with a rope on her bed."

It is to be hoped, for Isabel's sake, that this story was merely the invention of an enemy. But little doubt can be entertained that the domestic quarrels were serious. Indeed, during the year when John submitted to Rome, matters reached such a stage between the royal pair, that the queen, then twenty-seven years of age, was consigned to the castle of Gloucester, and there kept, by command of her husband, in safe custody as a captive. A reconciliation, however, did take place, and there was some prospect of a better state of feeling in future. But when the scandal about John and Maude, the daughter of Robert Fitzwalter, reached the queen's ears, the matrimonial feud was renewed; and Isabel, almost frantic with jealous rage, declined to see her husband's face. Subsequently, however, a second reconciliation was brought about; and, after some correspondence, a meeting between the king and queen had been appointed to take place, when the sudden seizure of London by the confederate barons threw all John's plans into confusion, and forced him not only to postpone his visit to Isabel till a more convenient season, but to take measures for her security, lest she and her son, Prince Henry, should fall into the hands of the barons, and be used as instruments to complete his ruin.

It was at Savernake that Isabel was residing while the barons assembled at Stamford, and marched, by Brackley, and Northampton, and Bedford, to London. Only vague and indistinct intelligence as to their movements reached her in her retreat; and, buoyed up by the king's confident assurance that he would crush any attempts at insurrection, she delighted her soul with visions of reigning as a queen in reality, and occupied her time with repairing the palace of Savernake, and appears to have meditated housekeeping on a very extensive scale, since she added kitchens with fires for roasting oxen whole. It was not pleasant to be disturbed in the midst of such projects by news that her husband's crown was at stake; and, when Isabel had been conveyed home after her fright and her escape, and sufficiently restored to be informed that a knight and squire sent by the king were awaiting an audience to deliver a message, she felt instinctively that something was wrong; she wrung her hands, and exclaimed to her ladies—

"My heart misgives me; I fear me they bring tidings of woe."

But, at the same time, her impatience to know all made her anxious to receive them without delay; and, having arrayed herself so as to appear to the best advantage—for her vanity as woman was quite as strong as her ambition as queen—she ordered them to be conducted to her presence.

It was in a spacious chamber, royally adorned after the fashion of the age, and magnificent, according to the ideas of that generation, that Isabel of Angoulême, seated on an elevated chair resembling a throne, with two of her ladies behind her, received the knight and the squire. Her taste was displayed in her dress, which was such as to set off her natural charms. She wore a green robe, lined with sarcenet, and girdled round the waist with a belt sparkling with precious stones, and a collar of gold round her neck, which was graceful as the swan's, and her hair, not concealed, as that of ladies then usually was, with kerchief or veil, but inclosed in a caul of golden network, and ornamented with an elegant chaplet. Her bearing was majestic in the extreme, and as she sat formally waiting their coming, she looked every inch a queen. But no sooner did Collingham approach, and bend his knee, than she stared as if she had seen a ghost, and fluttered perceptibly.

"William de Collingham!" said she, after a pause, during which she seemed to examine her boots, which were curiously embroidered in circles round the ankles, "I deem that you were in exile or——"

"Or dead, you would have added, madam," said Collingham, smiling. "However, I am alive and in England, as you perceive, and, let me add, wholly at your service."

Isabel’s colour went and came so as to make Oliver Icingla look and wonder; but the knight took no notice of her agitation. As if to relieve her from the embarrassment which she appeared to feel, he drew forth the king’s letter, and, with great respect, presented it on bended knee. Isabel took it, tore it open, ran her eye over the contents, and uttered a cry of disappointment.

“Alas! alas!” exclaimed she, looking the picture of distress, “I have been deluding myself with the hope of receiving a far different message. It was but yesterday, as it seems to me, that my lord the king wrote these words:—‘I have now made peace with Philip of France, and I have the means of putting mine enemies under my feet, and making myself both king and lord in England;’” and, as Isabel repeated the words used by the king, she wept, and looked so lovely in tears that both the knight and squire were deeply moved.

“Madam,” said Collingham in a voice expressive of sympathy, “be not cast down by adversity, but take comfort. Fortune is much given to change. To-day she favours the king’s enemies; to-morrow she may declare for the king. But anyhow, royal lady, it is best to meet the future with a brave heart; and, for the present, the king deems it expedient that your safety and the safety of your son should be insured by a removal to Gloucester, which is a strong and loyal city, and to which I have orders to conduct you; so that, tide what may, you may feel that you and the prince are secure against the king’s enemies and your own.”

“Gloucester is a place associated in my mind with no pleasant memories,” said the queen with a sigh; “but it is vain to strive against fate, and I submit. I will be prepared to set out on the morrow, sir knight. Oh, vanity of vanities!” exclaimed she, sighing more deeply; “all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

And, sinking back in her chair, Isabel of Angoulême looked the picture of disappointment.

Next day Isabel of Angoulême and her son, Prince Henry, left Savernake under the escort of William de Collingham and Oliver Icingla, and journeyed by rapid stages to Gloucester, a city so strongly fortified and garrisoned that the queen might, within its walls, congratulate herself on the fact that there at least she was, in some degree, secure against any attempts on the part of the baronial party to interfere with her personal liberty, or any attempt on their part to get possession of her son.

CHAPTER XVI

TAKEN BY SURPRISE

It was neither the duty nor the inclination of William de Collingham and Oliver Icingla to linger in Gloucester. The city, indeed, was not without its attractions; and, with its castle and cathedral, and picturesque houses, from the balconies of which dames and demoiselles, the wives and daughters of the citizens, gazed with curiosity, and criticised the procession as Queen Isabel rode along the streets to the castle which had once been her prison, the place was sufficiently interesting and lively to have been agreeable under ordinary circumstances to such warriors as the knight and the squire. But both had orders to enact their parts elsewhere in the drama that was being played by the king and barons, and were animated, as was natural with persons of adventurous spirits, by a strong desire to hasten where their services were most likely to be appreciated. So, without losing a day, they mounted and rode out of the gate of Gloucester to go in different directions—Collingham to Lincoln, to join the garrison which, under Nicola de Camville, a noble dame of surpassing courage, held that city for the king; Icingla to make for Windsor, with a letter of importance which Isabel had intrusted to him, and intelligence that the queen and the prince had reached their destination, and that they were in safety behind the walls of Gloucester. For a short distance, however, their road lay in the same direction; and, riding side by side, they beguiled the way with conversation on the topics of the day, mingled with digressions on adventures in war and love.

At length they reached the point where their roads separated; and Collingham, as the elder and more experienced of the two, seemed to consider it his duty to favour his comrade with some wholesome advice for his guidance.

"Farewell, boy," said the knight, in kindly accents; "I would that you were to accompany me northward. But I know that you share not my regret, and mayhap it is better as it is, and the king's court will be more to your liking than the northern city, where Dame Nicola lords it so bravely over fighting men; for I perceive clearly that you have not only a keen eye and a ready tongue, but that, under your gay and light demeanour, you have a scheming brain, and ambitious resolves which you would fain gratify at all hazards."

"And wherefore not, sir knight?" asked Oliver, looking in Collingham's face with a smile which indicated considerable confidence in his destiny, if not in himself.

"Oh, by the mass!" replied Collingham, quickly, "I see no cause why you should not aspire as well as another; only bear this in mind, that Fortune, like other dames, often disdains the suit of those who are too ardent in wooing her; and be not in too much haste to climb the ladder of life; I, for one, have, in that endeavour, realised the truth of the homely proverb, 'The more hurry the less speed.'"

"On my faith," observed Oliver, thoughtfully, "I believe that most men do, in this life, learn the truth of that proverb when it is too late."

"Marry, that they do, sir squire," said Collingham, sadly. "But forewarned is forearmed. Fall not you into the common error, nor dream that you can scale lofty walls without long ladders; nor despise that discretion without which you will never sit, as lord, in the halls of the castles of which Hugh de Moreville has taken so firm a grip; nor what I have told you of yore of a certain fair demoiselle who stands to him in the relation of daughter and heiress."

Oliver smiled and shook his head, and played with the rein of his bridle.

"But farewell," continued Collingham, now speaking in a half-jocular tone. "May you prosper in war and love, and so act as never to merit the reproaches of the valiant, and as you grow in years may you grow in wisdom; for, as Solomon, that wise king of Israel, has told us, 'the merchandise thereof is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.'"

"And yet," remarked Oliver, "beshrew me if wisdom is not ever less lightly regarded than wealth in this world we inhabit."

"Not by all men," exclaimed Collingham. "For my part, I often envy the wise, but I never covet wealth save when I feel the pressure of poverty."

Oliver laughed.

"But as regards yourself, Master Icingla," added the knight, tightening his rein, and preparing to give his horse the spur, "again I say, be not over-ardent in your pursuits, and bear in mind that, in the struggle of life, battle is not to the strong, nor the race always to the swift. Marry, he was a wise old fellow who stood on the bridge built by Queen Maude at Stratford-le-Bow, and told the youngster who asked him about the way to a certain place that he would get there in time if he did not ride too fast. So now farewell."

And they parted; and Oliver Icingla rode on, and summoned all his intelligence to aid him in reaching Windsor, and bearing the queen's letter to her lord with as little hazard of interruption as possible.

Now Oliver had very little doubt of accomplishing his object with success; and for hours he rode on, availing himself of the trees to shade himself and his steed from the heat of the sun, and musing over the conversation he had held with Collingham at parting, not without visions of the kinswoman on whose charms the knight had taken several opportunities to expatiate. In fact, the youth became so absorbed in his own reminiscences and reflections, that he thought only vaguely of the circumstances under which his black steed Ayoub was carrying him from Gloucester, and even neglected to keep that strict watch around him which was so necessary, considering the state of the country—not even paying attention to the wild animals which ever and anon sprang up from the brushwood that bounded his path, and scampered away into the thicket, nor the maiden who filled her pitcher at the brook, nor the old woman who looked out from the solitary cottage as he rode past.

Suddenly, however, Ayoub pricked up his ears, and Oliver roused himself from his reverie, and, looking back, he perceived a small band of horsemen—they might be half a dozen in number—riding at a rapid pace, and, as he shrewdly conjectured, in eager pursuit of some object, and that object he instinctively felt was himself. Of course he could not divine their motive, but, whatsoever it might be, he expected it was not friendly; and, feeling still more certain on a second inspection that he was the game of which they were in pursuit, he resolved to lose no time in giving them the slip. Not hesitating longer, for the distance between himself and the horsemen was now trifling, and their manœuvres and gestures threatening, he turned suddenly into a by-path, plunged into the forest, rode cautiously on, making the best use of his eyes and ears, and succeeded so well that, ere long, he flattered himself

that he had evaded pursuit; and, after halting for a brief period at the hut of a forester to refresh his horse, he resumed his journey, and pursued his way in the firm belief that he had, at least, baffled one danger.

It was necessary, however, to think of rest and repose for the night; and, as evening fell, Oliver reined up at a substantial and flourishing wayside inn, which had three cranes for its sign, and was frequented by chapmen and other travellers between London and the West, and which was favourably known among wayfarers as an hostelry where good entertainment was furnished by Robert Goodwin to men with money, and wholesome provender to beasts of burden. Having secured quarters for the night, and having carefully looked to the comfort of his black steed, which was weary with its day's work, Oliver proceeded to the kitchen of the inn, and, while a fowl was being roasted for his supper, listened to the conversation of the chapmen who lounged about. At first, their conversation was merely about markets and the price of wool and wares, and had little interest for the boy-squire; but he had scarcely seated himself at supper, and begun to satisfy the cravings of hunger, which after his long day's ride were pretty keen, when the landlord entered with portly dignity, and the chapmen, who appeared to regard mine host as a political oracle, put some questions on public affairs which made Oliver prick up his ears.

"And so, Robin, lad," said one chapman, with curiosity, "thou deemest that England is not done with these broils, of which her heart is already so sick?"

"Ay, ay, Robin," chimed in the other, "thou hast a long head; are we not to have peace now, thinkest thou?"

"In truth, my masters," replied the host, shaking his head sapiently, "I see no more chance of peace for the present than I do of being Soldan of Babylon; and if I saw any chance I should value it but lightly. Appearances are nought when the passions of the great men are roused and their hands on the hilt of their swords. No later than Friday the barons deemed everything settled fair and square, and beguiled themselves with the notion that henceforth the king would comport himself in accord with their wishes. But mark, my masters, what happens: King John goes back to Windsor, takes a second thought, and leaves under night, doubtless to take thought as to the means to get the upper hand. 'Where has he gone?' askest thou. As well ask where the flaming star that threatened to burn the world up last year. When the news was carried to London, Constantine Fitzarnulph says, 'Let him go!' 'By Our Lady the Virgin!' exclaims the Lord Fitzwalter, 'he has gone for our destruction.' 'If we take not the better heed,' says the Lord de Vesci, 'we are dead men; but let us seize the queen and the prince and keep them as hostages.' So the Lord Hugh de Moreville, just returned from the North, and, albeit, somewhat ailing, hastens with a band of armed men to Savernake. But it was too late; the ladybird had flown off to Gloucester, and the Lord de Moreville rode by here, on his way home, no later than noon, with a frowning brow and an angry countenance. Credit me, my masters, they will never make up this quarrel till they have torn the land to pieces between them."

And, having hazarded this political prophecy, mine host, with a shrug of his shoulders, lounged leisurely from the apartment.

"I fear me, neighbour, that Robin Goodman speaks nothing but the truth," said one of the chapmen, gravely.

"In good sooth," said the other, "his words are but too like to come true. It is known full well that of late things have happened which portend calamities to the country. In some parts there have been showers of hail, with hailstones as big as goose-eggs; and at the mouth of the Thames they have caught fishes of strange shape, armed with helmet and shield like knights. If such be not signs of woe and war, I want to know, neighbour, what kind of signs this generation would have?"

The chapmen now sank into silence, and Oliver continued to sup, and to muse over the gossip he had just heard, when his ear caught the tread of horses and the ringing of bridles. Presently voices were heard, and an armed man presented himself at the door of the apartment, and, as the chapmen rose to make way—for, being men of peace, they cared not for too close a contact with those who were in the habit of carrying matters with the strong hand—Oliver, much to his dismay, recognised Ralph Hornmouth, a rough Northern squire who had accompanied Hugh de Moreville on the occasion of his visit to Oakmede on Christmas Eve. Events soon proved that the recognition was mutual.

"Sir squire," said Hornmouth, advancing to the place which Oliver occupied, "methinks you can call to mind my having seen your face before."

"It is possible," replied Oliver, coldly; "I have been much among fighting men, and many of them have seen my face."

"And I think I could even tell the name you bear and the errand on which you are riding," said Hornmouth, significantly.

"Mayhap," replied Oliver, haughtily; "but I have yet to learn what business you have either with my name or mine errand."

"So much," said the other, quickly, "that, knowing you to be Master Icingla, on your way with messages from Queen Isabel to the king, I am empowered by the Lord de Moreville to conduct you, in the first place, to his presence."

"To Hugh de Moreville's presence!" exclaimed Oliver, starting up. "I will be cut to pieces first."

"Resistance is vain," said Hornmouth, persuasively, "and it is better for all concerned that you yield to fate. You have already given us trouble sufficient in tracking you through field and forest this day since you gave us the slip so cunningly. By the Holy Rood, no man balks me twice in one day, either by cunning or force of arms!"

And as he spoke he stepped backward and made a signal, at which five others rushed in.

Oliver drew his sword, placed his back to the wall, and stood on his defence, while the chapmen hurried out, to avoid the risk of being mixed up in the fray or wounded by accident, and Oliver's adversaries advanced on him in a body. A brief struggle ensued, and the English squire's sword struck fire from more than one steel cap. But the odds against him were too unequal to be contended with, and the conflict lasted but a few moments. When it was over, Oliver, wounded, but still breathing defiance, lay prostrate on the floor, while two of the men bound his hands with cords; and within half an hour he was placed on his own horse, and, in bitter mood, found himself riding with a soldier on either hand, who had orders to despatch him on the spot in case he made any desperate effort to escape.

For hours Oliver did not deign to mutter a word; but at length, as the moon emerged from behind a cloud, and shone brightly, he perceived that they were within a park, such as generally in that day lay around the castle of a Norman baron.

“Whither are you conducting me?” asked he, eagerly.

“To Chas-Chateil,” was Hornmouth’s brief reply.

“I guessed as much,” replied Oliver. “And for what purpose?”

“You will learn when you arrive and enter,” was the reply.

As Hornmouth spoke, the dogs in the forester’s lodge barked at the tramp of horses, and the deer, which lay asleep on knolls in groups of some half-dozen, started and glided swiftly through the glades; and, as the horsemen moved on, a feudal castle, reared on the crest of an eminence and defended by rampart and moat, appeared in sight, the pale moonbeams resting on the walls.

“And this is Chas-Chateil?” said Oliver, as lights glanced from casement and loophole.

“Assuredly,” was Hornmouth’s answer. “Didst thou take it for Windsor?”

“No, by my faith,” replied Oliver; “only I was thinking it somewhat strange that I should come in such an unseemly plight to the place where I was cradled with such feudal pride.”

Ralph Hornmouth uttered an audible “Humph!” and in a few moments more the drawbridge was lowered, and Oliver rode in with his captors to the courtyard; and the great gate closed heavily behind, and he found himself where, a few hours earlier, he had, of all other places, least expected to be for the night—in one of the castles which were his mother’s inheritance, and under the same roof with, and in the power of, the person who, of all others on earth, he most disliked—Hugh de Moreville.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WINDSOR OF KING JOHN

"Whether," says an old writer, speaking of Windsor, "you regard the wholesomeness of the air, the natural beauty and strength of the situation of the place, the pleasant pastime ministered out of the forest, chases, and parks that are annexed unto it, the good neighbourhood of that noble river which runneth by it, or the respective commodity of that most flourishing city, that is not past half-a-day's journey removed from it, you will find it comparable to any prince's palace that is abroad, and far surmounting any that we have at home." But this was written long after Windsor was rebuilt and extended by William of Wykeham, at the command of the third Edward, when it stood regal in situation and aspect, with the standard of England waving from its battlements—a monument—and no unworthy monument—of the pride of the Plantagenets in peace, and of their prowess in war.

It was a very much less splendid edifice, however—as the reader may suppose—which, at the opening of the thirteenth century, stood on the brow of the hill looking over twelve fair counties, and with the Thames flowing at its feet; and it lacked even such means and appliances for rendering mediæval life comfortable and convenient as had come into fashion when, some sixty years later, Eleanor of Castile kept house almost constantly within its walls, and when the conqueror, of Evesham and Kakhow, in the midst of his grand projects of policy and war, was in the habit, on festive occasions, of making merry in the hall, and, as his people liked well to hear, playing "blindman's-buff" with his children more readily and as heartily as he played a deeper, but somewhat similar, game with Boniface VIII. and Philip the Fair.

No doubt, even in the time of Edward and Eleanor, Windsor was rather a gloomy building for a palace, according to modern ideas, and utterly unlike the regal pile which now occupies the ground—recalling the shadowy past, with a host of memories gratifying to the national pride. For it carries the mind, through five eventful centuries, to that era of English chivalry which could boast of the Black Prince, and which was marked by the institution of the Order of the Garter, and rendered glorious not only by Cressy, and Poictiers, and Navaretta, but by great naval victories over France and Spain, which, even at that early period, made England mistress of the sea. Still, before the reign of John, Windsor, originally founded by the Conqueror as a hunting seat, had witnessed right royal marriages and high feudal ceremonies—especially the marriage of Henry Beauclerc to his second wife, Adelicia of Louvaine, and the homage of the King of Scots and of the Norman barons to the Empress Maude—and had been so enlarged by succeeding kings, that, among the royal fortresses, it was regarded as second in importance only to the Tower of London when the Plantagenets began to rule England, and was determinedly fought for by the various personages—whether prelates or princes—whose quarrels disturbed England during the crusade and captivity of Cœur-de-Lion—Prince John among the number. Imagine an old Norman stronghold on the brow of the hill, with towers, and turrets, and battlements, grey walls, penetrated by loopholes to admit the light, gloomy halls, with huge chimneys and oaken rafters, long, straggling chambers, a garden and a vineyard, a chapel dedicated to Edward the Confessor, and parks stretching away into the forest abounding with wild cattle and beasts of game, and you will have a notion of what Windsor was when King John removed thither from the great metropolitan stronghold before meeting the Anglo-Norman barons at Runnymede, with the intention of granting their demands.

It was not on this occasion John's fortune to be very magnificently attended. In fact, he was every day becoming more unpopular; and many men who might otherwise have been inclined to arm in his behalf were awed into neutrality by the hostile bearing and the menacing attitude which the confederate barons assumed towards all who would not support their cause. Several men of consideration, however, were sufficiently under the influence of loyal memories to adhere steadfastly to the regal standard, though not much enamoured of a king who had brought his crown into such jeopardy; and the royal party, besides the Earls of Pembroke and Salisbury, and Warren, and Lord Hugh Neville, included eight bishops and about seventy knights. Besides, the papal legate accompanied John, and gave him the whole benefit of his influence, which, in spite of the counteracting influence of the primate, was not slight, nor to be lightly regarded, as both the primate and the barons well knew. Nevertheless, in spite of the presence of the legate and bishops, even the most steadfast of his partisans looked grave; and on the evening of Thursday, the 14th of June, John sat at supper in the gloomy great hall of Windsor with the expression of a man who saw the handwriting on the wall, and whose crown and sceptre were about to pass away.

At a late hour, when the Earl of Pembroke, and the legate, and the eight bishops had quaffed the "poculum charitatis," and been ceremoniously conducted to the apartments appropriated to their use, Hugh Neville, who was Keeper of the Great Seal, and one of the staunchest of the king's adherents, reached Windsor and was admitted to the presence of the king, whom he found pacing his chamber restlessly. Many a time, in seasons of depression, John had drawn consolation for the present and hope for the future from Neville's counsels; but now the Norman baron had a weight of care on his brow, and looked liker a man to need than to administer consolation and hope.

"Welcome, Hugh Neville," exclaimed John, endeavouring to be gay, "I am right glad to see your face, though it is somewhat longer than I could wish—as glad as if you had brought the philosopher's stone in your pocket."

Hugh Neville bowed in acknowledgment of the royal courtesy, and remained silent, that John might pursue the subject without interruption.

"I mean the stone which is said to turn everything into gold," continued John, "and beshrew me if gold would now come amiss. Had I but treasure, methinks I could not fail speedily to better my position."

"Sire," said Neville, gravely, "the best treasures of a king are the hearts of his people."

John looked angrily, supposing that the words conveyed some reproach; but seeing that none was intended he calmed himself, smoothed his ruffled brow, and answered—

"By my faith, Neville, it is too late to speak in such a strain now, when everything, almost even hope, is lost. Beshrew me if I feel not strongly at times that I would rather be laid to-morrow by the side of my father and mother in the abbey of Fontevraud than endure the humiliation of submitting to the triumph of my foes."

"Sire," replied Neville, "in this life we must take the thorn with the rose, the sweet with the bitter. But life is life after all; and a live dog is better than a dead lion."

"And yet," said John, sorrowfully, "you know full well that if Fitzwalter and his confederates are henceforth to have their own way, and to do what they list in England, I am like to lead a life compared to which that of a dog is

comfort and dignity. By St. Wulstan! I am like to be no better than a slave in mine own realm; and no being on earth is so contemptible as a despised king."

Hugh Neville was silent.

"Why speak you not?" asked John, sternly. "I want to hear what you would counsel me to do."

"Sire," replied Neville, frankly, "I was thinking that, if any quality would stand you in good stead in the present situation of affairs, it would be that which the Arabs say is the price of all felicity—I mean patience."

John's brow darkened, and his lip curled. It was not the advice which he wished his minister to give, and, being against the grain, was not well taken.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DAY OF RUNNYMEDE

It was Friday, the 15th of June, 1215, a week before Midsummer Eve, or the vigil of John the Baptist, and the sun shone fair on Runnymede—a large green meadow on the margin of the Thames, midway between Windsor and Staines—when thither came King John and the Anglo-Norman barons (the King from Windsor, and the barons from Staines) to bring their fierce dispute to a close, and give peace and security to England, by putting their signatures and the great seal of the realm to that important document since known as Magna Charta, and regarded with veneration as the foundation of England's laws and liberties.

Runnymede was not unworthy of being the scene of a ceremony so memorable in the annals of a nation which clung tenaciously to its old history and traditions, and which forced even the iron-handed, iron-clad, and strong-willed heirs of the Norman conquerors—the grandsons of the men who had fought under the banner of Duke William at Hastings—to treat the history and traditions with respect, and demand a restoration of the laws of Edward the Confessor, the last of the old royal line. In earlier days, when the Saxon kings had a palace at Old Windsor, Runnymede had been celebrated as a place where the people assembled to discuss public questions of great moment; and where now cattle graze and wild flowers spring, grew a gigantic oak, under the shade of which Alfred or Athelstane, perhaps, had occupied a throne of stone, and sat in royal state, when rallying their subjects to their standard to resist the inroads of the Danes.

It was around this oak, which the English regarded with a superstitious veneration, the origin of which might have been traced back to the time when the Druids performed their mysterious rites, and sacrificed and feasted under the shelter of its spreading branches, that the king and the barons met—John, who was attired in a gorgeous style, being attended by the Earl of Pembroke, Hugh Neville, Keeper of the Great Seal, the papal legate and eight bishops, and seventy knights—Fitzwalter and his confederates, who were in chain-mail, with long swords at their sides, having an array of fighting men which fully proved the mighty feudal power they possessed, and one sight of which must have convinced their sovereign that, on that day at least, they were masters, and that he was there simply to do their bidding.

Nor, to judge from John's countenance and demeanour, would it have been possible for a spectator, however acute or intelligent, to entertain any doubt that he was a willing actor in the solemn scene that was being enacted in presence of the legate and the bishops. When the charter, of which he well knew and understood the contents, was handed to him, he received it with alacrity, and signed it without a murmur expressive of reluctance, and looked on calmly, almost cheerfully, while the barons—each in his turn—set their signatures to it, and Hugh Neville, in his official capacity, appended the great seal of the realm. But now a circumstance occurred which brought the blood to John's cheek. In fact, it appeared that, after all this signing and sealing, the ceremony was not yet at an end, but that the barons had more demands to make.

"Now," said they, "we require security for the charter being faithfully observed.

"It is necessary, in the first place, that you should engage to send all foreign knights and fighting men out of the kingdom.

"It is necessary, in the second place, that we should be allowed to remain undisturbed for two months in possession of London, and the archbishop in possession of the Tower.

"It is necessary, in the third place, that a committee of twenty-five barons should be appointed as conservators of this charter of liberties, and to decide all claims in conformity with its provisions."

On hearing so many fresh demands John flushed and started with surprise, and his brow darkened. But he cast a glance over the formidable body of knights, and squires, and men-at-arms whom the barons had brought to overawe him, and, feeling the necessity of being calm, he checked his rising indignation, and answered calmly,

"My lords, I do not deny that I am taken by surprise; as, in truth, I well may be when I think of your demands. Nevertheless, I object not to accede so far as consists with my honour. I will send the foreign knights and soldiers out of the kingdom; I will leave the city of London in your hands, and the Tower in the hands of the archbishop, for the space of two months; and I consent to the appointment of a committee of twenty-five barons as conservators of the charter."

It was clear—so thought the confederates—that the king would yield anything; and the names of the twenty-five conservators were read. They were Robert Fitzwalter, Robert de Roos, William Albini, Eustace de Vesci, Humphrey Bohun, Roger and Hugh Bigod, William de Fortibus, Richard and Gilbert de Clare, Gilbert Delaval, John Fitzrobert, Geoffrey Mandeville, William de Huntingfield, John de Lacy, William de Lumvallei or Lanvally, Richard de Montpellier, William Malet, Roger and William de Moubray, William Marshal the younger, Richard Percy, Sayer de Guency, Geoffrey de Say, and Robert de Vere—all either earls or barons of great power, and maintaining great feudal state, but not by any means men who had ever had a generous thought for the welfare of the English race, till they found themselves at issue with the king as to the scutages, and found also that they could not make head against him without getting the nation on their side.

But for the time being they were playing the part of patriots and having it all their own way. So they deemed it not unsafe to go a step farther and make another demand.

"It is, moreover, necessary," said they, addressing the king, "that you should give a promise in writing never to apply to the Pope for a dispensation to relieve you from the engagements into which you have now entered."

"My lords," said John, with undisguised astonishment in his face, "I have consented to your keeping the city and Tower of London, and to the committee of conservators, and I will send without delay all foreign knights out of the kingdom; but," added he, resolutely, "I will pledge myself no further, be the consequences what they may. Nay," added he, interrupting Langton, who was beginning to speak, "I cannot and will not listen further;" and, rising from his seat, John walked deliberately to where his knights were stationed, mounted his horse, and rode slowly away to Windsor.

But his departure was by no means triumphant. Not more than seventy knights accompanied him—a mere handful of armed men compared to the host of enemies whom he left behind; and even of the seventy knights very few were zealous in his cause. Dismal as had frequently been his prospects, they had never before been at so low an

ebb. But he did not yet despair. Time and patience might still enable him to prevail over all the difficulties that beset him; and he rode up the steep that leads to Windsor revolving plans for emancipating himself and his crown from the feudal and ecclesiastical trammels in which both were bound.

Arrived at Windsor, John dismounted and entered the castle, and gave way to the wrath he had been hoarding up. Neither food nor drink did he take. He beat his breast, tore his hoary hair, rolled on the floor, rose up all the more violent for the exertion, cursed the day he was born, swore like a trooper and raved like a maniac, and all day stamped so furiously about that his attendants feared that his reason was going. As evening fell, however, he recovered his equanimity, and instantly took measures for disconcerting the plans of his enemies. As night deepened he summoned two of his knights and despatched them to the Continent. One was commissioned to repair to Rome for the purpose of invoking the aid of the Pope; the other to Guienne and Flanders to secure the swords of as many mercenaries as could be tempted to England by the promise of pay and the prospect of plunder. This done, John at length sat down to supper, and made up for lost time by eating ravenously and drinking copiously, and as the red wine sparkled in his golden cup his imagination conjured up visions of beheaded barons and burned castles.

“By God’s teeth!” said he to William de Hartarad, his cup-bearer, “it shall be done.”

“Sire,” replied the cup-bearer, soothingly, “be calm and chafe not over much. It were best to sleep over your project; a man’s pillow is often his safest counsellor in times of difficulty. May you find it such!”

Having supped, John sought his chamber, which was fragrant with the Eastern spices then burned in the sleeping apartments of kings and princes, and threw himself on his bed of red velvet, richly embroidered with gold and silver. But such was the excitement through which he had passed during the day that he invoked sleep in vain. Restless and feverish, he rose about midnight and looked out on the park which reposed peacefully under the light of the moon. Suddenly a new idea took possession of his mind, and for awhile he pondered deeply.

“I seem,” said he to himself, “to see a hand beckoning me away, and to hear in mine ear a voice saying, ‘Arise, king, and go hence; it is not good for you to be here.’ By the light of Our Lady’s brow! I will be gone. Rather let me herd with the beasts of the forest than be further humbled by these barons, on whose trunkless heads the sun shall ere long shine.”

He then awoke the squire who slept at the door of his chamber, and ordered horses to be saddled and men to be mounted; and, just as morning began to dawn and the song of the nightingale ceased, and the antlers of the deer stirred above the fern, and the red in the east heralded the rise of the sun, the king, having mounted, left the castle and rode away through the park of Windsor, to which he was never to return.

“Now,” soliloquised he, “let mine enemies tremble, for I will oppose guile to guile and force to force. Revenge is sweet, and revenge, at least, I may enjoy; and even if Fate do her worst I am prepared. Rather than be their slave I will commit my soul to God and my body to St. Wulstan.”

CHAPTER XIX

CHAS-CHATEIL

On the summit of a hill looking over the vale of the Kennet stood the castle of Chas-Chateil, surrounded by a park well wooded, and stocked with deer and beasts of game. It had been built in the reign of Stephen by Henry de Moreville, a great baron who flourished in the twelfth century and bore an eagle on his shield, after his return from the Holy Land; and as the Morevilles were favourites with the second Henry, it escaped destruction during the time when the politic king razed so many feudal fortresses to the ground. Originally it was an ordinary Norman castle, consisting of a basecourt, the sides of the walls being fortified with angles, towers, buttresses, battlements, and hornworks. But it was now a far prouder and more magnificent edifice—a place which, if well garrisoned and provisioned, might, before the invention of cannon, have held out long against a besieging army.

In fact, few men in England had a more thorough perception of the utter insecurity of national affairs at that time than Hugh de Moreville. Having long foreseen the crisis, he had not neglected to set his house in order; and Chas-Chateil had, consequently, been much enlarged and strengthened, and much improved both as regarded the appearance which it presented in its exterior and as regarded the comfort which it afforded to the inmates. At morning, indeed, when seen at sunrise it had quite a gay and laughing aspect; and in the interior everything was arranged with a view of rendering feudal life as tolerable and pleasant as possible. The outer galleries glittered with the armour of the sentinels, and the towers were all bright with their new gratings, and the roofs bordered with machicolations, parapets, guard-walks, and sentry-boxes; and on passing the chapel, dedicated to St. Moden—the patron saint of the Morevilles—and entering the court, with its fountain and its cisterns, you found the kitchens, with their mighty fireplaces on one side, and stables and hen-houses and pigeons on the other side, and in the middle, strongly defended, the donjon, where were kept the archives and the treasure of the house. Below were the cellars, the vaults, and, what were sometimes as well filled as either, the prisons, in which unhappy captives pined and groaned; and above, and only to be reached by one spacious stone stair, the apartments occupied by the family and dependants of the lord of the castle—the great hall, the lady's bower, the guest-room, the bed-chambers, and the numerous cribs necessary for the accommodation of the multitudinous domestics, who, arrayed in the picturesque costume and speaking the quaint language of the period, and wearing the Moreville eagle, under the names of demoiselles, waiting-women, squires, pages, grooms, yeomen, henchmen, minstrels, and jesters, formed the household of a feudal magnate.

But when Oliver Icingla entered the castle of his maternal ancestors, the hour was so late that everything was quiet, most of the household having betaken themselves to repose. Nor, in truth, had he any opportunity of making observations. With very little ceremony he was told to dismount from his horse; and having, not without a sigh, parted from Ayoub, he was conducted, manacled as he was, up the great stone stair, and into the interior of the castle, and that with such haste that he had scarcely time to take breath, far less to collect his thoughts, till, after passing through several galleries, he found himself in a somewhat dimly lighted room. There, covered with a mantle of minever, Hugh de Moreville was stretched on a couch, his favourite hound by his side.

The Norman baron was occupied with his last meal for the day—that cold collation, generally taken at nine o'clock, and known as "liverie." But it was evident he was merely going through a form, and that he could not taste the viands. In fact, De Moreville was suffering severely from gout—the result of indulgence in good cheer during his brief stay in the capital—and his temper, never celestial, was so severely tried by pain and twitches, that, at times, he was inclined to mutter imprecations the reverse of complimentary on king, barons, citizens, the laws of Edward the Confessor, even the Great Charter itself.

"What ho, young kinsman!" said he, recovering himself after a moment, and speaking in a bantering tone; "I hardly deemed myself such a favourite of Fortune as that she should send you under the roof of Chas-Chateil; but I rejoice to see you. Our last meeting was unlucky in this, that we parted without your fully understanding me. By St. Moden, you shall now comprehend my meaning!"

"My lord," replied Oliver, speaking calmly, though his blood boiled with indignation at the tone in which he was addressed, "I thank you for welcoming me to the castle which is the inheritance of my mother; albeit I cannot help confessing that it would have been more pleasing to come under different circumstances. However, of that anon. Meantime, vouchsafe to inform me for what reason I have been hunted like a robber by your men-at-arms, and dragged here forcibly against my will. I demand to know."

De Moreville laughed mockingly, and raised his eyes to the roof of the chamber, whereupon were carved some grotesque figures, each of which might be intended to represent that important bird the Moreville eagle.

"On my faith!" answered he at length, "I marvel much that any youth with the Moreville blood in his veins can be such a dullard as to ask such a question. But an answer you shall have. You were seized and brought hither because you were engaged in attempts at variance with the laws of the land and the authority of the barons, the conservators of the charter signed at Runnymede."

"Answer me two questions," said Oliver, sternly. "Am I a prisoner? and if so, is my life aimed at?"

"Everything depends on yourself. Meanwhile, you have letters from Queen Isabel to King John. Hand them to me."

"You do me great injustice," said Oliver, "in supposing it possible that, if intrusted with letters, I should render them to any but the person for whose hand they were intended."

"Is that your answer?" fiercely demanded De Moreville.

"It is my answer," retorted Oliver, with equal heat; "and it is an answer more courteous than you deserve."

"By the bones of St. Moden!" exclaimed De Moreville, with a frowning brow, "I can no longer brook such obstinacy! May I become an Englishman if I bend or break not your proud spirit ere the year is much nearer midsummer!" and he blew a silver whistle that lay at his side, the sound of which instantly brought Ralph Hornmouth and another man-at-arms into the chamber.

"Ho, there! Ralph Hornmouth," said De Moreville, fiercely, "give me the letters which this varlet has about him. Methinks, from the direction his eye took when I mentioned them, he has them in his boots."

Hornmouth and his comrade obeyed; and Oliver, notwithstanding a brave struggle, had the bitter mortification,

while prostrated on his back and held down, of seeing the queen's letter taken from his boot and handed to the Norman baron; but no second letter could be found, for the very excellent reason that no such letter had ever been in existence.

Meanwhile, De Moreville perused the epistle slowly, and as he read, his countenance evinced disappointment. It seemed, indeed, that the letter did not contain the kind of information he expected; and he turned to Oliver, who was again on his feet, almost weeping from rage, and regarding his kinsman with angry glances.

"You will now inform me," said he, like a man determined on having an answer by fair or foul means, "whither William de Collingham has gone, and with what intent."

"Dog of a Norman!" exclaimed Oliver, giving way to his fury, "I would not answer such a question to save my body from the bernicles. Villain and oppressor, do your worst; I defy you and your myrmidons."

"I can waste no more time in bandying words," said De Moreville, significantly. "Conduct this varlet to the blind chamber of the prison-house," continued he, addressing Hornmouth, "and give him a taste of the brake. The blind chamber has, in its day, brought still worse madmen than he is to their senses, and the brake has proved too much for the endurance of hardier limbs."

Oliver Icingla shuddered. He rapidly recalled to memory the stories he had often heard from men of English race of the atrocious cruelties perpetrated by Norman barons in earlier reigns on their unfortunate prisoners; how one victim was starved to death; how a second was flung into a cellar full of reptiles; how a third was hung up by the thumbs; how a fourth was crippled in a frame which was so constructed that he could not move an inch in any direction; and how a fifth was suspended from a sharp collar round his neck, with his toes just resting on the ground. It was natural enough that Oliver should shudder as the recollection of such things flashed through his brain; and as they did so his blood ran cold, and his heart beat fast and loud. But he was game to the backbone; and De Moreville, who watched him narrowly, could not but marvel that there was not, even for a moment, any appearance of the slightest inclination to show the white feather.

"I am in your power," said he, in a firm voice, as he threw back his head proudly. "You can do with me as you please; but bear in mind that whatever you do will be at your peril."

"Away with him!" cried De Moreville, with an impatient gesture; and Oliver was led from the chamber.

CHAPTER XX

OLIVER'S CAPTIVITY

WHEN Oliver Icingla was drawn away by Ralph Hornmouth from the presence of Hugh de Moreville, he felt conscious that, for the time being, he was endowed with more than the obstinacy of the mule—with an obstinacy which he felt to be invincible. A strange reaction had taken place after his display of rage and excitement; and he was as calm as contempt could make a human being. As for the blind chamber to which the Norman baron had ordered him to be consigned, he manned himself to face its horrors, be they what they might, without flinching; and he vowed internally, no matter what torments they made him endure, that he would tell them nothing, but that he defied their worst malignity—not even that he was quite unaware of the object of Collingham's journey northward, which he might have stated with perfect truth, for he only knew that the knight was going, in the first place, to Lincoln.

Much surprised, however, was Oliver when, after being conducted through a long gallery, he found himself led into an apartment which, so far from being a chamber of horrors, neither appeared worse nor more uncomfortable than many it had been his lot to occupy; and still more surprised was he, while gazing round sullenly, that Ralph Hornmouth, after carefully closing the door and ordering his comrade to keep watch outside, undid the bands which fettered his hands, and left him free, as if, instead of being a captive, he was in the chamber as a guest.

"By the rood, young gentleman," said Hornmouth, in a more kindly tone than he had yet used, "but that I know how loud young game-cocks can crow when they are roused to excitement, I should marvel at your courage. I was in dread that my lord would strike you dead where you stood; and, had you been any other living mortal than you are such must have been your fate. You little know him, or you would be less venturesome. When he swears by his faith, he is safe enough; when he swears by St. Moden, his wrath is only rising; but when he swears by the bones of St. Moden, his temper has reached such a pitch of heat, that it were safer to pull the Devil by the beard than to cross him further—even a hair's breadth."

"Sir squire, is this what the Lord Hugh de Moreville calls the blind chamber?" asked Oliver, without noticing the henchman's observations.

"Nay, by rood and mass, and well for you that it is not," answered Hornmouth, smiling grimly. "It is no place for birds of your feather, I ween, and so would you were you there till cock-crow. My lord spake in his wrath, but he will think better of it ere another sun shines; and were I simple enough to take a kinsman of his, with the blood of Moreville in his veins, thither to-night, my reward would be the dule tree on the morrow. I have more regard for my neck, Master Icingla, than you seem to have for your limbs. Cog's wounds! but I cannot think enough of the courage with which you flouted and defied my lord, at whose frown I have seen so many tremble;" and the rude soldier eyed Oliver with the genuine admiration which a display of real courage seldom fails to inspire.

Having given warning that any attempt to escape would be certain destruction, and that any attempt to corrupt the gaolers would only lead to a close confinement, Hornmouth took the captive by the hand.

"Beware," whispered he, "of doing aught to place thee in the power of the governor of the castle. Sir Anthony Waledger detests thy race and thy name, and is marvellous valiant when dealing with enemies who cannot injure him. Good night, and droop not; all will yet be well."

Oliver was then left to solitude and his own reflections, which were none of the pleasantest. Of all men in England, Hugh de Moreville was the last into whose hands he could have wished to fall; and, though reassured in some measure by the words of the squire, he could not feel certain, after what had passed, that he might not, in some unlucky hour, be exposed to personal violence. However, after worrying himself with gloomy thoughts for hours, he gradually felt sleep stealing over him, and soon exchanged his torturing reflections for dreams of the palace of Savernake and the city of Gloucester. Nor did he awake till he was shaken by the arm; and, as he looked up, one sight of the bronzed face of Hornmouth brought all the events of yesterday to his memory.

"Young gentleman," said De Moreville's squire, respectfully, "it is as I foretold. My lord wishes you no harm; but I tell you frankly, that you have no more chance of leaving this castle till the war is over than of going to Fairyland, if such a place there be. Wherefore be ruled by my advice, and content yourself. Make the best of a bad bargain, and make good cheer. I will forthwith send the wherewithal, and give orders for all your wants being supplied, save thy liberty, which is not mine to give. I myself am on the point of undertaking an expedition to the castle of Mount Moreville, and may not return for many months. But fear not. Be quiet. Make no vain attempt to escape; and I swear to you, by mass and rood, that you are as safe in this chamber as if you sat in your mother's hall."

"By the Holy Cross!" exclaimed Oliver, "you give me cold comfort. Deem you that it can be otherwise than irksome to an Icingla to lie here like a useless log, while others are pressing on in the race of life, and marking their valour on the crests of foemen? True, I am an Englishman, and I have none of the vague aspirings about conquering kingdoms and principalities with which so many Norman warriors delude their imaginations. Still I want to do my duty and to keep my sword from rusting, and to enjoy freedom and free air. But I see you mean me well, good squire, and I thank you with all my heart; albeit I can hardly in my heart forgive you for having come with such odds at your back, that I had not even a chance of avoiding what I loathe most—I mean captivity."

Ralph Hornmouth laughed and withdrew; and Oliver, rising from his couch, resolved to his utmost to reconcile himself to his fate, and, moreover, began to indulge in vague hopes.

"Collingham may learn my fate, or the faithful Styr," soliloquised he as he devoured his morning meal with the appetite of a Saxon thane in the days of King Ethelred; "and if they do, by the Holy Cross, Chas-Chateil, thick as may be its walls, and well guarded as may be its doors and gates, will not long hold me as a captive. Holy Edward be my aid meanwhile!"

But it cannot be very easy for a young warrior, in a fighting age, who has fleshed his maiden sword, and taken part in two fields of fame, especially at the age of eighteen, to force himself to be philosophical in captivity; and Oliver Icingla, being intended by nature for a man of action, soon grew weary of compelling himself to be patient. Indeed, as days and weeks passed, the dulness and monotony of his existence, and the thought of his home and his mother's grief, depressed him to such a point that he experienced something like intolerable woe. Hugh de Moreville he never saw. Ralph Hornmouth did not reappear to bid him take comfort. The gaoler performed his functions in silence, and, when questioned, replied in monosyllables. During his brief captivity on the continent, Oliver had been

in attendance on a great earl, and daily in contact with knights and squires, and he had borne it easily. But he feared that this solitary incarceration would, if prolonged, break his spirit.

One advantage, indeed, he had in his imprisonment; for the window of his chamber commanded a prospect of the vale of the Kennet, and barred as the window was, he could catch glances of the world from a distance, and sometimes even see not only peaceful travellers, but bands of armed men, passing and repassing. Still this only reminded him of his own sad plight, for everybody and everything seemed free but himself. The river flowed on; the trout leaped in the clear water; the heron perched on the stones by the grassy margin; the eagle soared over the castle; the squirrel climbed the trees; and the deer ran free in the chase. Even the serf who toiled in the fields around Chas-Chateil appeared to enjoy a happy lot, in comparison with the only son of the woman to whom Chas-Chateil rightfully belonged. But there was consolation at hand.

It happened that the chamber appropriated to Oliver was on a level with a battlement or outer gallery constructed to resemble a terrace, and known as “the ladies’ walk.” Nobody, however, seemed to frequent it; and Oliver, whose knowledge of feudal strongholds enabled him to comprehend its purpose, had concluded that Hugh de Moreville’s daughter was being educated in a convent, or under the roof of some noble matron; for, proud as they were, the feudal dames did not disdain to undertake the tuition of their sex; and he had concluded, moreover, that there were no ladies under the roof of Chas-Chateil, not, perhaps, without speculating whether or not there might be in the event of its becoming his own, when he was unexpectedly convinced that, on this point at least, he was mistaken.

It was the evening of a long, bright, merry summer day, about the close of July, and Oliver was standing at his window looking out on the landscape, now watching the men-at-arms engaged in athletic exercises, and now brooding dismally over his evil fortune, and cursing his cruel captivity, when his ear suddenly caught the sound of soft voices, and his eye was attracted by an apparition which instantly changed the whole current of his thoughts.

And what was this apparition?

A very lovely Norman demoiselle, dressed in a simple robe of white, and attended by two maidens almost as captivating as herself.

CHAPTER XXI

DE MOREVILLE'S DAUGHTER

A GIRL not more than seventeen, with eyes of deep blue, fair face, features slightly aquiline, a soft and somewhat pensive, but still noble expression, her auburn hair not almost entirely concealed, as was the fashion of the court ladies of the period, but flowing free over her shoulders; and her graceful figure not decorated or deformed as theirs were with meretricious ornaments, but arrayed in a simple robe of white, girdled at the slender waist with a belt of blue—such was the Norman demoiselle who suddenly appeared before the eyes of Oliver Icingla and put his melancholy musings to flight. Nor could he doubt who she was, seeing her where he did.

"By the Holy Cross!" he exclaimed to himself, "surely that is no other than the demoiselle who has so often been present to me in my dreams and visions! And yet she can be none other than the daughter of my worst woe—she whom the Lord Neville mentioned as so fascinating and so fair. Verily, my lord was guilty of no exaggeration when he spoke so highly in praise of her grace and comeliness!"

Beatrix de Moreville could not know what eyes were upon her, or possibly she would not have lingered so long that July evening on "the ladies' walk." However, if she had known all, her vanity would perhaps have been gratified; for, in spite of his strong antipathy to the father, Oliver was enchanted with the daughter, and, when she vanished with her waiting-women at the sound of the vesper bell, he devoutly prayed that she might return again and again to cheer the solitude which he had begun so much to abhor. In fact, although he knew it not, he was, as old Froissart said on a similar occasion, "stricken to the heart with a sparkle of fine love that endured long after." All that evening she occupied his thoughts; and, after comparing her to the various heroines of the chivalrous romances then in vogue, always giving her the preference, he finally fell asleep to dream that he was being put by Hugh de Moreville into a frightful instrument of torture, and that he was saved from the threatened infliction by De Moreville's daughter.

Next day appeared marvellously long to Oliver, so impatiently did he await the coming of evening and the coming of the fair being who had made so strong an impression on his fancy. Again she appeared, and evening after evening during August, when from the ramparts of Chas-Chateil the rustics could be seen gathering in the yellow corn, always remaining until the bat begun to hunt the moth and the vesper bell sounded. Oliver grew more and more interested, and thought of her more highly the oftener he saw her; for, as the old chronicler puts it, "love reminded him of her day and night, and represented her beauty and behaviour in such bewitching points of view, that he could think of nothing else, albeit her father had done him grievous wrong."

But Oliver Icingla was a youth of mettle, and not the youth to be content to worship Beatrix de Moreville at a distance as an Indian worships his star. Naturally enough, he began to form plans for making this Norman damsel aware of his existence, and not altogether without success. In fact, fortune very highly favoured the captive Englishman in this respect. The Lady Beatrix was frequently in her evening walks accompanied by a very devoted attendant in the shape of a dog, and this dog sometimes found its way to the rampart without its mistress. Oliver from his window very easily made the dog's acquaintance, and speedily converted the acquaintance into a friendship so close that it would not pass the place of his incarceration without giving audible signs of recognition. This led to important consequences.

One evening late in August, when Oliver's captivity had lasted for more than ten weeks, he was posted, as usual, at his window, looking through the bars, when Beatrix de Moreville passed close to him with her dog and her maidens. The dog stopped, looked up in his face, wagged his tail, and began to spring up towards him, and the lady naturally enough turned her eyes in the same direction to see what was the cause of her canine favourite's excitement. Such an opportunity might never, as Oliver thought, occur again, and he was not likely, under the circumstances, to allow it to pass for lack of presence of mind.

"May God and Our Lady bless thee, noble demoiselle!" said he, not without a slight tremulousness in his voice. "I would that, like thee, I had the privilege of walking at freedom; for methinks that freedom, ever sweet, is doubly sweet on such an eve as this."

Oliver sighed as he spoke. The lady appeared startled, and looked embarrassed; but influenced, doubtless, by courtesy, she stayed her steps and gazed timidly through the iron bars on the face of the speaker, so young, so fair, and yet so melancholy.

"Pardon my boldness, noble demoiselle," continued Oliver, "and fear not. I am no wild beast, though thus caged, but an English squire who was taught from childhood by a widowed mother to serve God and the ladies; and I comprehended my duties in both respects even before I was apprenticed to chivalry in the castle of my kinsman, the noble Earl of Salisbury. But I am well-nigh beside myself with this captivity. Credit me, that hardly have I heard the sound of any one's voice for weeks, save when visited by the holy man who is the chaplain in this castle; for my gaoler is the most churlish of churls, and answers only with a sullen scowl when I address him. To all men, I doubt not, captivity is irksome; but to me it is not only irksome but horrible; for I am English by birth and lineage, and of all nations it is well known that the English most thoroughly abhor the thought of being deprived of liberty."

"Gentle sir," said the Lady Beatrix, speaking with an effort and not without agitation, "I know not what you would have me to do. Is it that you wish me to speak to my lord and father on your behalf? If such be your object, say so, I pray you, and it shall be done forthwith."

"Nay, noble demoiselle," replied Oliver, shaking his head; "that were vain as to appeal to the wolf of the forest to abstain from preying on the deer in the chase. He would not listen."

"But he ever listens to me—he shall listen!"

"By the Holy Cross!" exclaimed Oliver, giving way to the enthusiasm which the presence of Beatrix de Moreville created, "I marvel who could refuse to listen to a being so gentle and beautiful. However," added he, checking himself as he perceived that she was startled by the warmth of his speech, "I will not so far trespass on your generosity as to accept your intercession: nor, in truth, could it avail ought. Between the Lord Hugh de Moreville and myself there has never been much love, and we have twice parted of late not just the best of friends. Moreover, I chance to be of kin through my mother to the house of Moreville, and the Lord Hugh dislikes me more on that account than mayhap he would otherwise do. Wherefore accept my thanks and leave me to my fate. Events have ere

this opened stronger doors than keep me here; and credit me, that when I do leave this castle where I have passed so many weary, weary hours, I shall at least carry with me one pleasant memory—the memory of the fairest face that I have seen in England, France, or Spain. Adieu, noble demoiselle; may the saints—especially Our Lady—ever watch over thy welfare and safety!”

Beatrix de Moreville moved on pensively, and not without indulging in pity for the young warrior whose language was so earnest and whose plight was so sad. Nor did the knowledge that he was there prevent her returning to the battlements to breathe the evening air; nor, so far as can be ascertained, did she make a point of avoiding further conversation. In fact, she became inspired with a very dangerous interest in her father’s captive, and contrived not only to learn who and what he was, but how he had fought at Muradel and Bovines, and much more about his parentage and his history than was likely to add to her peace of mind. In short, the daughter of De Moreville, the Norman of Anglo-Normans, passed the winter of 1215 dreaming of her English kinsman and picturing him as a hero. Ere the spring of 1216 came he was costing her many a sigh and many a tear.

As for Oliver Icingla, he almost felt that he was content with his condition. It would be too much to say that if his prison doors had been opened he would have said with the heroine of the ballad of “The Spanish Lady’s Love”—

“Full woe is me:
Oh, let me still sustain this kind captivity!”—

but certainly he did find his prison infinitely less intolerable than it had been when he first entered it, cursing the fate that had sent him thither. At times, however, the old spirit seized him, and he stamped about like a caged lion, and startled the sullen gaoler by his explosions of rage.

“On my faith,” said he to himself one day in April, after having worn himself out by the intensity of his ravings, “never did the hart pant for the water-brook more than I pant for freedom and air and exercise, and yet the chance seems as far away from me as ever. I marvel how long I have been here. Ha! I have lost count. By St. Edward, I fear me that ere long I shall lose my senses!”

As Oliver thus soliloquised he went to the window, and, seating himself on the broad sill of stone, looked out on meadows and woodlands which spring, “that great painter of the earth,” had once more robed in green, and on the ploughed fields to which, in spite of war and rumours of war, the husbandmen were committing the seeds, with every hope of reaping in due season. Almost as he did so, his ear caught the sound of a musical instrument and of a voice singing a Castilian ballad in very indifferent Spanish, but in accents which were so familiar that his heart leaped within him. Oliver listened, and as he listened the singer sang—

“They have carried afar into Navarre the great Count of Castile,
And they have bound him sorely, they have bound him hand and heel;
The tidings up the mountains go, and down among the valleys—
To the rescue! to the rescue, ho! they have ta’en Fernan Gonsalez!”

Interrupting without ceremony, and taking the ballad out of the singer’s mouth, Oliver repeated the verse at the top of his voice, so emphasising several of the words as to leave little room for mistake as to his meaning. As he did so he observed a figure climb slowly but without difficulty up a parapet, at such a distance from him that there was no possibility of communicating by words; but the figure, on reaching the top of the parapet, reared itself and stood in the form of a boy dressed in crimson, holding some musical instrument in his hand, and looking scrutinously from window to window, and from casement to casement, apparently with the object of discovering from which had come the voice of the person who had caught up his song. Oliver, to aid him, took his cap, put his hand between the bars of the window, and dexterously tossed the cap in the air. The signal was observed and had the desired effect. The singer returned it, and having dropped nimbly to the ground disappeared, while Oliver, withdrawing into the interior of his chamber, began to marvel what consequences would flow from this unexpected incident.

But days and weeks elapsed, and nothing came to alter his situation; and Oliver, thinking he was forgotten by those on whom he had been relying, was musing over the song that had raised his hopes, and ever and anon asking himself with a smile whether or not it would be possible to persuade De Moreville’s daughter to play the part of the infanta who bribed the alcaydé with her jewels to set free the great Count of Castile, and who then fled with him to his own land, when there occurred an event which changed the aspect of his affairs.

It was somewhere about the middle of May, 1216, and Oliver had been nearly eleven months in captivity, and Hugh de Moreville, with Ralph Hornmouth in attendance, had been many months absent from Chas-Chateil, being, in fact at the court of Paris; and the castle, which was well garrisoned, was under the command of a Norman knight who had seen about fifty winters, and who rejoiced in the name of Anthony Waledger. He was a man of courage and prudence, Sir Anthony Waledger, and had married the “lady governess” of Beatrix de Moreville, she being a distant kinswoman of the house. And Hugh de Moreville had the most implicit confidence in her husband’s fidelity and discretion. It is true that the old knight was a man of violent temper and intemperate habits, and much given to brimming goblets and foaming tankards. Besides, he had the character of having sometimes in moments of danger shown too much of the discretion which is the better part of valour. But De Moreville overlooked his weaknesses, believing him to be incapable of betraying his trust or failing in his duty. Moreover, the knight had faith in his garrison, and felt so secure that he would readily have staked his head on holding out Chas-Chateil against any army in England till the arrival of succour; and his confidence was all the greater because he knew that he had the means—no matter how closely the castle might be invested—of communicating with the baronial party in time to be rescued, for there was a subterranean passage, the existence of which Waledger believed to be known to none save himself and the baron whom he served. In this he was partly wrong, inasmuch as Styr, the Anglo-Saxon, from his residence at Chas-Chateil in the days of Edric Icingla, was aware that there was this underground passage, and even knew the chamber that communicated with it. But he knew no more, and if put into it could no more have guessed where it was to lead or where it was to terminate than De Moreville’s horse-boy, Clem the Bold Rider, or Richard de Moreville, the baron’s nephew, who were equally ignorant that such a passage existed. Everything, however, tended to inspire the governor of Chas-Chateil with a feeling of security. Indeed, over his cups he was in the habit of talking big to De Moreville’s knights and squires, and especially to De Moreville’s nephew Richard, about his engines of war, and what he could do with their aid.

“Sirs,” he was wont to say at such moments, “let who will tremble at a false tyrant’s frown, I defy his malice. Let him do his worst, and, by the head of St. Anthony, if King John makes his appearance before the castle of Chas-Chateil, the said king will be the luckiest of Johns if he can escape from before it alive and at liberty.”

Never had Sir Anthony Waledger boasted more loudly of the impregnability of the fortress he commanded than as he sat at supper in the great hall on the evening of the day to which allusion has been made; and never did the garrison retire to rest with a better prospect of reposing undisturbed till the return of daylight. But it appeared, as Ralph Hornmouth remarked, that “his confidence did not rest on quite so firm a foundation as the Bass rock.” About three hours after sunset, when the moon afforded but a faint light, shouts suddenly resounded through Chas-Chateil, and gradually swelled into such an uproar as if all the fiends had congregated within its walls to fight out the quarrels they had been fostering from the beginning of time.

Oliver Icingla, roused from his repose, started from his couch and rushed to the window; but as there was nothing visible in the direction towards which it looked to explain the uproar, that grew louder and more alarming, he hastily donned his garments, and stood calm, though greatly curious, to await the issue. As he did so, voices were heard; the gaoler opened the door, and as the door opened in rushed, pell-mell, De Moreville’s daughter with her two maidens and the wife of Waledger, all in the utmost trepidation, weeping and wringing their hands, and showing signs of hasty toilets.

“Gentle sir,” said Beatrix, coming towards him, “I implore you by our kindred blood and for the sake of your mother to save us from these cruel men.”

“Assuredly, noble demoiselle,” replied Oliver very calmly, as he took his fair kinswoman’s hand and kissed it most gallantly by the moonlight. “I am under the vows of chivalry, and albeit I wear not the spurs of knighthood, I am bound to save imperilled ladies or to die in their defence. But I marvel who they can be?”

“Oh,” cried the spouse of Waledger, whose consternation increased every moment, “who should they be but your own friends, the ravening wolves whom the false king has brought into the realm—Falco the Cruel, Manlem the Bloody, Soltim the Merciless, Godeschal the Iron-hearted? Woe is me that I should live to be in their power!”

“On my faith, madam,” said Oliver, who had listened to her vehemence and the names and epithets with amazement, “I am more puzzled than ever. Beshrew me if I ever heard of the men before. In truth, their names sound as strange to my ear as if you had called the roll of the Ethiopians who kept guard over the caliph’s palace at Bagdad.”

But at that moment steps sounded in the gallery, and a loud knock at the door made Beatrix de Moreville tremble and the three other women shriek with terror.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW THE KING BIDED HIS TIME

ROBIN GOODMAN, mine host of The Three Cranes, did not speak without good information when he gave the chapmen of Bristol intelligence as to the attitude which public affairs had unexpectedly assumed in the metropolis. In fact, the position of the baron was, for the time being, almost ludicrous.

Great was the exultation, high the excitement, of Robert Fitzwalter and his confederates as they left Runnymede and marched towards London. On the way they were met by the mayor, with the sheriffs and aldermen in scarlet robes, and many citizens, all dressed in violet and gallantly mounted, who, headed by Constantine Fitzarnulph, escorted the heroes of Runnymede along the bush-grown Strand, and over the Fleet Bridge, and through Ludgate to St. Paul's, where the assembled multitude hailed their return with cheers that rent the sky.

It was a stirring spectacle as the procession moved along the narrow streets, with banners waving and trumpets sounding, and everybody was too much interested to ask what the morrow might bring forth. It was enough that they had won a great victory over the king, who had been in the habit not only of treating them with hauteur, but of making them pay their scutages; and they resolved to celebrate their victory by holding a grand tournament, on the 2nd of July, at Stamford, where so recently they had, at all hazards, set up the standard of revolt, and vowed to dare all and risk all in vindication of their feudal pretensions.

And so closed Friday, the 15th of June, 1215, every man well satisfied with himself and with his neighbour; and on the morning of Saturday Hugh de Moreville entered London by Bishopsgate, bringing full assurance of aid from Alexander, King of Scots, in case of need. The royal Scot, however, stipulated that he was to have a large reward in the shape of Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmoreland—a noble addition to his kingdom, it must be admitted, if the Northern counties had been the barons' to give. But even at this price they seemed to consider his alliance cheaply purchased, and luxuriated for the time in the success of their revolt. But ere Saturday's sun set, messengers, breathless with haste, came to tell Fitzwalter that King John had secretly departed from Windsor under cover of night, no one knew whither; and when the barons immediately afterwards met in council, every countenance was elongated and every brow heavy with thought, and the boldest quailed as he reflected what a king, goaded and rendered desperate, might have it in his power to do if he turned savagely to bay. De Moreville shared the apprehension of his friends, but gave vent to no nervous ejaculations.

"I deny not," said he calmly, "that this is an awkward circumstance, and one against which precautions ought to have been taken. But John is no Arthur or Richard, nor even such a man as his father Henry, that we should much fear the utmost he can do, if he is mad enough to challenge us to the game of carnage. St. Moden and all the saints forbid that I should ever blanch at the thought of battle with a man who, even his own friends would confess, is so much fitter for the wars of Venus, than those of Bellona, and whose wont it has ever been, even while blustering and threatening the powerful, to strike at none but the weak! Come, noble sirs, take heart. By my faith, the game is still ours if we play it with courage, and imitate not the cowardly heron, which flies at the sight of its own shadow."

"But think of the pope," said a dozen voices. "How are we to contend with the thunders of the Church, before which the Kings of France and England have both of late been forced to bend their heads in humble submission?"

"By St. Moden," replied De Moreville, "I fear not, if the worst comes to the worst, to trust to stone walls, and the arm of flesh, and gold. We have strong castles, and fighting men, and the wealth of London at our backs. Nevertheless, I freely own that a king's name is a tower of strength in the opinion of the unreflecting multitude, and, since such is the case, I opine that it becomes us to counteract the influence of the king's name and fortify our cause by taking possession of the queen and prince, who are now at the palace of Savernake. It is a bold measure, but this is no time to be squeamish. Speak the word, and I myself will forthwith summon my men and mount my horse, and ride to make the seizure. Falcons fear not falcons; and beshrew me if any but liars shall ever have it in their power to tell that Hugh de Moreville shrank cravenly from a contest for life and death with such a kite as John of Anjou!"

At first the proposal of De Moreville met with little support; but his eloquence ultimately prevailed, and he lost no time in setting out to execute his mission. But the scheme of seizing the queen and the prince was, as the reader already knows, baffled by the king's precaution; and when the barons who were in London became aware that De Moreville had failed, their alarm became greater than ever, and they resolved to take measures for ascertaining in what danger they really stood, and what chance there was of the king playing them false.

It was now about the close of June, and intelligence reached London that John was at Winchester, and the barons determined to have some satisfactory understanding. Accordingly they sent a deputation to Winchester to inform him of their doubts, and to demand whether or not he really intended to keep the promises he had made at Runnymede. The king received the deputation with apparent frankness, ridiculed their suspicions as being utterly without foundation, and appointed a meeting with them in July, at Oxford, to which city he was on the point of removing.

The barons were neither deceived by the king's manner nor deluded by his words. They had lost the last lingering respect for his good faith; and they felt instinctively that he was exercising all his duplicity and all his ingenuity to free himself from their wardship and bring about their destruction, and vague rumours that mercenaries were being levied on the Continent added to their alarm. It was even said that John intended to take advantage of their absence at the tournament at Stamford to seize London; and, though he was without any army capable of taking a city, this report influenced them so far that they postponed the tournament, and named a distant day for its taking place at Hounslow.

Ere long affairs reached a new stage, and caused more perplexity. It suddenly became known in London that John, regardless of his promise to hold a conference with the barons at Oxford, had left that city suddenly, ridden to the coast, and embarked in a ship belonging to one of the Cinque Ports, but with what object could not be divined; and though from that time the wildest stories were told on the subject, his movements were shrouded in such mystery that nothing certain was known. Even in the month of September, when the barons met in London and held a council at the house of the Templars, they were utterly at a loss to imagine what had become of the sovereign whom two months earlier they had browbeaten at Runnymede, and bound in chains which they then believed could never be broken.

"He is drowned," said one.

“He has turned fisherman,” said a second.

“No,” said a third; “he is roaming the narrow seas as a pirate.”

“Doubtless he is living on the water,” said a fourth, “but it is in the company of the mariners of the Cinque Ports, whom he is, by an affectation of frankness and familiarity, alluring to his side in case of a struggle.”

“Such fables are wholly unworthy of credit,” said a fifth. “For my part, I doubt not the truth of what is bruited as to his being weary of royalty and the troubles it has brought with it, and that he has abjured Christianity and taken refuge among the Moors of Granada, whose alliance he formerly sought.”

“Noble sirs,” said Hugh de Moreville, who had recovered from his attack of gout and returned to London, “suffer me to speak. You are all wrong. Pardon me for saying so in plain words. King John is not drowned; nor has he turned fisherman; nor pirate; nor gone to Granada; albeit he may have been more familiar with the mariners of the Cinque Ports than consists with our interest and safety. I had sure intelligence brought me, when I was on the point of coming hither, that he is now in the castle of Dover.”

“The castle of Dover!” exclaimed twenty voices, while a thrill of surprise pervaded the assembly, each man looking at his neighbour.

“Yes, in the castle of Dover,” continued De Moreville, raising his voice; “and he is in daily expectation of the arrival of mercenary troops from the Continent, under the command of Falco, and Manlem, and Soltim, and Godeschal, and Walter Buch, men of such cruel and ruthless natures, that I can scarce even mention their names without the thought of their being let loose in this country scaring the blood out of my body.”

A simultaneous exclamation of horror rose from the assembled barons, and several prayed audibly to God and the saints to shield them and theirs from the terrible dangers with which their homes and hearths were threatened. And when the news became public and spread through the city, the terror proved contagious, and the citizens began to quake for the safety of their wares and their women. Joseph Basing cursed the hour in which he had, even by his presence, sanctioned the entry of the barons into London; and even the countenance of Constantine Fitzarnulph was overcast, and his voice husky. Meanwhile, however, Hugh de Moreville rather rejoiced than otherwise at the danger; and Robert Fitzwalter maintained his dignity, and stood calmly contemplating the peril which he had defied.

“One word more,” said De Moreville. “It is the king’s intention, so far as can be learned, to commence operations by an attempt to take the castle of Rochester.”

“William of Albini is already in command of the garrison, and will do all that a brave man can to defend the castle,” said Fitzwalter. “But forewarned is forearmed; and it were well instantly to despatch a messenger to tell him of the danger that approaches. Where is Walter Merley?”

“Here, my good lord,” answered the young Norman noble, who had figured among the guests of Constantine Fitzarnulph when the chief citizens decided on inviting the “army of God and the Church” to take possession of London.

“Mount without delay, and carry to the Earl of Arundel the intelligence my Lord de Moreville has just brought us.”

“Willingly, my good lord,” replied the stripling; “but ere going I make bold to offer this suggestion, that, since we have been restoring the ancient laws of this land, it would be politic to restore a time-honoured custom which was wont to do good service in the days of the Confessor—I mean, publish the ancient proclamation of war, which used to arouse every Englishman capable of bearing arms—‘Let each man, whether in town or country, leave his house and come.’”

Few listened; nobody answered; and the youth withdrew to ride on his errand, too ardently enthusiastic for the baronial cause even to feel galled that his suggestion had not been deemed worthy of notice, or to perceive the absurdity of asking the grandsons of the conquerors of Hastings to appeal to the vanquished and down-trodden race. But De Moreville both heard and understood it; and laying his hand on Fitzwalter’s arm, he said in a low tone—

“My noble friend, I wish we had among us more of the enthusiasm that glows at that stripling’s heart. By St. Moden, my young friend—albeit of Norman lineage—has strange notions, being English on the spindle side; for his mother, Dame Juliana, is sister of Edgar Unnithing. She has inspired him with a dangerous sympathy for the English race, and would have had him and his elder brother take the king’s side if her counsel had availed. *Mort Dieu!* I hold it lucky that John has not by his side our young Walter, with his keen eye and scheming brain, whispering such suggestions in his ear as that which was hazarded but now. The false king might, with wit enough, in such a case, have saved himself the trouble of sending for warriors from beyond sea; for he might have found them at his door. But, trust me, resolution, and the determination to act with a strong hand, are much wanted in this emergency. And hearken. The king brings foreigners into this country to fight his battles, forgetting that both parties can play at that game if needs be. Nay, start not; you will ere long come to view this matter in the same light that I do; and I swear by my faith, that rather than be beaten by that anointed, craven, and perjured king, I would not only consent to bringing a foreign army into the kingdom, but to placing a foreign prince on the throne. Tush! what matters it who is the puppet, so long as we, the barons of England, pull the strings?”

“By my halidame, De Moreville,” said Fitzwalter, gravely, “I much marvel that a man so skilled in statecraft, and accounted so sage in camp and council as you are, can indulge in talk so perilous to our enterprise, encompassed as it is with dangers. Credit me that when the cession of the three northern counties to the King of Scots is bruited about, and the condition of his friendship becomes matter of public notoriety, that of itself will be sufficiently difficult to vindicate. Make not the aspect of affairs more repulsive to our best and most leal friends, the citizens of London, by defying their prejudices. Credit me, such a course, if persisted in, will ruin all, and leave us at the mercy of an adversary whose tender mercies are cruel. No more of it, I pray you, as you value all our lives and fortunes, and the welfare of the army of God and the Church.”

“Fitzwalter,” replied De Moreville, earnestly, “be not deceived. Much less easy is it than you think to startle the citizens of London, who care nothing for traditions or love of country. Behind that old Roman wall which you see to the east are men from every clime and of every race, mongrels almost to a man, who have no feeling, no motive in this quarrel, save their aversion to the monarchy and their dislike of the king. Be not deceived. Besides, as I am a Norman gentleman, I swear to you, on my faith, that I do not value their opinion or their support at the worth of a bezant.”

Fitzwalter started, and looked round as if fearing that any one might be within earshot.

“For the rest,” continued De Moreville, conclusively, “I have well considered what I have spoken, and am prepared to abide by it, let William Longsword or the Nevilles do their worst. We are Normans, and not Englishmen, as you well know—none better. You start. Yet a little while, and others will cry out loudly enough in the market-place what now I hardly dare to whisper; for clearly do I see, and confidently do I predict as if I had read it in the book of fate, that matters must be worse before they can be better. I have for some time only thought so; but I have known it ever since I learned that this cowardly yet bloodthirsty king has turned to bay.”

“May the saints in heaven shield this afflicted land,” said Fitzwalter, with a sigh, “and grant us a happy issue out of all our troubles!”

And they parted: Fitzwalter, in no enviable frame of mind, to enter his gilded barge, and go by water to Baynard’s Castle; De Moreville, his brain peopled with conflicting projects, to walk eastward to his hotel outside of Ludgate.

CHAPTER XXIII

TURNING TO BAY

It soon appeared too clear to be doubted, even by the most incredulous, that the King of England was bent on having his revenge on the Anglo-Norman barons at all hazards and at all sacrifices, and that the feudal magnates who had confederated to humble their sovereign in the dust had too good grounds for the alarm with which the news of his preparations inspired them. Ere October (then known as the wine-month) drew to a close, and the vineyards and orchards yielded their annual crop—indeed, almost ere the corn was gathered from the fields into the garners and barnyards—the torch of war was lighted, and an army of mercenaries was let loose on "merry England."

The knights despatched by John as early as the middle of June to raise fighting men on the Continent had executed their commission with a zeal and fidelity worthy of a better cause; and all the bravoes and cut-throats of Flanders, France, and Brabant, attracted by the hope of pay and plunder, came to the trysting-places on the coast as vultures to the carnage, headed by captains already notorious for cruel hearts and ruthless hands. Falco, and Manlem, and Soltim, and Godeschal, and Walter Buch, were men quite as odious—unless they are belied by chroniclers—as Hugh de Moreville had represented them to be. Falco was known as "without bowels," Manlem as "the bloody," Soltim as "the merciless," Godeschal as "the iron-hearted," and Walter Buch as "the murderer," and none of them knew much more of humanity than the name and the form. All of them were not, however, destined to reach the land which was to be made over to their tender mercies. A large number, under the command of Walter Buch, were caught in a gale and wrecked and lost, as if even the elements had interfered between England and her king's wrath. But the others weathered the storm and gradually reached the English coast; and early in October John found himself at the head of a force so formidable and so fierce that he intrusted the castle of Dover to the custody of Hubert de Burgh, a valiant warrior and a Norman noble of great note in his day, and led his hireling army towards Rochester.

Rochester Castle—the stately ruins of which, hard by the Medway, still attest its ancient grandeur, and recall the days when it stood in feudal pride, guarded by moat, and rampart, and lofty battlements—was deemed a place of immense importance; and Robert Fitzwalter and his confederates had intrusted it to the keeping of William Albini, Earl of Arundel, a great noble whose family had long maintained feudal state at Castle Rising, in Norfolk, and whose ancestor had acquired Arundel with the hand of Adelicia of Louvaine, the young widow of Henry Beauclerc. Albini was a brave warrior, and quite equal to the duties of his post under ordinary circumstances; but the castle was without engines of war, and very slenderly furnished with provisions, when, about the middle of October, John, with his army of foreigners, appeared before the walls, and summoned the place to surrender.

No doubt William Albini was "some whit dismayed." Perhaps, however, he expected some aid from the barons, who were with their fighting men in London. Accordingly, he prepared for resistance; and the barons, on hearing that John had left Dover, did march out of the city with some vague idea of relieving the imperilled garrison. On drawing near to the king's army, however, they began to remember that the better part of valour was discretion, and after their vanguard was driven back they quickly retreated to the capital and took refuge behind the walls, leaving Albini to his fate.

Meanwhile, John laid siege to Rochester, and, impatient to proceed with his campaign before winter set in, hurried on the operations, and, by making promises to the besiegers and hurling threats at the besieged, did everything in his power to bring the business to a close. But, with all chances against him, Albini made an obstinate resistance, and weeks passed over without any clear advantage having been gained by the king. Even after his sappers had thrown down part of the outer wall, matters continued doubtful. Withdrawing into the keep, the garrison boldly resisted, and for a time kept the assailants at bay. At length, by means of a mine, one of the angles was shattered, and John urged his mercenaries to force their way through the breach. But this proved a more difficult matter than he expected. Every attempt to enter was so bravely repulsed, that the king, under the influence of rage and mortification, indulged in loud threats of vengeance. At length, on the last day of November, when his patience was well-nigh exhausted, famine, which had been for some time at work among the besieged, brought matters to a crisis, and William Albini and his garrison threw themselves on the royal mercy.

"Hang every man of them up!" cried John, who at that moment naturally thought with bitter wrath of the delay which they had caused him when time was so peculiarly valuable.

"Nay, sire," said Sauvery de Manlem, the captain of mercenaries, "that were perilous policy, and would lead to retaliations on the baronial side too costly to be hazarded by men who hire out their swords for money."

John listened, acknowledged that there was reason in Manlem's words, and consented to spare life. Accordingly, Albini and his knights were sent as prisoners to the castles of Corfe and Nottingham; the other men belonging to the garrison were pressed into the royal service.

The loss of Rochester was felt to be a severe blow to the baronial cause; and the pope having meantime annulled the charter, as having been exacted from the king by force, John's star was once more in the ascendant, and after making arrangements for the safe keeping of Rochester, and little guessing the circumstances under which the fortress was to change hands within the next six months, he marched from Kent to St. Albans, his mercenary forces spreading terror wherever they appeared. But it was towards the North that his eye and his thoughts were directed; for the chiefs of the houses of De Vesci, De Roos, De Vaux, Percy, Merley, Moubray, De Brus, and D'Estouteville were conspicuous among the confederate barons; and, moreover, Alexander, the young King of Scots, had not only allied himself with the feudal magnates, but raised his father's banner, on which "the ruddy lion ramped in gold," and at the head of an army crossed the Tweed to make good his title to the three Northern counties with which the barons had gifted him.

At St. Albans, accordingly, about the middle of December, John divided his forces into two armies: one he placed under William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, to keep the barons in check and maintain the royal authority in Hertford, Essex, Middlesex, and Cambridge; while at the head of the other he marched northward to avenge himself on the barons of the North and the King of Scots. With a craving for vengeance still gnawing at his heart, he passed the festival of Christmas at the castle of Nottingham, and then, still breathing threats, precipitated his troops on the North.

It was on the 2nd of January, 1216, when John entered Yorkshire with fire and sword. The snow lay thick on the

ground; the streams were frozen; and the cold was intense; but the king, who but recently had been branded by his foes as a tyrant fit only to loll in luxury, and averse to war and fatigue, now appeared both hardy and energetic, and urged his bravoes up hill and down dale. It was a terrible expedition, and one long after remembered with horror. Fire and sword rapidly did their work in the hands of the mercenaries who composed the royal army; men were slaughtered; houses and stackyards given to the flames; and towns, castles, and abbeys ruthlessly destroyed. Beyond the Tyne the country fared almost worse. Morpeth, the seat of Roger de Merley, Alnwick, the seat of Eustace de Vesci, and Wark, one of the castles of Robert de Roos, were stormed and sacked; and John, crossing the Tweed at Berwick, prepared to inflict his vengeance on the King of Scots.

"Now," said he to his captains, as he found himself beyond the Marches, "we must unkennel this young red fox."

The captains of the royal army offered no objection; and while John burned Roxburgh—a royal burgh and castle at the junction of the Teviot and the Tweed—the mercenaries pursued the King of Scots to the gates of Edinburgh, and, during their return, deliberately burned Haddington, Dunbar, Berwick, and the fair abbey of Coldingham, associated with the legend of St. Ebba and her nuns. Nothing, indeed, was spared; and John, having intrusted the government of the country between the Tees and the Tweed to Hugh Baliol and Philip de Ullecotes, with knights and men-at-arms sufficient to defend it, returned southward with such satisfaction as he could derive from the reflection that he had taken revenge on his baronial foes, and included in his vengeance many thousands who had not given him the slightest cause of offence.

But whatever may have been his feelings on the subject—and it is impossible to suppose that he had not his hours of compunction—John was destined, ere long, to find that his revenge had been dearly purchased. Scarcely had he returned to the South with blood on his hands, and the execrations of two countries ringing in his ears, when he received tidings which made his heart sink within him.

It was when the winter had passed, and the spring had come and gone, that messengers brought to John, who was then at Dover, intelligence that his baronial foes, driven to desperation, had taken a step which was likely to detach his mercenary soldiers from his standard, and leave him almost alone and face to face with an exasperated nation. It was a terrible contingency, and one on which the king, in pursuing his schemes of vengeance, had not calculated. But there was no mistake about the news; and John trembled as he foresaw how that, as soon as it spread among his mercenaries, the army which, while ministering to his vengeance, had made him odious to the nation on whose support he might otherwise have counted in case of the worst, would melt as surely as had melted the winter's snow through which he had urged on that army to devastation and carnage.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DESPERATE EXPEDIENT

It was the Christmas of 1215; and the barons, cooped up in London, and not daring to venture beyond the walls, were almost in despair, and listened with unavailing regret to reports of the devastation wrought by the royal army on its march northward, and with dread to the sound of the spiritual artillery which Pope Innocent directed against them. However, they, as well as the citizens, celebrated Christmas with unusual festivity, and appeared anxious to show the king and his partisans that they were not to be cast down by adversity, and to convince the pope and the legate that they did not tremble before the thunders of Rome.

Nevertheless, Robert Fitzwalter and his confederates were sadly disheartened by all that was taking place, and in mortal terror of what might take place in London, if John turned his face towards the capital; and Falco, and Manlem, and Soltim, and Godeschal had an opportunity of stabling their steeds at Baynard's Castle and the Tower, and quartering their men among the worthy citizens who had proved such good friends in the day of need to "the army of God and of the Church."

Moreover, it was the reverse of flattering to Fitzwalter and De Vesci, and De Clare and De Roos, and the Bigods and Bohuns, to find that, after all, they had been fooled and humbled by a king whom they had not only disliked but despised; and wounded pride and vanity whispered constantly to each that it would be better to adopt any expedient likely to lead to their relief from the perplexity of the present, than trust to the course of events and the chapter of accidents. Nevertheless, it was not very easy to discover a ready and short way out of their multitudinous difficulties, and they spent many days in anxious debate and somewhat unmanly lamentations. Naturally enough, different opinions were expressed, and there was much variance; but nobody could refuse to admit that something must be done, and that quickly; and at length they arrived at a resolution which, to say the least of it, was unpatriotic, imprudent, and unfortunate.

At that period, Philip Augustus, no longer young, was still occupying himself with the projects which he had conceived in youth for rendering France the great monarchy of Europe, and of all men he was the likeliest to lend an attentive ear to any proposal for humbling the house of Plantagenet; and it happened that Louis, the son of Philip by his first wife, Isabel of Hainault, had, in 1200, espoused Blanche of Castile, daughter of King Alphonso, the conqueror of Muradel, by Eleanor, daughter of our second Henry. Louis, who was now in his twenty-ninth year, cannot be described as one of the great princes of the Capet line, though he rated himself very highly, owing to inheriting, through his mother, Isabel, the blood of Charlemagne; and chroniclers, wishing to be complimentary, have been content to call him "the son of an able father, and the father of an excellent son." But the barons were not in a position to be very nice when in search of a puppet, and nobody, at all events, could deny that Louis of France, the heir of Hugh Capet and Charlemagne, was also the husband of Blanche of Castile, and that her mother was a princess of the blood royal of England; so the barons, in their perplexity, seem to have considered her claim to the crown of England quite good enough to serve their purpose, and to have believed that they could not do better, all things taken into account, than call her and her husband to the throne which her maternal grandsire had occupied. It is true that some dozen persons, male and female, actually stood before Blanche of Castile in the legal order of succession; but the barons were in no humour to make nice distinctions, or to be fastidious as to genealogies; and early in the year 1216, while King John was ravaging the North with his mercenaries, they actually despatched Fitzwalter and De Quency as ambassadors to invite Prince Louis, the heir of Philip Augustus, to land in England and take possession of the crown which, with a fine disregard of facts, they represented as his wife's rightful inheritance.

To a man of ambition the prize was certainly tempting, and had there been no more serious obstacle to encounter on the way to it than John's army of foreign hirelings, Philip Augustus would have urged his son to grasp at it resolutely, and to hold by it tenaciously. But Philip, who had fought side by side with the English in the Holy Land, and face to face with them in Normandy in the days of Cœur-de-Lion, understood what kind of people they were, and well knew that, whatever the Anglo-Norman barons and the citizens of London might say, the English as a nation would never submit to the rule of a foreigner, and that foreigner a French prince. Besides, he could not overlook the fact that John was under the especial protection of the pope; and he could not forget that, years before, when he suffered excommunication for marrying Agnes de Méranie, and vainly attempted to resist the power of Rome, he had learned to his severe experience how good a friend and how terrible a foe the pope could be to one of the sovereigns of Europe. It was no pleasant retrospect, but it was instructive.

Much more caution was, therefore, observed in the matter by the court of Paris than the barons had expected, or than they relished; but the invitation was by no means declined. On the contrary, Louis seems to have relished the prospect of reigning over England, and to have thought his royal sire somewhat too cautious. In any case, a little fleet of French ships reached the Thames in February, with several French knights on board, who brought assurances that, by Easter, Louis would be at Calais to embark for England, and that he only asked the barons to send him their sons or nephews as hostages for the fulfilment of their part of the covenant.

Probably the barons and the Londoners were not very well pleased with so much hesitation and delay. But they had gone too far to recede, and every day, while making their position more desperate, added to the aversion which the barons had always felt towards the king. Besides, the accounts which were given of the cruelties exercised by John in the North were such as could not fail to add greatly to his unpopularity, and every citizen who met his neighbour in the market-place, or gossiped with him across the street from the house-tops, had something horrible to relate of what was going on in York and Northumberland. One told how the king was in the habit, after lodging during the night in any house, of setting fire to it before he took his departure next morning; a second told how on such occasions he had not only set fire to the house, but ordered the host to be hanged at his own door-post; and a third told that in the royal army the king had a number of Jews, whom he made the instruments of his cruelties. Such stories, constantly repeated, and losing nothing in the telling, ere long made the king so odious that the citizens and populace of London began to regard the evil of calling in a foreign prince to make himself master of England as a very light evil indeed compared with that of living under a tyrant who set truth, and justice, and humanity at defiance; and they shouted loudly, "Come what may, we will not any longer have this man to reign over us."

Meanwhile, at Poissy and in Paris, Prince Louis and his advisers were making out as good a claim for Blanche of Castile as circumstances would admit of their doing. It was, indeed, no easy matter. But what with reviving the

recollection of John having been forfeited by the Great Council of England for rebellion against his brother, Richard Cœur-de-Lion, and of his having been condemned by the peers of France for the murder of his nephew Arthur, and what with pronouncing his children disqualified to succeed, and overlooking the existence of Eleanor of Brittany and of Blanche's own brother and her elder sister, they did make out a case which satisfied themselves, and which perhaps they deemed good enough for their confederates in England; and Philip Augustus, though hesitating, or pretending to hesitate, did not offer any opposition to his son's preparations; though Gualo, the cardinal of St. Martin and papal legate, passing through France, visited Paris, and warned Prince Louis against embarking on an enterprise of which the holy see disapproved.

So far matters went smoothly, and the barons and citizens looked longingly for the arrival of Prince Louis, whom they daily became more eager to welcome as a deliverer. But their patience was put to a trial; and Easter passed, and May Day passed, and the "merry, merry month of May" was rapidly running its course, and still the French prince lingered.

CHAPTER XXV

THE VOWS OF THE HERON

A WEEK before May Day Hugh de Moreville reached Paris, and did all that he could, on the part of the Anglo-Norman barons, to hasten the preparations, and hurry the departure of Prince Louis. Matters, however, did not go so satisfactorily as he could have wished. Philip Augustus was grave and reluctant; Louis, like his paternal grandfather, was pompous, slow, and somewhat sluggish; and the only person whose ideas on the subject moved as rapidly as those of De Moreville was Blanche of Castile, who inherited energy and intellect that would have made her, if of the other sex, quite equal to the occasion. As it was, however, De Moreville found much difficulty in persuading Louis to take the ultimate step which might expose him to the censures of the Church; and, on the eve of a great banquet, he conceived the project of surprising the prince into one of the vows of chivalry considered too serious to be broken or treated with indifference.

Now among the vows of chivalry in fashion at that period the most solemn were known as “the vow of the peacock,” “the vow of the pheasant,” “the vow of the swans,” and “the vow of the cranes.” All these birds were esteemed noble; and the peacock was, in a particular manner, accounted proper food for the valiant and the amorous; and, when the vow was about to be made the bird was roasted, decked in its most beautiful feathers, and made its appearance on a basin of gold and silver, and was carried by ladies, magnificently dressed, to the assembled knights, who with all formality, made their vows over the bird in the presence of the company. But it was neither the vow of the peacock, nor the pheasant, nor the swans, nor the cranes, with which Hugh de Moreville was about to surprise the heir of France.

On the morning before the royal banquet was to be given on May Day in the palace which Philip Augustus, while embellishing and paving Paris, had built beside the great tower of the Louvre, Hugh de Moreville rode out of the city with a little falcon on his wrist, and a spaniel running at his horse’s feet, as if to recreate himself with sport, and went fowling along the banks of the Seine till he caught a heron, which was the bird of which he was in search. Returning to Paris with the heron, he ordered it to be cooked, and placed between two dishes of silver; and, having pressed into his service two fiddlers, and a man who played the guitar, and secured the assistance of two young ladies—the daughters of a count—to carry the dishes, and to sing songs, he, at the hour appointed for the banquet, proceeded to the Louvre, and entered the great hall, where Louis and Blanche of Castile were presiding at a board, surrounded by young nobles of great name, and dames and demoiselles celebrated for grace and elegance. The prince had what is called the Capet face, with the large, long, straight nose, slanting forward, and hanging over the short upper lip, and was no beauty; but the princess inherited the features of her maternal ancestors, and was fair and fascinating to behold as in the days when, in her youthful widowhood, she won the heart and inspired the muse of Thibault of Champagne. Among the company were the Count of Perche, the Viscount of Melun, the Count of Nevers, and the young Lord Enguerraud De Coucy, one of that proud house whose chiefs had on their banners the motto disclaiming the rank of king:—

“Je suis ni roi, ni prince aussi—
Je suis le Seigneur De Couci.”

“Open your ranks, good people,” cried Hugh de Moreville in a loud voice, as he entered the hall of the Louvre, with the two fiddlers and the man who played the guitar and the two noble demoiselles carrying the heron; “I have a heron which my falcon has caught, and which, methinks, is fitting food for the knights who are subject to the ladies, who have such delicate complexions. My lords, there should be no coward sitting at this board, except the gentle lovers; yet I have with me the bird which is the most cowardly of all others; for such is the heron by nature, that, as soon as it sees its own shadow, it is astonished, and gives way to fear; and, since the heron is so timorous, and the timid ought to make their vows on it, I opine that I ought to give it to my Lord Louis, who is so faint-hearted that he allows himself to be deprived of England, the noble country of which his lady and companion is the rightful heir; and, seeing that his heart has failed him, she is like to die disinherited. However, he must vow on the heron to take some step befitting the occasion.”

Louis reddened perceptibly as De Moreville and the demoiselles stood before him with the heron, and his eye flashed with pride and ire.

“By St. Denis!” said he, solemnly, “since I am charged with timorousness, and the word coward is almost thrown in my face, I must needs prove my worth. I do vow and promise that, before this year is past, I will cross the sea, my father’s subjects with me, and defy King John; and, if he does come against me, I will fight him, let him be sure of that. With my oath have I taken this vow; and, if I live long enough, I will perform it, or die in labouring to accomplish it—so help me God and St. Denis!”

When Hugh de Moreville heard the words of Prince Louis, he smiled with the anticipation of triumph.

“Now, in truth,” exclaimed he, “matters will go right; and, for my part, I ought to have joy that, through this heron I have caught, victory will be ours; and I swear by St. Moden that I will attend the Lord Louis to England, and act as marshal of his army, and do all that in me lies to set him on the throne, which is his lady’s by right; and, if I live, I will accomplish the vow I have taken.”

Again Hugh de Moreville moved on with the two silver dishes, and while the fiddles and the guitar played, and the demoiselles sang, he carried the heron to the Count of Nevers, and the Count of Perche, and the Lord de Coucy, and to each of the knights and barons present, who each took the vow, and then to the Viscount of Melun, who, however hostile to King John and England, was not much gratified with the scene that was being enacted before his eyes.

“Sir,” said De Moreville, pausing before the viscount, “vow to the heron, I pray thee.”

“At your will,” replied the viscount, sighing deeply; “but I marvel greatly at so much talk. Boasting is nothing worth unless it be accomplished. When we are in taverns or in festive halls, drinking the strong wines, and looked upon by ladies drawing the kerchiefs round their smooth necks, every man is eager for war and glory. Some, at such times, in imagination conquer Yaumont and Aguilant, and others Roland and Oliver; but when we are in the field, on our steeds, our limbs benumbed with cold, with our shields round our necks, and our spears lowered, and the enemy

approaches, then we wish we had never made such vows. For such boasts, in truth, I would not give a bezant; not that I say this to excuse myself; for I vow and promise, by the finger of St. John the Baptist, which was of late brought from Constantinople, that if our lord, Louis, will cross the sea, and enter England, I will accompany him with all my forces, and do my devoir in aiding him to gain the realm which is by right his lady's."

Hugh de Moreville smiled grimly as the Viscount of Melun made his vow, and took the dishes, and again moving, with the fiddles and guitar playing, and the demoiselles singing, he knelt before Blanche of Castile, and said that "the heron he would distribute in time, but meanwhile he implored her to say that which her heart would dictate;" and the princess, having vowed, in case of need, to embark for the war which Louis and his lords had sworn to undertake, the bird was cut up and eaten, and the ceremony closed.

And now Louis of France delayed no longer. Next day he presented himself to Philip Augustus, and begged that his voyage might not be obstructed, for that he was under a vow which he could not break; and the king, though somewhat against his inclination, granted his son's request; and Louis, with his lords and knights, and Hugh de Moreville, hastened to Calais.

At that time, one of the most remarkable of naval heroes was a Fleming by birth, who had originally been in a convent, and who was popularly known as Eustace the Monk. It is said that, on the death of his brother without children, Eustace cast the cowl, and threw aside the monk's habit, and abandoned the convent to inherit the property. But, be that as it may have been, he had become a captain of pirates, and made his name terrible on the sea. Allured into the service of Louis, Eustace had fitted out at Calais a fleet to transport the French army to the English coast; and the prince, having embarked with his fighting men, put to sea. The voyage was not particularly prosperous. The winds were stormy, and the mariners of the Cinque Ports were eager and earnest in their attacks on the French armament. Louis, however, escaped all perils, and on the 26th of May, 1216, landed at Sandwich.

But no sooner did he set foot in England than the legate excommunicated him, and the pope, on hearing that he had crossed the Channel, exclaimed, significantly—

"Sword, sword, spring from the scabbard, and sharpen thyself to kill!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A PAINFUL INTERVIEW

Hugh de Moreville did not await the sailing of Prince Louis and the fleet which Eustace the Monk had fitted out at Calais. Indeed, the Norman baron was all eagerness to reach London, and communicate to his confederates the intelligence that the French prince was really coming with a formidable force. Embarking in a swift vessel, and having a prosperous voyage, he soon reached the English coast, and, hastening to the capital, carried to Fitzwalter, and De Quency, and Stephen Langton, intelligence that his important mission to the court of Paris had been crowned with complete success.

De Moreville was still in London at his great mansion in Ludgate, but preparing to set out for Chas-Chateil, where he had reason to believe all was not quite right, and whither he had already despatched Ralph Hornmouth, in whom he had great faith, when one morning a visitor was announced, and the Norman baron, on looking up, perceived that it was Walter Merley. The young noble, however, looked haggard, careworn, and sad, and marvellously unlike the keen and sanguine partisan of Fitzwalter and the barons who had appeared as a guest at the board of Constantine Fitzarnulph, and aided in alluring the citizens into the alliance which enabled the confederates to seize the capital and strike dismay into the king.

"Walter Merley," said De Moreville, a little taken by surprise at his visitor's woe-begone look, "I give thee welcome, and have news of great import to tell thee, so I pray thee be seated."

"Nay, De Moreville," replied the young noble, sadly, very sadly indeed, "it needs not. I already know it, and I grieve to think that other matters should be as they are. For yourself, I must say that you have misled me. Nay, frown not; it avails nought with me. I believed you to be a man true to England in thought, word, and deed; and I, the son of a woman of English blood, mark you, and therefore more closely interested in the national welfare than any mere Anglo-Norman, understanding that it was the object of yourself, and the barons with whom you are associated, to secure the liberties of England by forcing John of Anjou to confirm the laws of the Confessor, and to restore the usages that prevailed in England in the Confessor's reign—understanding this, I repeat, I not only gave you all the aid in my power, but exposed my brother and my mother to the vengeance of a king who is as cruel and unjust as he is treacherous. And now neither of them have a roof under which to shelter their head. Their hearths are desolate, their castles and manors in the hands of strangers."

"Even taking it at the worst, Walter," said De Moreville, startled more and more at the young noble's aspect and style of address, "you must own that others in the North besides your kindred have felt the king's vengeance. De Vesci, and De Roos, and Delaval, and half a dozen others, are equally sufferers."

"But, De Moreville," continued Merley, still calmly and sadly, "what I complain of is this: that you and your confederates have deserted all the professions so loudly and so boastfully made, and that you have betrayed England. Nay, frown not, for I tell you again that the son of Dame Juliana Merley is not to be daunted by a frown; I say you have betrayed the cause of England by calling into the kingdom a foreign prince who is certain to hold the ancient laws of England in lighter regard than the worst Plantagenet whom the imagination could conjure up; and of all foreigners a Frenchman, and of all Frenchmen a Capet, and of all Capets a son of Philip Augustus, England's fellest foe."

"Necessity, Walter—a stern necessity."

"However," continued Merley, more calmly, "I do not recognise the necessity; nor, credit me, will the country long recognise it. Meanwhile I can take no part in the struggle. King John I abhor; Prince Louis I abhor still more than I do King John. I have, under your counsel, De Moreville, taken such a course as to involve in ruin the house to which I belong. My brother and my mother are exiles north of the Tweed, dependent on our potent kinsman for the very bread they eat. All that I could have endured to behold; but to think that this was suffered to place a Frenchman and a Capet on the throne of Alfred and Edward maddens me. But, farewell! I go to Flanders to seek oblivion in the excitement of war; and may God pardon you, De Moreville, for having brought this wretched foreign prince and his rascal myrmidons into England, for I own that I cannot. I have said."

De Moreville was much affected, and buried his head in his bosom to conceal his agitation. This was not the kind of language he expected to hear from an eager partisan of the baronial cause; and he certainly began to view the matter in a different light than when he was at the court of Paris, and thinking only of vengeance on King John. However, he felt that every awkwardness and inconvenience must be endured, and every reproach borne, now that the great step was taken, and it was too late to recede. He raised his head resolutely, with the intention of bringing his young friend over to his view. When he did so, he found that he was alone. Walter Merley was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE INVADER AND HIS DUPES

MEANWHILE King John had left Dover for Guildford, and marched from Guildford to Winchester, and from Winchester to Bristol, having taken the precaution of strongly garrisoning the castles of Windsor, Wallingford, and Corfe; and Louis of France, after landing at Sandwich, in spite of the legate, led his army to Rochester, and on the 30th of May, 1216, took that fortress from the garrison which John had left within its walls six months earlier. Having thus inaugurated his career in England with a conquest which raised the hopes of John's enemies, Louis, accompanied by the Lord de Coucy, the Viscount of Melun, the Count of Nevers, and the Count of Perche, marched his army towards London.

It was Thursday, the 2nd of June, when the heir of the Capets rode into the capital of England, and met with a reception which must have excited at once his wonder and contempt. Both by barons and citizens he was welcomed with rapturous applause, and conducted to the church of St. Paul's, a rude and homely structure, standing amidst the ruins of the Temple of Diana, so soon to be replaced by a magnificent edifice; and within St. Paul's the mayor, aldermen, and chief citizens took the oath of allegiance. This ceremony over, Louis mounted his steed, and, riding to Westminster, entered the abbey, where the Anglo-Norman barons solemnly acknowledged him as their sovereign, and swore to be true to him—the French prince taking an oath on his part to restore to every one his rights, and to recover for the crown whatever had been lost to it by King John. Louis, being under a sentence of excommunication, could not be crowned. However, he was hailed King of England, and, in that capacity, nominated Langton to the office of chancellor.

But Louis and the companions of his adventurous enterprise were well aware that ceremonies, however solemn, could not render his position secure, and that the crown could only be his by right of conquest. No time, therefore, did he lose before letting loose his foreign troops and his Anglo-Norman partisans on the unfortunate country which he hoped, when conquered, to govern by the strong hand. Having despatched the Count of Nevers to besiege Windsor, Robert Fitzwalter to make war in Suffolk, and the Earl of Essex to gain possession of Essex, he himself raised the royal banner of France, led his army from London into Sussex, seized the fortresses in that county, and manned them with French troops; marched from Sussex into Surrey, taking the castles of Reigate, Guildford, and Farnham; and, passing into Hampshire, appeared on the 14th of June before Winchester, and soon made himself master of the ancient capital of England and all that it contained—the city, in fact, surrendering at his summons, and the king's castle and the bishop's palace eleven days later.

Naturally enough, so brilliant an opening of the campaign exerted a powerful influence on men of all opinions. The populace, indeed, continued sullen, and their hatred of the foreigner grew daily stronger. But people who had much to lose were startled by events so important as weekly occurred. The friends of Louis gained confidence, and took bolder steps; his foes were disheartened, and led to doubt and hesitate. Neutrals began to make up their minds as to the merits of the controversy, and, in most cases, decided on taking the winning side. So far the invader was pleasant to all men, and so charmed his Anglo-Norman partisans by his affability, that his praise was on thousands of tongues; and he was everywhere contrasted most favourably with King John. Even the reports spread abroad as to the beauty, the intelligence, and the high spirit of his wife had their effect. Besides, victory seemed to sit on his helm, and misfortune to have claimed his rival as her own. Everywhere the shout of "Montjoie, St. Denis, God aid us, and our Lord Louis!" was shouted by warriors confident of triumph. Nowhere could John remain, even for a week at a time, without having to make a hasty exit. Daily the shouts for "our Lord Louis" became louder and more general; and at length the nobles who had hitherto adhered to the royal cause, believing that, do what they might, the invader was destined to reign, lost heart and hope, and, in order to escape the utter ruin that stared them in the face, ventured to the camp of Louis, and gave in their adhesion.

First appeared Hugh Neville, and yielded the castle of Marlborough; then the Earls of Oxford, and Arundel, and Albemarle, and Warren made their submission; and so hopeless appeared the struggle, that even Salisbury, notwithstanding the Plantagenet blood that ran in his veins, appeared at the French camp, and did as Hugh Neville and his peers the other earls had done before him. Pembroke, however, remained stanchly loyal, and somewhat startled the conquerors by wresting the city of Worcester from their grasp, almost while they were triumphing in the thought of having taken it; and, what in the end proved of immense importance to the royal cause, the mariners of the Cinque Ports continued to be loyally devoted to the crown. Everything, however, led Louis to believe in the ultimate success of his enterprise; and having obtained possession of Odiham, he was already master of all the country as far as Corfe Castle, when, on the 22nd of July, he appeared at Dover, and laid siege to that stronghold rising in silent majesty from the range of cliffs, and regarded as the key of the kingdom.

It could not be denied that the castle of Dover presented a formidable aspect; and even the most sanguine of the invaders must have eyed its towers and battlements with some misgiving. Louis, however, had no doubt of being able to reduce it. In fact, he had made preparations which he believed could not fail in their object, and particularly relied on engines of war sent by his father, Philip Augustus, particularly a machine called a "malvoisine," with which to batter the walls. But the effect was not commensurate with the prince's expectations. Hubert de Burgh not only looked calmly upon the besieging force and apparatus, but soon took such measures to mitigate the violence of the assault that the French were driven back, and forced to remove their lines to a greater distance from the castle than they had at first deemed necessary. Louis, Capet like, lost his temper when he found matters were not going so favourably as he wished.

"By St. Denis!" cried he in a rage, "I swear that I will not depart hence till I have taken the castle, and hanged the garrison."

Meanwhile the Count of Nevers and the barons of England who served under his banner had failed to take Windsor, which was defended by Ingelard D'Athie, a warrior of great experience; and learning that King John was moving northward at the head of a slender force, they marched to intercept him. John, however, contrived to elude them; and learning that he had taken possession of Stamford, they retraced their steps, and proceeded to Dover to aid Louis in the siege, which was making no progress.

It happened, however, that among the prisoners taken by the French was Thomas, brother of Hubert de Burgh, and Louis now smiled with triumph as he anticipated the hour for setting the royal standard of France on the heights

of Godwin's tower. Demanding a parley, he sent to inform Hubert de Burgh of what had happened.

"If you do not surrender the castle," said the messengers of Louis, "you are likely presently to see your brother put to death, with every torment likely to render death horrible."

"I grieve to hear it," replied Hubert, calmly; "but I cannot value any man's life in comparison with the loyalty which I have sworn to maintain."

"Our lord, Louis," said the messengers, returning, "will give you a large sum of money to surrender."

"I intend to hold out the castle and maintain my loyalty," was the brief and conclusive reply.

Finding that Hubert de Burgh was proof against threats and promises, Louis became very irritable, and treated the Anglo-Norman barons with a disdainful indifference which sorely galled them, and at the same time gave much offence by bestowing the earldoms of Wiltshire and Surrey on the Count of Nevers, who was very avaricious and exceedingly unpopular. Jealousy was already at work in the camp before Dover, and many of the barons were beginning to think less unkindly of King John, and were inclined to return to their allegiance, when a story which was spread abroad gave them an excellent excuse for changing sides, and in the long run did better service to the royal cause than could have been rendered by a thousand knights.

While Louis was prosecuting the siege of Dover, the Viscount of Melun, who had remained in London, was attacked by a malady which his physicians assured him could not fail to end fatally; and, finding himself drawing near to the gates of death, he sent for Hugh de Moreville and others of the barons who were then in the capital, and, turning on his couch, he informed them that he had something on his conscience, of which he felt bound to relieve it before going to his account.

"Your fate," continued the viscount, "grieves me, for you are doomed. Our lord Louis and sixteen of his comrades, on leaving France, bound themselves by an oath, as soon as the realm of England is conquered and he is crowned king, to banish for ever you who have joined his standard, as traitors, who are not to be trusted. Moreover, your whole offspring will be exterminated or beggared. Doubt not my words. I who lie here dying was one of the conspirators. Look to your safety."

And, having given this warning, the Viscount of Melun lay back on his couch and died.

Naturally enough, this story, when it reached the camp at Dover, made a strong impression, and the barons regarded the movements of their foreign allies with grave suspicion, and communicated their thoughts to each other in whispers. But they had placed themselves in such a predicament that they knew not what steps to take. In fact, Louis had them under his thumb. He had made himself master of the whole South of England. In the West and in the North his power was great, supported in one quarter by the Prince of Wales and in the other by the King of Scots.

"We are like woodcocks caught in our springe," said one.

"And ere long," remarked others, "we may be dealt with as deer in a buckstall."

"In truth," observed Hugh de Moreville, "our lord Louis is a deceiver, and we are his dupes. But patience, and the tables will be turned, without our cause being lost. It is possible to dupe the deceiver. Meantime, let us use these Frenchmen while they believe they are using us. Patience, I say, and one day they will discover with amazement that the tables are turned. By St. Moden, I swear it!"

"Our friends are already beginning to fall away from our cause, as rats desert a falling house," said the first speaker bitterly.

"It is true," said De Moreville; and he sighed as he thought of Walter Merley.

CHAPTER XXVIII

STYR THE ANGLO-SAXON AND HIS SON

It was August, 1215, and Oakmede, with its old house of timber and Roman brick, and its great wooden gates, and irregular pile of outbuildings, reposed in the warmth and sunshine of a bright autumn day. All was still and peaceful around the homely hall of the once mighty Icinglas; and though the country was ringing with alarms and rumours of war, the inhabitants pursued their ordinary avocations, apparently taking as little interest in the quarrel of King John and the Anglo-Norman barons as if Oakmede had been situated in the recesses of the forests of Servia.

The hinds were employed in the fields with the labours of harvest; the swineherd was in the woodlands with his grunting herd; and nobody appeared in the shape of living mortal save an old cowherd, in a garment much resembling the smock-frock still worn by English peasants, and Wolf, the son of Styr, and half-a-dozen urchins from the neighbouring hamlet, who watched the varlet with interest and admiration as he fed a couple of the dogs which were then commonly used to hunt wild boars, and ministered to the wants of two young hawks, which he had procured by a long journey and by climbing a precipice at the risk of his life.

The urchins evidently regarded Wolf as a very important personage, and even the old cowherd treated him with deference. Having embarked at a Spanish port, bound for London, with the servants and baggage of the English knights and squires who fought at Muradel, and deemed it prudent to free themselves from all incumbrances before undertaking their adventurous expedition to Flanders, Wolf had reached Oakmede many months before Oliver Icingla, and made the most of his and his master's adventures in Castile and at the court of Burgos, telling such stories and singing such songs as he had picked up, and playing on a small musical instrument which he had brought with him, and which the inmates of Oakmede deemed very outlandish. However, he contrived to establish such a reputation for himself that, boy as he was, rivals bent before him. Even Dame Isabel's steward could not hold his own against a varlet who had figured in yellow and scarlet at a king's court; and the swineherd—great official as a swineherd was in a Saxon household—was fain to content himself with being deemed of inferior interest.

No sooner, therefore, did Wolf ask the urchins to bear a hand than they vied with each other in their efforts to have the pride of assisting him. At length, however, they grew weary of watching the operations going on in the stable-yard, and wandered forth to feast their eyes on the apples clustering on the trees of an unguarded orchard—to roll among the lambs that nibbled on the sunny sward—to gaze on the brindled cows reclining under the shady trees or cooling their hoofs in the pond—and to throw pebbles at the white pigeons cooing on the roofs of the brewhouses or winging their way over the stable-yard to settle and bask on the barn-tops; and Wolf—who, in default of older and more experienced functionaries, united at Oakmede the offices of falconer, huntsman, and groom in his own person—applied himself to the most congenial of all his duties—namely, attending to a young horse, iron-grey, which was own brother to Ayoub, and had lately been distinguished by the name of Muradel, in honour of King Alphonso's famous victory over the Moors. Ayoub and Muradel were steeds of value, and had a great pedigree, being, in fact, the descendants of a Spanish horse and a mare with which Cœur-de-Lion had gifted his good knight Edric Icingla. Some enthusiasts added that the said horse was the identical Spanish charger which King Richard bestrode at Cyprus when he went forth to chastise the Emperor Isaac Angelus; but this was more than doubtful. Wolf, however, was happy in the company of these steeds: he had been familiar with Ayoub and Muradel from the day they were foaled, and was in the habit of speaking to them almost as if they had been human beings; and fierce as they were by nature, and intractable in the hands of strangers, they were in the hands of this boy quiet as lambs and patient as asses. It is true Wolf treated them with real kindness, and he was engaged combing and washing Muradel's mane and tail, and singing to the dumb animal snatches of a Spanish ballad about the Cid, and Bavieca, the Cid's renowned charger, when he was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps. As he turned round, his father, Styr, the Anglo-Saxon, stood before him.

"All hail, father," said Wolf, kindly, as he resumed his operations on the mane of Muradel. "How farest thou?"

"Passing well, Wolf, boy," answered Styr, examining the iron-grey with the eye of a judge of horseflesh; "but I have tidings that sit heavy on my heart. Knowest thou what has come of the young Hlaford?"

"Nought further than that he left the Tower of London with King John, and sent word to Dame Isabel that he had, with Holy Edward's aid, escaped the peril that threatened him," said Wolf, desisting from his work, and turning round to look in the old man's face. "Wherefore askest thou, father?"

"Wherefore do I ask?" said Styr, repeating his son's words. "Marry, because he is missing, and his friends know not what has befallen him."

Wolf gave a long, low whistle, and then shrugged his shoulders, and drew a long face.

"Wolf, boy," said Styr, after a pause, during which the expression of his countenance became very serious, "I wish he may not have come to grief. St. Dunstan forbid that it should so prove; but my fear is that he has fallen into the hands of the Lord Hugh de Moreville, who is a cruel man, and heir, as thou mayst have heard, of the Moreville who imbrued his hands in the blood of St. Thomas of Canterbury; albeit the world, in consideration of the son's ill-gotten wealth and power, forget his father's crime. If so, peradventure the young Hlaford may lose his life as well as his liberty; for as my departed master—may his soul have gotten grace!—told King Richard the Lion-hearted, Hugh de Moreville is a man who would not spare his own child, if his own child stood in the way of his ambition. But say nought of all this to the Hleafdian, for it might bring her down with sorrow to the grave."

"But how came this to thine ear, father?" asked Wolf, after a brief silence.

"In truth," answered Styr, somewhat confused, "it was made known to me by him whom men call Will with the Club."

"But methought Forest Will had saved the king's life while hunting by taking a bull by the horns, and been received into favour, and turned out to be a great lord."

"True; but matters did not go with him as he would fain have had them go, and he has again taken to the greenwood."

Wolf whistled, and, meditating the whilst, combed Muradel's tail, then laid aside the comb, took off his light cap, smoothed his long yellow hair, and looked long up to the rafters of the stable, and then spoke.

"And hast thou any notion where the young Hlaford may be, father?" asked he, suddenly.

“Certes, boy, I wot not where he is,” replied Styr; “but I deem it most like that, if he has fallen into Hugh de Moreville’s hands, he has been carried either to Chas-Chateil, or to Mount Moreville on the Scottish marches.” “If,” added the Saxon, “there was any means of gaining access to De Moreville’s castle, and learning whether such a prisoner is there, all might be amended.”

Wolf cast his eyes on the ground, reflected long and earnestly, and then looked up with the exultation of one who has solved a difficult problem.

“Father,” said he, “I have it; leave the business to me. It is, I own, parlous ugly; yet, with the blessing of St. Edward, who is known to favour the Icinglas and such as serve them, I will hazard limb and life in the adventure.”

Styr the Saxon winced, and his paternal affection got the better of his hereditary devotion, as before his mind’s eye rose a vision of his son—so young, so comely, and so slight of frame—at the mercy of Hugh de Moreville, and in the clutches of De Moreville’s myrmidons.

“Wolf, boy,” said he, tenderly, “this may not be. Hugh de Moreville is a man whom it is not chancy to meddle with.”

“Hout, father!” exclaimed Wolf, who was waxing very valiant under the influence of his imagination. “What more dangerous is the Lord Hugh than any other lord? Perchance, after all, his bark is worse than his bite.”

“But thou art young, Wolf, being as yet a boy, with years to grow; thy form is too slight and thy strength all-insufficient to fight with so stormy a sea as that on which thou wouldst venture.”

“Fear not for me, father,” interrupted Wolf, half offended; “nor deem that because I am not so big of body as Forest Will, my peril will, therefore, be the greater. Bulk is not craft, or the fox would be less cunning than the ass; nor is size courage, or the sheep would not run before the dog; nor is stature swiftness, otherwise a cow could outrace a hare. Anyhow, I will go, and time will try whether I have mettle enough in me or not, as frost tries the strange plants in the physic garden of the monks of St. Alban’s. But speak on, father, that I may be instructed by thy words, for does not the proverb tell us that as the old cock crows the young one learns?”

Styr the Saxon, however, was not listening to his son’s remarks, for a great struggle was taking place in his breast, and when Wolf turned round for a reply his father’s chin was resting on his bosom, and his eye directed to the ground.

“Wolf,” said he, at length raising his head, with a sigh, “this is not an adventure to be undertaken lightly, nor without asking leave of the mother who bore thee. But pass through the woodland to thy home at eventide, and I will then tell thee more fully what I think concerning it.”

“As thou wiliest, father,” said Wolf, with filial reverence; “but fail not to consider what our grief would be, if, through our neglect, or aught of cowardice on our parts, evil befel the young Hlaford—the son, father, of him who is away.”

The eyes of Styr the Saxon filled with tears, and he did not attempt to speak; but, abruptly leaving the stable, he strode away from Oakmede, and made his way through the forest.

CHAPTER XXIX

HUNTING A WILD BOAR

One day in autumn, about a month after Styr the Anglo-Saxon had taken counsel with his son in the stable at Oakmede, when King John was occupied with the siege of Rochester, and Hugh de Moreville was in London urging on his confederates the desperate expedient which they subsequently adopted, a gallant party of knights and squires, armed with spears and hunting-horns, and attended by huntsmen with boar-hounds, left the castle of Chas-Chateil.

Riding through the chase, the hunters penetrated into the great forest of Berkshire, which at that time stretched from Windsor right away up the vale of the Kennet to Hungerford, a distance of some forty miles as the crow flies. Their object was to hunt a wild boar, and they were headed by Sir Anthony Waledger, who rode Oliver Icingla's black steed Ayoub, an animal to which the Norman knight had taken a decided fancy, and which he already looked on as his own property.

It has been hinted that Sir Anthony Waledger was somewhat boastful over his cups, in which he at times indulged more deeply than prudence warranted; and after a carouse, while his blood was still heated, he at times deluded himself with the idea that he was an important feudal magnate. On such occasions, and in De Moreville's absence, the knight gave himself much greater airs than ever the lord of the castle took the trouble to do; and as he paid his vows to St. Hubert, the patron of sylvan sports, as well as to St. Martin, the patron of mediæval Bacchanalians, he was particularly fond of displaying his mightiness and getting rid of his superfluous energy by indulging in that violent sport which has been described as "the image of war." Nay, more; Sir Anthony relished violent sport in its most violent form, and looking with contempt on hawking and hunting the deer, even by way of whet for fiercer game, devoted himself to the wolf and the wild boar. Many were the perilous adventures he had passed in the forest; but he boasted frequently that he loved danger for its own sake, and loved it all the better that it was accompanied by the excitement of the chase.

"Sirs," he would exclaim, when the red wine of Bordeaux sparkled in his cup, and the fire began to glow in his brain, "let us leave falconry to the ladies, and damsels, and spaniels, and stag-hunting to the greyhounds and men who are women in all but the name. By the head of my namesake, St. Anthony, I prefer pressing close on the track of the bear or the wild boar, beasts that have the courage to turn to bay and rend their pursuers."

On this occasion Sir Anthony Waledger, having washed down his breakfast with copious draughts, was particularly enthusiastic. Moreover, he was violent in proportion to his enthusiasm. He talked loudly and largely about the qualities of De Moreville's dogs, and which was likely to hunt the best, always in a way which would have led a stranger to believe they were his own, brooking no contradiction whatever; and no sooner had the huntsmen roused a huge boar from his lair than he became highly excited, and, shouting loudly as he hounded the dogs on the game, dashed his spurs into Ayoub's side and went off in keen pursuit. All the forenoon the chase continued, and as their horses grew weary and began to flag, the hunters gradually tailed off; but Sir Anthony never halted in the pursuit, nor did the black steed give the slightest sign of weariness, though his glossy coat was literally covered with foam. On the knight went, the dogs gradually gaining on the boar, and the boar making a circuit till he led them back to within a mile of Chas-Chateil, and turned fiercely to bay under a gigantic oak hard by the spot where the castle of Donnington was afterwards built—perhaps the oak under which, according to tradition, Geoffrey Chaucer in his last years wrote many of his poems.

And terrible was the aspect which the boar now presented; his ears erect, his shaggy hair standing in bristles, and his mouth foaming with rage, as, tearing and tossing aside the dogs with his mighty tusks, he collected all his remaining strength to spring at the horse and the rider. Nor did Sir Anthony shrink from the stern encounter. Blowing his horn till it resounded through the woods, and shouting with a ferocity which rivalled the dumb ferocity of his grisly antagonist, he, with an oath and a gesture of fiery impatience, threw down his hunting-spear, and, drawing his sword of Bordeaux steel, dashed the rowels of his spurs into Ayoub's flank and swung aloft his weapon to deal a decisive blow.

But the blow was not destined to be struck. Unaccustomed to such treatment, rendered furious by the provocation of hours, and startled by the fierce aspect of the boar, the noble animal made one plunge, reared himself high in the air, and then fell prostrate on the ground, bearing his rider with him. It was a terrible moment. Sir Anthony was, indeed, little hurt by the fall, but his sword had dropped from his hand, and he lay at the boar's mercy.

The knight in terror bawled out for St. Anthony and St. Hubert to come to his aid.

Only two moments did the boar lose ere making the rush; they were employed in freeing himself from the dogs, already blinded by the blood from the wounds he had inflicted; and then he made his final rush—a rush that brought his very snout in contact with the prostrate knight's person. But ere that rush took place, and ere mischief could be done, from the branches of the oak dropped something which to the knight's swimming eyes looked like a large ball. Next moment the sword of Bordeaux steel, driven by a sure hand, penetrated the boar's throat; and, as the monster rolled back on the grass, writhing in the agonies of death, and Sir Anthony freed himself from the steed, and the steed sprang to his feet with a bound, he found standing before him, holding Ayoub's bridle-rein in his left hand and the Bordeaux blade in the right, a dark-haired and rather swarthy youngster, in parti-coloured garments of an outlandish cut, with a smile on his countenance. The smile was meaningless, and the boy looked marvellously innocent; nevertheless, Sir Anthony was so enraged with his mishap that he almost felt inclined to kill his preserver on the spot for that meaningless smile and that innocent look.

"Who in the fiend's name are you?" he asked with a frowning brow and in a voice of thunder.

The boy, who had not, as it happened, parted with the sword, replied with a smile which disarmed Sir Anthony's anger; but the answer was in a language which the knight did not understand; so he muttered a slight imprecation to rid himself of the remnant of his wrath, and, having again loudly sounded his horn, began to look more kindly on the mysterious stranger who had come to his rescue at the very moment of his extreme need, and when otherwise he must have been torn to pieces.

"By my faith," said he in a low tone and with a thrill of superstitious awe, "I firmly believe that St. Anthony or St. Hubert has sent this youth to my aid, and it behoves me, therefore, to treat him as one whom the saints account worthy of being their messenger. One thing is lucky," continued he: "the youth cannot speak our tongue, and therefore cannot report the unworthy spectacle I have presented."

As Sir Anthony thus soliloquised, the huntsmen and two squires, attracted by the repeated blasts of his horn, rode up to the spot, and the knight, having given a very inadequate description of the scene that had been enacted, and consigned the boar to the huntsmen to be cut up, ordered them to take care of the boy and bring him to the castle. He then attempted to remount, but he might as well have attempted to scale the heavens. Ayoub positively resisted, and, despising both threats and caresses, stood proudly upon the dignity which had been so recently and so deeply injured. The knight was finally under the necessity of mounting the horse of one of the huntsmen, and leaving Ayoub, and the mystic boy, and the dead boar under their care, rode slowly away through the trees towards Chas-Chateil.

“Cog’s wounds! friend Martin,” said one of the huntsmen to his fellow, after examining the boy as to his proficiency in the vernacular tongue, “I can make nothing of this jackanapes. Beshrew me if I do not think he is such a creature as was of late taken in the sea on the coast of Suffolk.”

“Hubert, lad, I fail to comprehend thee,” said Martin.

“Natheless, it is true as any story ever sung by minstrel,” continued Hubert. “It was a fish in the form of a man, and they kept it alive six months on land, feeding it the whilst on raw meat; but seeing they could get no speech out of it, they cast it back into the sea.”

“I doubt thee not, Hubert, lad—I doubt thee not,” said Martin cheerily; “but, credit me, this is no such creature, but a boy from some outlandish country beyond the seas. I have heard the like of him ere now singing glees on the great bridge at London. Mark how simple and innocent he is. Even that fiend of a horse, that wouldn’t so much as look at Sir Anthony, takes kindly to the child and licks his hand.”

CHAPTER XXX

A GRAND FEAT OF HORSEMANSHIP

AFTER reaching Chas-Chateil, and relating his adventure to Dame Waledger, Sir Anthony saw no reason to repent of the resolution he had expressed to befriend the mysterious entity whom, as he devoutly believed, the saints had sent to his succour in the hour of peril, and when, otherwise, nothing could have intervened between him and certain destruction. The dame encouraged his pious intent, and expressed unbounded curiosity to see the strange child but for whose timely appearance she would have been a weeping widow; and no sooner had the knight dined than he sent for the young stranger to the daïs of the great hall.

Apprehensive, however, that the whole business—the carouse of the previous night, the boar-hunt of the morning, and the danger to which her husband had been exposed, might be a device of Satan, and that the boar and the boy might be agents of his satanic majesty, Dame Waledger suggested the propriety of first handing over the child to be examined by the chaplain of the castle as to his origin and position in life; and Father Peter, though a little nervous, undertook the delicate investigation.

The result was, in the main, satisfactory. Father Peter was no great linguist, but he had been on the continent, and knew enough of continental tongues to comprehend that the boy's name was Pedro; that he was a native of Burgos, the capital of Castile; that he had left his country as one of a band of musicians bound for London: that they had been shipwrecked on the coast, and that he, having escaped a watery grave, had wandered into the woods, not knowing whither he went; and on the approach of the boar, and the hounds, and the hunter, he had climbed a tree to escape observation; and, with an innocent smile, he confirmed his story by producing an instrument, and accompanying himself, while he sang the ballad of "The Captive Knight and the Merle;" and finally melted all hearts by bursting into tears, and deploring his plight as a helpless orphan in a strange land.

The victory was now complete. Dame Waledger insisted on young Pedro being handed over to her as a page; and in a day or two he was strutting about dressed in crimson, accompanying the ladies of the castle when they ventured into the chase to fly their hawks, singing to them his native ballads, and diverting them with his droll attempts to speak the language of the country in which he found himself, and of the people among whom he had been so strangely cast.

Sir Anthony's liking for Pedro rather increased as weeks passed over, and he allowed the boy to come about him at times when he would not have been seen by any other mortal—even in a certain wainscoted chamber of the great hall, which was reserved for the use of the lord of the castle and the governor, and which none of the household—knights, squires, or grooms—were ever allowed to enter; not that there was anything very particular about the interior, except one tall panel, on which was depicted the battle of Hastings, with a very grim De Moreville bearing one of the conqueror's standards. But this panel appeared to have much more interest for Pedro than even the pictorial embellishment would account for, and often his eye stole furtively towards it.

Ere long Pedro did something which, but for superstition and jealousy, ought to have won golden opinions among that part of De Moreville's household attached to the stables, and devoted to the Norman baron's stud. After being conducted to his stall, fresh from the horrors of the boar-hunt, Ayoub displayed a very haughty temper. For days he declined in the most distinct manner to be groomed, and refused all provender, and after his hunger got the better of him, and he began to feed, he took refuge in sullenness, and repelled every attempt to deal with him as an ordinary steed.

At length Sir Anthony's peremptory command had such an effect that the grooms forcibly cast the refractory steed in his stall, bitted and bridled him, and led him forth to exercise. But a fresh difficulty now arose. Do what they would, he kicked against all attempts to mount him, and Clem the Bold Rider, a lad of seventeen, and one of those mediæval stable-boys who had hitherto had the credit of being able to deal successfully with the wildest and fiercest of chargers, in vain essayed to bring Ayoub to reason or reduce him to submission.

It was a November morning, but the sun was shining brightly for the time, when the grand struggle took place outside the great drawbridge leading into the courtyard, and all the officials connected with the stable, and the huntsmen, and most of the garrison, were present to witness the contest between the skilful equestrian and the refractory steed. Sir Anthony also was there, determined that—no matter how many necks might be broken—Ayoub should be mounted and ridden; and with him were Richard de Moreville, Hugh's nephew, and Pedro, the lady's page, who appeared to take a lively interest in the business, and clapped his hands in the excess of his innocent excitement, till the knight, smiling kindly on him, patted his head, and remarked to young De Moreville that of all urchins this urchin was the most diverting.

At length the critical moment arrived, and Clem the Bold Rider manned himself with dauntless air, and, coaxing and caressing the while, attempted quietly to mount. It was vain. Ayoub declined. Unable to accomplish his purpose by flattery, Clem had recourse to stratagem, and made a brave effort to take the charger unawares, vault on his back, and then trust to his skilful hand and strong arm. But it would not do. Ayoub was vigilant as a rabbit, and though his eyes were covered for the moment by the grooms who held him, he seemed instinctively to know what was intended, and baffled the stratagem by a sudden movement which left Clem sprawling on the ground. Still, the word of Sir Anthony being law, and his purpose continuing inflexible, force was resorted to, and a fierce struggle ensued, the men having the advantage at one moment and the horse at another. But in the long run, Ayoub, by plunging, and capering, and kicking furiously, gained the victory, and the knight's rage knew no bounds.

"By the head of St. Anthony!" exclaimed he, drawing his dagger, "the accursed brute shall pay the penalty of its obstinacy by dying on the spot where he has defied our will."

"Holy Woden, sir knight!" exclaimed Richard de Moreville in surprise, "you would not kill that noble horse, and he the property of another person? Master Icingla is a prisoner, but not taken in battle, and neither his steed nor his sword is forfeit. Credit me, the world, if it hears of this, will cry shame on us if we so flagrantly violate the laws of honour, which are binding on all chevaliers—especially on you and me, who are of Norman race, and therefore doubly bound to observe all usages."

Sir Anthony was about to reply, but at that moment Pedro, who had been listening to the conversation, without, of course, understanding it, ran forward to the spot where the grooms were still holding Ayoub, and commenced earnest endeavours to communicate by signs something which he wished them to understand, now pointing to the

sky, then to the ground, and then to the horse. Meanwhile Richard de Moreville resumed the conversation.

"By my faith, Sir Anthony," said he, half laughing, as if thinking that he had spoken too strongly, and wishing to soothe the knight, "methinks, since this steed proves too much for the whole garrison, we could not do better than bring forth the captive, and let him try his powers of persuasion. Master Icingla, doubtless, could find some way of casting out the devil which seems to have entered into his charger."

Sir Anthony laughed a hoarse laugh.

"Bring forth the captive!" said he—"bring forth the captive, and give him an opportunity of escape! That, forsooth, were blind policy, and you may call me Englishman when I do aught so foolish. No, by St. Anthony's head, had I my will the young Saxon churl should be in the deepest dungeon of Chas-Chateil till he rotted, if it were only to avenge ourselves for the heart of pride which made the father who begot him look down, as from an elevation, on better men than himself. I myself forget not his insolence when he was on the eve of departing from Mount Moreville, where he was a guest, when last summoned to embark with Cœur-de-Lion for Normandy. 'Good Norman,' said he, 'I pray thee hold my stirrup while I mount;' and when I showed some disinclination, he added, calmly, 'Nay, sir, it misbecomes you not; albeit you have lands and living, and wear golden spurs as well as myself, you are still the descendant of one of the adventurers who fought for hire at Hastings: I am still the heir of the Icinglas.'"

"Holy Woden!" exclaimed Richard de Moreville, with a sly laugh, which had its meaning, "and what answered you, sir knight? You drew your sword, or challenged him to mortal combat on the spot?"

Sir Anthony changed colour, and hesitated.

"No," said he, at length, "I wished not to have the death of the husband of a de Moreville on my conscience, and I pardoned his insolence for his lady's sake."

"And held his stirrup?"

Sir Anthony did not reply, but turned away to avoid doing so; and a broad grin was on the Norman squire's aquiline face.

Meanwhile Pedro, unable to make the grooms comprehend his meaning, advanced to the head of the stubborn charger, looked in his face, muttered in his ear, led him a few paces by the rein, then turned his head from the sun, jabbering to the grooms as he did so what to them was unintelligible. Then he made a sign that he would mount, and as they lifted the boy to the charger's back, Ayoub not only stood still and quiet, but immediately obeyed the touch of his heel, and walked quietly down among the trees that grew on the slope that led from the castle, and then returned at a gentle canter. All present stood amazed, but none more than Sir Anthony and Richard de Moreville.

"By the saints!" cried the knight, forgetting in his wonder to mention his patron in particular, "this is marvellous to behold. I have ever deemed that boy more than mortal since he came so opportunely to my rescue."

"On my faith," said the squire, "I believe that never has the like been seen since Alexander of Macedon mounted Bucephalus in spite of his heels and horns."

"It is magic," exclaimed Hubert the Huntsman, in terror.

"Nay, nay, Hubert lad," said old Martin; "bearest thou not in mind that I said the fierce steed took kindly to the simple child from the first?"

No sooner had Pedro alighted from Ayoub than he commenced jabbering and inviting Clem the Bold Rider to mount, and Clem, having done so, rode quietly down the acclivity. But it did not suit the Bold Rider to occupy the seat which he did "on sufferance," and on reaching the level ground he took measures to convince Ayoub that the rider and not the horse was master. The experiment was not successful, and the result was not flattering to his vanity. A brief struggle took place. When it was over, the Bold Rider lay prostrate on the grassy sward, and Ayoub, the refractory steed, with his head reared aloft and his bridle-rein flying hither and thither, was snorting and rushing with the speed of the wind towards the banks of the Kennet.

Sir Anthony uttered a fierce oath as he saw Ayoub disappear among the trees, and watched Clem the Bold Rider rise from the ground.

"My curse on the braggart churl's clumsiness!" said he. "The steed is gone beyond hope of recovery. Would that the fall had smashed every bone in his body!"

And the knight, having thus given vent to his disappointment, went with Richard de Moreville to see his dame and De Moreville's daughter mount their palfreys and ride forth to fly their falcons, escorted by a body of horsemen, and attended by their maidens, and their spaniels, and Pedro the page.

"Sir Anthony," said Richard de Moreville as they went, "you have excited my curiosity as to these Icinglas. I crave your permission to visit this captive squire, and hear the adventures in love and war which he had in Castile and Flanders."

"Nay, nay," replied the knight sternly; "ask anything in reason, but not that. By St. Anthony's head! even the chaplain should not have gone near him, but that he pressed me hard. Let him pine in solitude; would that it were in chains and darkness!"

"But men say that he is fair, and brave, and high of spirit!"

"He is his father's son," replied Sir Anthony in a conclusive tone, "and the calf of a vicious bull is ever vicious. Besides," continued the knight, his anger rising as he proceeded, "he is English by birth, and the eggs of the serpent hatch only serpents; and," added he, staying his step to stamp on the ground, while he ground his teeth with vindictive rage, "it is ever safest for us when we have our armed heel on the viper's brood."

CHAPTER XXXI

PEDRO THE PAGE

THE position of Pedro the page at Chas-Chateil was much endangered by the feat of horsemanship which he had performed. A general impression prevailed in the castle that he was an emissary of the powers of darkness, and that the wild boar, the black steed, the outlandish boy, and the Devil were all in league to bring some misfortune on the inmates. Moreover, the lady, who was already tiring of the page, was inclined to take this view of the case; but Father Peter, having again subjected the suspected person to examination, gave it as his deliberate opinion that he was in reality what he professed to be—one of a band of musicians from Burgos.

The good chaplain had considered the matter gravely, and made use of the intelligence he drew from Oliver Icingla to test the youngster's veracity. He asked Pedro the name of the King of Castile, and Pedro answered, King Alphonso. He asked who was Alphonso's chief enemy, and Pedro answered, the Moorish King of Granada. He asked what great event had happened before he left his own country, and Pedro told him about the battle of Muradel, and how the king, in gratitude to the saints for his victory, was about to convert his palace in the gardens of La Huelgas into a convent. He asked what was the sin on King Alphonso's part which had brought such dangers on the kingdom, and Pedro very innocently related the well-known story of the beautiful Jewess whom the royal Castilian loved too well. The holy man was satisfied. How could he be otherwise? And Sir Anthony was satisfied also, for he had taken a notion into his head that the page's songs and musical instrument were necessary to his existence.

In fact, the nerves of the knight required music to soothe them. Since his encounter with the wild boar in the wood at Donnington, Sir Anthony Waledger had never been quite himself, and, as he continued his daily potations, and ran into excess oftener than of yore by day, his condition did not improve during the winter; and ere spring came strange stories were abroad as to his habits by night. Still matters went on about the castle as of old, and no particular notice was taken of the governor's eccentricities till about Easter, when Richard de Moreville became so alarmed that he made some excuse for leaving, and embarked for Paris to intimate to his uncle that the knight who had the custody of Chas-Chateil was beside himself.

"My lord," said the Norman squire when he presented himself to his astonished kinsman about a month before that May-day when Hugh de Moreville had persuaded Prince Louis to vow on the heron, "Sir Anthony is crazy—in truth, he is mad. He has got into a custom of rising in the night-time when he is asleep; of arming himself, drawing his sword, and beginning to fight as if he were in battle!"

"By St. Moden," said De Moreville with a sneer, "I never knew the good knight so fond of fighting when blows were going. But, nephew, proceed, for this touches me nearly."

"Well," continued the squire, "the servants who sleep in his chamber to watch him on hearing him rise go to him, and next morning tell him what he has been doing, but he forgets all about it, and cries out that they lie. Sometimes they leave neither sword nor arms in his chamber, but when he rises and finds them gone he makes such a noise as if all the fiends were there. They therefore think it best to leave his sword and arms, and sometimes he remains quietly in his bed, but only sometimes. Seldom a night passes without a scene."

"Ha!" exclaimed De Moreville, thoughtfully, "I little expected such tidings, and it behoves me to hasten my return to England and put matters on a better footing at Chas-Chateil. It is no time for a man who has lost his senses to be in command of a fortress."

However, in the thirteenth century the time required to pass from the banks of the Seine to the banks of the Kennet was considerable, and April was speeding on without De Moreville having appeared at the castle or giving any intimation that he was likely to come; and Sir Anthony became worse rather than better, declaring that nothing soothed him but the music of Pedro the page, and insisting more strongly than ever that Pedro had been sent to him by St. Anthony and St. Hubert at the very instant he had cried out to them for protection.

By this time Pedro's equestrian feat was all but forgotten. It had been a nine days' wonder and nothing more. Yet one person had neither forgotten nor forgiven—namely, Clem the Bold Rider. In fact, Clem, feeling certain that there was some mystery in the business, and blaming Pedro for his mishap, had, under the influence of mortified vanity, vowed revenge, and continued to watch Pedro wherever he went when outside the castle as a cat watches a mouse it has destined as a victim. No matter at what hour he went forth or in what direction he turned, he was sure to meet Clem hanging about the courtyard, or the stable-yard, or the drawbridge talking the slang of the age to one person or another, but never without a sharp eye on Pedro's movements. This was, doubtless, annoying. Pedro certainly looked much too innocent to have any evil intention. Still, one likes not to be watched every time he moves out to take the air.

Now Pedro, since his reception into Chas-Chateil, had been quite free to go about wherever he liked. But there was one place from which he was strictly excluded, and that place was "the ladies' walk," which was strictly guarded by a sentinel. It was wonderful, by-the-bye, how this fact used to slip out of Pedro's memory, and how many efforts he made by hook or by crook to reach that battlement. But his efforts were unavailing.

At length he seemed to think that a view from a distance was better than no view at all, and after singing a Spanish song he clambered up a parapet, and strained his eyes towards the prohibited region. As he descended Clem stood before him, seized him by the collar, and administered a hearty buffet on the cheek. But he little calculated the consequences. Pedro's frame shook with rage, his eyes flashed fire, and he turned savagely on his assailant.

"Son of a theorve!" said he in very good English, "hadst thou known how I can return that blow, thou hadst never had the courage to deal it. This is the way I requite such courtesy, as chevaliers phrase it."

As the page spoke, his clenched fist avenged the wrong he had suffered, and the Bold Rider lay sprawling by the parapet. But he rose instantly from the ground, not, indeed, to renew the attack—of that he had had enough, and more than enough. But he retreated several paces, and then looked his adversary in the face.

"Master page," said he, glowering with malice, "thy speech has betrayed thee. Ere half an hour passes the governor shall know that a spy is within the castle, and the dule tree is your sure doom;" and Clem ran off to take measures for insuring his revenge.

Pedro did not seem quite easy under the influence of this threat. But perhaps he had heard that to pause at the crisis of one's fate is to lose all, and he did not hesitate. It was the hour when he was in the habit of singing to Sir

Anthony Waledger in the chamber so vigilantly guarded against intrusion that the inmates of the castle believed it contained De Moreville's treasury. Pedro entered, and found Sir Anthony seated at a table with his wine-cup before him. Pedro having purposely left the door half-open, sat down on a low footstool, and prepared to sing. Sir Anthony rose and moved slowly to close the door, and Pedro, quick as thought, drew forth a little bag, and shook some powder into the wine. Sir Anthony resumed his seat and drained the wine-cup, and Pedro began to sing. Sir Anthony gradually fell sound asleep, and Pedro, rising from the footstool, went to the panel on which the battle of Hastings was depicted, examined it minutely, and pressed his finger on a knob that caught his eye. As he did so it flew open with a spring, and Pedro, entering, closed it as gently as he could, and, descending a stair that lay before him, found himself in a dark but broad and high passage, along which he walked with what speed he could, not without stumbling as he went.

It was not, however, until he had travelled full half a mile and taken several turns that he at last began to descry something like daylight. It was, indeed, only a glimmer. But he proceeded, pushed through a cleft of a rock, and going head-foremost through some brushwood, found himself to his great joy in a thicket close by the Kennet. Pedro, indeed, leapt for joy as he reflected on the discovery he had made, but did not in his excitement forget to leave such marks as to insure his being able to find the place on his return, for to return he intended. Cunningly he set marks on the trees around, measured the distance to the margin of the river, impressed on his memory the various objects around, and then, turning his face southward, made for the neighbourhood of London as fast as he could, to obviate the chance of being recaptured in case of pursuit.

But he was in no danger in that respect. At Chas-Chateil his disappearance was heard of with superstitious awe, and the inmates told each other that the goblin who had been figuring as a lady's page, and whose spells and devices had driven the governor half-crazy and caused him to walk while asleep, had been suddenly carried off by his master who sent him. Only one person dissented—it was Clem the Bold Rider, who gave his reasons for believing the page to have been a spy. But Clem's character for veracity did not rank high, and he did not improve it by the story which he told on this occasion.

As for Sir Anthony Waledger, he woke up before sunset, much refreshed with his sleep. It was the first sound sleep the knight had enjoyed for months. Of course he could give no account as to how and where the mysterious page had gone, only he very much missed the music and the song.

Meanwhile, Hugh de Moreville was leaving Paris, resolved on placing Chas-Chateil in safer custody. The Norman baron was destined to reach the castle five hours too late for his purpose.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE

It was about ten o'clock on the night of the 17th of May, 1216, that a man and a boy—the one mounted on a strong Flemish charger, the other on one of those common riding horses then known as a "haquenée"—made their way up the banks of the Kennet, and halted by the spot from which so recently Pedro the page had emerged from subterranean darkness into the light of day.

There need be no mystery, so far as the reader is concerned, as to who the riders were. One was William de Collingham, the other was Wolf, the son of Styr, and it was clear from the caution with which they moved, that they were bent on some enterprise to the success of which secrecy was essential.

"Sir knight," said the boy, in a low tone, "this is the spot."

"Art thou certain?" asked the knight, looking round.

"As certain as that I serve the Icinglas, and that I played the part of a goblin page in Chas-Chateil."

"Good," said the knight, pulling up his steed, and taking his bugle-horn from his belt as to sound a blast. However, he did not blow the round notes, but gave a low, peculiar whistle, which brought a man from among the trees. It was one of those obscure nights common in the month of May, and the moon affording but a dim light, the knight could not make out the figure of the person who approached.

"Friend or foe?" cried Collingham.

"The Black Raven," was the reply; and as the man drew near the knight and Wolf recognised Styr the Saxon.

"All right?" said Collingham.

"All is right," replied the Saxon. "We have nothing to do but commend ourselves to the saints and proceed to the work before us."

"In God's name, then, let it so be," said the knight. "Summon the men who are assembled, and let us to the business. By this hour, I doubt not," added he, "that the drunken governor is going through his nocturnal exercises."

Collingham, as he spoke, dismounted, gave his horse into the care of Wolf, and getting under the shadow of the trees, kept humming the song of "I go to the Greenwood, for Love invites me," till Styr returned with a hundred men at his back, all armed, and prepared to attack or resist foes just as occasion should arise. Some of them were simply peasants, others fighting men in the knight's pay; but most of them were neither more nor less than forest outlaws. Each of them was dressed in a short green kirtle, hose of the same colour, a leathern cap or head-piece, and armed with a short sword, a horn slung over his shoulder, a long bow in his hand, and a bunch of arrows in his belt. A formidable band it was, though not numerous, and destined ere long, when increased tenfold, to be celebrated by minstrels as holding out bravely against the invader, when all others fled before his sword or crouched at his feet. At the time of which I write the existence of Collingham's band was not even known to the French. Ere twelve months passed over, the cry of the Black Raven was more terrible to Louis and his captains than an army with banners.

"All is ready," was the reply.

"Then let us proceed, in the name of God and good St. Edward," said the knight, and he moved towards the entrance of the subterranean passage by which Pedro the page—or, rather, Wolf the varlet—had escaped.

Taking Wolf with him to act as a guide, and leaving a band of six picked men to keep guard at the mouth, Collingham, having ordered all the briars and stones to be cleared away from the entrance, caused a number of torches to be lighted.

"Now, my merry men," said he, "let us enter this passage, which will conduct us to the hall of the castle. When we arrive there, if need be, we must break the door forcibly open, and combat all who oppose us. But I would fain hope that we may enter noiselessly, overpower the garrison, and do what is needful, without shedding blood. However," added he, "if it prove necessary, be not squeamish, but strike boldly, and spare neither the oppressor nor such as serve him. What better standard do Englishmen want than the gory head of a Norman tyrant?"

"We will! we will! we will most cheerfully obey you," answered the men, whose excitement had reached a high pitch. "Neither Hugh de Moreville nor Anthony Waledger can look for much mercy at our hands; neither for mercy nor justice have our race ever been beholden to them."

"But shed not a drop of blood unnecessarily," added Collingham, as, stooping down, he entered the cavern, and told Wolf to lead the way, his men following, and Styr the Saxon bringing up the rear, with his sword drawn, and firmly resolved to slay any man who attempted to turn back.

Marching noiselessly along the passage, they at length reached the stair that led to the door into the private chamber, and this both Collingham and Wolf exerted all their ingenuity to open, but in vain. The spring could only be acted on from within; and, after repeatedly making fruitless attempts, the knight gave up in despair.

"My hopes were vain," said he, at length, "and we only waste time. Bring forward the hammers to break the door, and let every man draw his blade and be ready to follow me."

One of the peasants, a Dane, who, as far as strength and stature were concerned, might have compared to advantage with Siward, the old Earl of Northumbria, advanced with a sledge-hammer, and with one blow smashed the door to pieces.

"Forward!" said Collingham; and the peasant, passing into the secret chamber, followed by the knight, with another blow smashed the door that led from the chamber into the great hall. Still the garrison gave no indications of having taken alarm; and Collingham, guided by Wolf, went straight to the apartment where Sir Anthony Waledger was engaged in combat with imaginary foes, took the governor prisoner, and shut him up till the work was complete.

But by this time the alarm had been given, and caught the ears of a man whose presence at Chas-Chateil Collingham did not even suspect. It was Ralph Hornmouth, who had arrived that very morning, and who, owing to recent fatigue, luckily for the assailants, slept sounder than was his wont. Springing from his bed, Hornmouth hastily armed himself, rushed from his dormitory, roused and called the garrison, and, with his sword drawn, and the soldiers at his back, made for the great hall, to which Collingham had just returned, and, with shouts of "St. Moden! St. Moden! Down with the robber herd!" rushed upon the intruders. But Collingham faced Hornmouth with a courage that equalled his ferocity, and the outlaws answered the cry of "St. Moden!" with loud shouts of "Ho, ho, for

the Black Raven! Out! out!”

And now the great hall was filled with combatants, and a bloody conflict took place, both parties fighting furiously. Collingham and Hornmouth singled each other out, and between the gigantic knight and the huge squire was fought a desperate hand-to-hand fight, no man interfering with them. For a time neither had the advantage, and the rafters rang with the echoes of their blows. At length Collingham’s sword broke, and his fate seemed sealed, but he drew back, grasped his terrible club, and renewed the combat, which grew fiercer and fiercer. What might have been the issue it is difficult to guess; but Hornmouth’s foot slipped just as a terrible blow alighted on his crest, and he lay senseless on the floor. In vain the garrison attempted to rescue him. The outlaws, if not the better men, had a mighty advantage over soldiers taken by surprise, roused out of their first sleep, and hastily armed; and ere long they yielded to their fate, ceased to struggle, and sullenly laid down their arms.

And now Collingham lost no time in completing the business which had brought him there. Guided by Wolf, he proceeded to the chamber in which Oliver Icingla was a prisoner, and knocked.

“Who knocks?” cried a stern voice.

It was Oliver’s, and very bold in tone; though what the young Englishman intended to do if there had been danger it is difficult to guess, inasmuch as he had not even a weapon.

“It is I, William de Collingham,” was the reply; and forthwith the door opened and revealed Oliver standing in the dim moonlight as guard over the women who had appealed to him for protection. It is needless to relate what followed. Suffice it to say that in half an hour the castle was left to its mortified and wounded garrison; the outlaws had dispersed through the woods; and Collingham and Oliver Icingla, with Wolf perched behind Oliver on the white “haquenée,” were riding leisurely in the direction of London.

But Oliver Icingla, eager as he might be for liberty and action, did not leave Chas-Chateil without a sigh.

“Noble demoiselle,” said he, as he took leave of De Moreville’s daughter, “I once said that when I left the castle I should carry with me one pleasant memory; and now that I have the prospect of freedom before me, beshrew me if I do not deem it dearly purchased at the cost of a departure from the place which your presence consecrates in my heart. But, farewell! May the saints watch over you, and may we meet in more peaceful days and on a happier occasion!”

“Amen!” said the Norman maiden, in a soft whisper, as Oliver chivalrously carried her soft hand to his lips, and the tear from her eye alighted on his hand. “May God so order it.”

Alas! alas! for the vanity of human wishes! It was neither on a peaceful day nor a happy occasion that Oliver Icingla and Beatrix de Moreville were to meet again.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WARRIORS IN DISGUISE

On the evening of the 1st of June, the day preceding that on which Louis of France rode into London to receive the homage of the chief citizens and barons, two persons—one of them a tall, strong man, riding a big, high horse, and the other a stripling, mounted on a white "haquenée"—reached Southwark. They reined up before the sign of the White Hart, an hostelry afterwards celebrated as the headquarters of Jack Cade during his memorable insurrection.

"Who may you be, and whence come ye?" asked the landlord, who, seeing that the times were troubled, was cautious as to the persons he received under his roof.

"I am a yeoman of Kent," answered the elder of the horsemen, frankly, "and this youngling is my nephew, and we have this day ridden from my homestead near Foot's Cray."

The explanation proved satisfactory—at all events, it sufficed for the occasion—and the travellers stabled their steeds, and, having entered the White Hart, were soon doing justice to such good cheer as the tenement afforded. The yeoman, meanwhile, talked freely enough with all who addressed him. The stripling, however, sat silent and seemingly abashed, as it was natural a young peasant should sit in a scene to which he was unaccustomed, and among people who were strangers. Only once, when his companion was holding forth on the subject of flocks and herds, he opened his mouth to utter an enthusiastic exclamation in praise of a brindled bull that had recently been baited in his native village; and having done so, and, apparently, also satisfied his hunger and thirst, he, in very rustic language, proposed a visit to the "bear-gardens" hard by the hostelry.

And here the reader may as well be reminded that, in the days of King John, and for centuries after—indeed, up to the time of Queen Elizabeth—the Surrey side of the Thames was almost without houses, with the exception of a part of Lambeth, where stood the primate's palace; and Bermondsey, a pastoral village with gardens and orchards; and Southwark, which was a considerable place, relatively to the period, and boasted of the public granary, and the city brewhouse, and the mansions inhabited by prelates and abbots when they were in London, besides many and various places of recreation to which the Londoners were wont to repair. Here was Winchester House, the residence of the Bishop of Winchester; there Rochester House, the residence of the Bishop of Rochester; there the inn of the Prior of Lewes; there the inns of the Abbots of Battle and of St. Augustine, in Canterbury; there St. Olave's Church; and there, standing hard by in strange contrast, as if to illustrate the truth of the old proverb, "the nearer the church, the farther from grace," certain tenements with such signs as the Boar's Head, the Cross Keys, the Cardinal's Head, etc., of which the reputation was such that it was presumed the faces of the decorous were never seen within their walls.

But, however that might have been, no discredit whatever attached to the bear-gardens, "where were kept bears, bulls, and other beasts to be baited, as also mastiffs in various kennels nourished to bait them, the bears and other beasts being kept in plots of ground scaffolded about for the beholders to stand safe." Bear-baiting, in fact, ranked, like festivities and tournaments, among the fashionable diversions of the age; and the yeoman and his nephew went thither and enjoyed themselves with clear consciences, as persons in similar circumstances would in our day visit a theatre or a music-hall. Indeed, the first two individuals who attracted their attention were persons no less respectable in their day and generation than Joseph Basing the citizen, who had a lurking reverence for the monarchy of England, and Constantine Fitzarnulph, who was all eagerness to overthrow it, no matter what the consequences. Eager was the conversation which they held as they walked along, and such as proved that Basing still cherished the doubts and fears which he had in vain expressed at Clerkenwell.

"I wish all this may end well," said he bluntly, in reply to a long narrative of the preparations made to receive the French prince and his lords.

"My worthy fellow-citizen," said Constantine Fitzarnulph, "content yourself, I pray you, and credit me that this is all as it ought to be, and that it will all work for the welfare and prosperity of England and our city."

"I would fain hope so if I could," replied Basing, shaking his head incredulously; "but, by St. Thomas, I wish you may not all live to repent your handiwork, and to find, when too late, that you are like the countryman who brought up a young wolf, which no sooner grew strong enough than it began to tear his sheep to pieces."

The two citizens passed on, and the yeoman of Kent and his nephew, having passed some time in the bear-gardens, strolled leisurely towards London Bridge, which was crowded with passengers, and enlivened by ballad-singers and minstrels bawling out the newest verses in praise of Prince Louis, and Robert Fitzwalter, and Constantine Fitzarnulph, and looked and listened till warned by the curfew bell to return to their hostelry and betake themselves to repose.

"Beshrew me," said the stripling in a low but ardently earnest tone, as, having looked to their horses, they parted for the night—"beshrew me if the heads of the Londoners are not turned with all this babble and noise about Prince Louis, and Robert Fitzwalter, and Constantine Fitzarnulph. My patience begins to give way."

"Heed them not," replied the yeoman in a similar tone; "it is because Louis and his friends are the stronger party, and for no other reason. It is ever the way of the vulgar to follow those, no matter what their worth, whom Fortune favours, and despise those on whom she frowns, as I have learned to my bitter experience. See you, when the royal cause flourishes again they will shout as lustily for the king. Mayhap even we may yet be the heroes of popular song. Marry, less likely things have come to pass in changeful times."

"May the saints forefend!" exclaimed the stripling, smiling; "for, certes, I should then conclude that we were in the wrong. I remember me of the story which tells that when the Greek orator was loudly applauded by the multitude, the philosopher chid him. 'Sir,' added the philosopher, 'if you had spoken wisely, these men would have showed no signs of approbation.'"

Next morning, the yeoman and the stripling rose betimes, broke their fast, crossed London Bridge, and mingled with the crowd—pressing, surging, and swaying—that cheered and welcomed Louis, who that day charmed all hearts by his great affability and his very gracious condescension. Nothing, indeed, could have exceeded the enthusiasm of the citizens and populace of London when the French prince, crossing London Bridge, entered the city; "for," says the chronicler, "there was nothing wanting in the salutations of the flattering people, not even that barbarous Chaire Basileus, which is, 'Hail, dear lord.'"

The yeoman of Kent and his young comrade did not add their voices to the music of the hour. Perhaps they were too stupid to comprehend fully what was taking place. However, they certainly did seem to make the best use of their eyes. They entered the church of St. Paul's while the citizens were doing homage and swearing allegiance, and they followed the long and brilliant cavalcade of prelates, and nobles, and knights, conspicuous among whom were Hugh de Moreville and Sir Anthony Waledger, when they conducted the French prince to Westminster; for here a similar ceremony was to be performed in the Abbey, which then stood very much as it had been left by Edward the Confessor—to wit, in the form of a cross, with a high central tower, and as it had been consecrated on the Christmas of 1065, when the saint-king lay dying in the Painted Chamber.

Both the stripling and the yeoman looked on the Abbey with peculiar reverence, and the sight of it seemed to recall to them the memory of the pious founder, but of whom few else in London or Westminster thought that day.

"Holy Edward be our aid, and the aid of England!" said the younger, uncovering his head; "for never, certes, have we and England been more in need of the protection of our tutelary saint."

"Amen," added the yeoman; and, separating themselves from the crowd, they proceeded to an ale-house right opposite the gate of the palace, exchanged salutations with the landlord in a confidential tone, and ascended a stair to a chamber, the window of which looked into the palace-yard. Finding themselves alone, they turned to each other with a glance of peculiar significance.

"Sir William de Collingham," said the stripling, much agitated, "we are discovered. That drunken maniac of a knight saw through our disguise."

"Be calm, Master Icingla," replied the other, like a man long habituated to danger; "you may be in error. Anyhow, we gain nothing by taking fright; for, if it be as you say, he may even now have taken such measures that we must fall into the toils. Wherefore I say, be calm."

And, in truth, their situation was perilous; for since the exploit of Collingham at Chas-Chateil, and Oliver's escape from that castle, had become matters of notoriety in London, both had been marked men. And not only had Hugh de Moreville sworn vengeance in case of having the power to inflict it, but Sir Anthony Waledger, exasperated by the loss of his post as governor of Chas-Chateil, which he ascribed to the trick put upon him and its results, vowed never to taste joy again till he had put both the knight and the squire into his patron's power. What was their real object in being in London under the circumstances, chroniclers have not pretended to state; but certainly they would have been safer elsewhere. Perhaps the very danger they incurred had its influence in making them venture into the midst of foes; but, however that may have been, there they were in that ale-house at Westminster, and below was Sir Anthony Waledger conversing with the woman of the hostelry.

"Dame," said the knight, in his grandest way, "tell me, on your troth, who are they drinking above? Are they alone, or in company?"

"On my troth, sir," answered the landlady, "I cannot tell you their names; they have come here but now."

On hearing this, Sir Anthony Waledger, wishing to judge with his own eyes, went up-stairs to ascertain the truth, and, not doubting that he was right in the conjecture he had formed, called for a quart of ale—for the Norman knight was never neglectful of opportunities of getting liquor—and, having ordered the quart of ale, he saluted Collingham.

"God preserve you, master!" said he, dissembling; "I hope you will not take my coming amiss; for, seeing you at the window, I thought you might be one of my farmers from Berks, as you are very like him."

"By no means," replied Collingham, as if much honoured by being spoken to by so great a man. "I am from Kent, and hold lands from the Lord Hubert de Burgh; and the Lord Hubert being somewhat neglectful of my interests, I wish to lay my complaints before Prince Louis and the barons against the tenants of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who encroach much on my farm."

"Ha!" exclaimed Sir Anthony, "then I may be your friend. If you will come into the hall I will have way made for you to lay your grievances before the prince and the lords."

"Many thanks, sir, but I will not trouble you at this moment, albeit, I do not renounce your aid in the matter. Sir, may I know your name?"

"My name," answered the knight, "is Sir Anthony Waledger;" and, after having paid for the quart of ale, and drank it hurriedly, but with evident relish, he added, "God be with you, master!" and descended the stair and left the ale-house, and hastily crossed to the palace and made for the council-chamber, whither the barons had gone, and, requesting the usher to open the door, called the Lord Hugh de Moreville.

"My lord," said he, as De Moreville appeared, "I bring you good news."

"By St. Moden!" exclaimed De Moreville, amazed at having been trespassed on at such a moment, "why not at once tell me what it is?"

"By the head of St. Anthony!" answered the knight very boldly, as he advanced, "it concerns not only you, but Prince Louis, and all the lords present. I have seen Sir William de Collingham and Master Icingla disguised as yeomen in an ale-house close by the palace-gate."

"Collingham and Icingla?" said De Moreville, much surprised.

"By the head of St. Anthony, my lord, it is even so—it is true," replied the knight, greatly elated at the thought of being the bearer of such intelligence; "it is as true as that I live by bread, and you may have them to dine with you if you please."

De Moreville, in spite of his bad humour, laughed grimly.

"In truth," said he, "I should like it much. Wherefore hasten to secure them; but take power enough with you to be in no danger of failing, for they are dangerous desperadoes, as their actions and words prove."

"Trust me," said Sir Anthony, with evident confidence in himself that he would be prudent in action. "May I never again taste joy if I fail in the enterprise!"

"Wherefore not say ale and wine at once?" replied Moreville, jocularly; "I should then feel assured of your doing your very utmost."

Sir Anthony did not answer, but, having selected a dozen stalwart men from De Moreville's train, the knight made for the ale-house.

“Follow me at a distance,” said he to the men, “and as soon as you perceive me make a sign to arrest the persons I am in search of, lay hands on them, and take care they do not, on any account, escape.”

So saying, Sir Anthony again entered the ale-house, ascended the stairs, and, followed by his myrmidons, entered the chamber where he had left Collingham and Oliver Icingla. He was prepared to give the sign which was to make them prisoners, and was already anticipating the success of the enterprise which, according to his calculations, was to redeem him from the disgrace which he had incurred by allowing Chas-Chateil to be entered by a band of outlaws, when his countenance fell and he tossed his arms on high.

“By the head of St. Anthony,” said he, wildly, and with mortification in his countenance, “the birds have flown!”

“*Yes*,” answered a sepulchral voice, which seemed to come from the midst of the band, “*they are flown; for in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird*.”

Sir Anthony Waledger started, shivered, and looked round and round in great alarm, and several of his followers crossed themselves; and as they did so, the voice repeated in still more mysterious accents—

“*In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird.*”

Sir Anthony called on his favourite saints to protect him; and his men began to back confusedly out of the chamber, every one of them with a heart beating faster and louder than his neighbour’s.

As they passed out and questioned the landlady, the good dame laughed in her sleeve.

“On my troth,” said she, complacently, as she looked after them, “they will be more clever than I take them to be if they can lay hands on Forest Will without his own leave.”

“As well,” added mine host, who now descended from the upper regions, rejoicing in having successfully executed his mission—“as well try to catch the blazing star which, some years since, was like to have carried the world away on its tail.”

“Forest Will is man enough for them all,” added the landlady with a smile.

Mine host gave a start which indicated slight jealousy.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A RIDE FOR LIFE

WHEN Sir Anthony Waledger drank his ale with such evident relish, and left the chamber from the window of which Collingham and Oliver Icingla were looking out on the excited populace, the knight and the squire turned on each other countenances which expressed a very considerable degree of consternation.

"By the rood!" exclaimed Collingham, "our necks are in peril. I feel it."

"But our hands can guard them, with the aid of God and good St. Edward," replied Oliver, drawing a dagger from under the rustic garments he wore as disguise.

"Impossible!" said Collingham, rising and shaking his head. "We must escape, and that forthwith. Put up your dagger and follow me."

"Lead on, then," said Oliver, calmly, and both descended the stair, Collingham as he passed out exchanging a whisper with the landlord, who thereupon betook himself to a hiding-place that looked through an almost invisible crevice into the chamber which the knight and squire had just left.

Meanwhile, Collingham and Oliver, more and more aware of their danger, but at the same time proof against anything like craven fear, contrived so to mingle with the crowd as to escape observation, and, feeling their way cautiously, made for the side of the Thames, which was gay with barges and pleasure boats crowded with the wives and daughters of barons and citizens eager to view the procession at a distance, and to catch a glance, if possible, of the foreign prince under whose rule they anticipated so much liberty and so much happiness. Hailing a little boat, as if anxious, in his character of a yeoman of Kent, to see all that was to be seen, Collingham coolly stepped on board, making a sign to Oliver to follow, and soon they were rowing leisurely in the middle of what was then "the great highway" of London. Barge after barge floated past them as they proceeded towards the Surrey shore, and in one of these Oliver, with a start, recognised De Moreville's daughter, attended by Dame Waledger and her maidens. They were so close that Beatrix's dog, with the remarkable instinct of his race, appeared to know Oliver in spite of his disguise, and barked and wagged its tail in sign of recognition, which had the effect of drawing the sharp eyes of Dame Waledger on the little boat and its passengers. The youth, however, forgetful of his danger, had only eyes for Beatrix, and gazed wistfully on the barge.

"I marvel much," soliloquised he, pensively, "whether the fair demoiselle has forgotten me;" and he sighed audibly.

"By the rood!" exclaimed Collingham, anxiously, "I fear me that ancient shrew guesses who you are. She has eyes like a hawk, and this encounter may be our death."

But it was too late to remedy the mischief, if mischief had been done, and having urged on the boatman they were soon set ashore on the Surrey side, at a little wharf hard by London Bridge, and without loss of time took their way to the White Hart, where Collingham, having given mine host some excuse for so sudden a departure, paid their reckoning, while Oliver saddled and bridled their horses, and brought them from the stable.

"Now horse and away," said Collingham, as he sprang into his saddle. "I hardly deem they can track us, even if they try, and anyhow we have the start."

"True," said Oliver, as he mounted, not without directing a glance at an ancient-looking battle-axe that hung at his saddle-bow; "and yet I cannot but mutter a malison on the luck that makes me dependent on the speed of such a haquenée at such a moment. Had I but my gallant Ayoub beneath me, small danger would there be of my impeding your progress;" and as he spoke they rode on, turning their faces southward.

"Fear not," replied Collingham, dauntlessly; "if the old hack has not speed he hath endurance, and I doubt not will carry you fast enough to sup and sleep this night in the Sussex forest;" and they pursued their way, frequently turning aside, however, to avoid the habitations of men, and confining themselves as much as possible to the woods and woodlands. Such, indeed, was the course they took, that the idea of being traced was one which it seemed unreasonable to entertain. But a craving for revenge sharpens mortal invention, and Sir Anthony Waledger was in no mood to be baffled. Besides, other keen eyes besides those of Dame Waledger had been on them. As they mounted in haste at the White Hart, Clem the Bold Rider, who had accompanied De Moreville to London, and gone on a visit to the hostler, was hanging about the stables of the inn, and patting the head of a russet bloodhound, which he seemed to have taken under his especial charge, and which he addressed as Canmore. No sooner did they ride away than Clem, committing the dog to the care of the hostler, left the White Hart, and hurried away to Westminster with intelligence of what he had seen.

"Ho, ho!" cried Sir Anthony Waledger, joyfully, "the saints have delivered them into our hands;" and without even waiting to consult De Moreville, the knight mounted, with Clem the Bold Rider and ten other men at his back, and hastily as the crowded streets would permit of their doing, made for London Bridge, crossed to Southwark, and rode forward to the White Hart, to set the bloodhound on the track of the fugitives.

"It is parlous strange," mused Sir Anthony, as Clem brought out the bloodhound; "this dog belongs to a breed which Edric Icingla brought from the borders of Scotland to Chas-Chateil, and he was wont to boast of their sagacity and unerring instinct. Little did the braggart Saxon foresee that one of them was one day to be used to bring his son to justice."

Meanwhile, guided by the dog, the knight was speeding on, and so were Collingham and Oliver. At first they rode at a rapid rate, but, believing that all danger was over, and having a long journey before them, they gradually slackened their pace, and even ventured to halt for half an hour at a mill that whirled on a branch of the River Mole, to rest their horses and drink a cup of home-brewed ale. Had they been aware of their danger, they might have found refuge in Earl Warren's castle of Reigate, which still held out for the king. But having now little or no apprehension of pursuit, they, on remounting, pursued their way leisurely towards Sussex, and entered the forest country with a feeling of such thorough security that they began to laugh at their recent peril.

"Now let De Moreville and his drunken knight do their worst," said Collingham, gaily. "If they follow us to our retreat they will have reason to wish they had rather fallen into the hands of the Tartars."

"Ay, let them do their worst," repeated Oliver, sternly. "By the Holy Cross, when we next meet, mayhap they will have less relish for our company."

“However,” observed Collingham, gravely, “let us not forget the homely proverb which tells us not to halloo too loud till we are out of the wood, and profit so far by the lesson we have received as not again, on light grounds, to thrust ourselves needlessly into manifest peril.”

“It is a lesson which men of adventurous spirit are ever slow to learn,” observed Oliver, thoughtfully, and again they rode on in silence.

But ere long this silence was destined to be rudely disturbed. While their horses were pacing along a beautiful glade, and over turf as smooth as that of a modern racecourse, a sound like the baying of a dog suddenly broke on their ears. It was, indeed, at some distance. Nevertheless, Collingham, a man not easily frightened, reined up his steed, and listened in great alarm.

“By the rood!” exclaimed he, after listening for a minute, during which the bay of the dog sounded again and again through the forest, “I could scarce have believed any man wearing the spurs of knighthood capable of taking such an advantage over warriors in adversity. Nevertheless, I suspect it is not the less true that they have bloodhounds on our track. If so, we have nothing to trust to but the speed of our horses. So Master Icingla, ride on, and spare not the spur, for in cases such as this, it is the safety of man, and not the convenience of the beast that must be consulted.”

“O for an hour of Ayoub!” groaned Oliver Icingla as he applied the spur. “My malison upon the false Normans who have separated me from my good steed at a time when I most need his aid. But on, on, Sir William de Collingham. St. Edward forfend that I should be in your way.”

And on they rode through the forest, pausing not at marsh, or hedge, or dyke, disdaining obstacles and defying dangers. But Collingham was under the necessity of ever and anon reining in his good steed to keep pace with the white haquenée, and Oliver, albeit his horse made every effort, felt that it would be better to face a dozen foes singlehanded than continue to urge the already exhausted animal beyond its speed, and gave expression to his sentiments on the point in very earnest language, especially when the baying of the hound indicated that the pursuers were drawing nearer, and still more so when, after emerging from the forest glade into open meadowland, they looked hurriedly behind, and perceived that their pursuers, headed by the bloodhound, and Sir Anthony Waledger cheering the dog on, were gradually, and indeed rapidly, gaining upon them.

Oliver uttered a shout expressive of rage and despair.

“Be patient,” said Collingham, “and droop not. Remember that, albeit their steeds are swifter, and their numbers greater, yet the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle always to the strong.”

Oliver Icingla answered only with a groan, and as he did so the white haquenée groaned in chorus. In fact, every hope of escape was vanishing from the English squire’s mind, and the horse he bestrode was fast becoming exhausted. But still Collingham spoke words of hope, and laughed in spite of the baying of the bloodhound and the yell of the pursuers. Indeed, the chase now became most exciting, and Sir Anthony and his men, who felt quite sure of their game, enjoyed it in spite of their exertions, and shouted mockingly at the efforts of Oliver Icingla to make the white haquenée keep up with Collingham’s charger. Of course, this state of affairs could not long continue, and it was brought to a very sudden termination.

Both the fugitives and their pursuers were already in Sussex, when they reached a wooded valley, intersected by a running stream, not wide, but deep, and difficult to cross. Collingham, however, dashed through, and, thanks to his strong steed, reached the sward opposite without accident; but Oliver Icingla was not so fortunate. In attempting to ascend the opposite bank his white steed gave way, rolled back, and, wholly incapable of making another struggle, fell utterly exhausted into the water, bearing its rider with it. To extricate his limbs from the fallen haquenée and gain the grassy bank was no easy process under the circumstances. But, agile and dexterous, Oliver Icingla succeeded, and with the water running from his clothes, he stood there grasping his battle-axe with the attitude and expression of a person who had lost all hopes of escaping death, but who was determined to sell his life at the dearest rate. Collingham gazed on the youth with the admiration which the physically brave ever feel for high moral courage.

By this time the pursuers were approaching close to that bank of the stream that the fugitives had left.

“Ride on, Sir William de Collingham,” said Oliver, with a gesture which sufficiently proved that he was thinking more of the knight’s safety than his own. “Ride on, I pray you. I grieve that I have too long impeded you on your way. I now perceive plainly that my doom is to die here, and I may as well resign myself to my fate.”

“And die by their hands in this wilderness?” asked Collingham in horror.

“Yes, by their hands, and in this wilderness,” answered Oliver with resignation. “But,” added he, grimly, “carry comfort with thee, Sir William de Collingham. I die not till I have sent at least three of mine enemies to their account. Now away and save thyself, and as thou ridest pray that St. Edward may aid the last of the Icinglas to write his epitaph in legible characters on the crests of his foes. Farewell!”

But William de Collingham was not the man to desert a comrade in such a strait as this.

“By my faith, lad,” said he, “I like thy spirit, and doubt not but thou wouldst make good thy promise ere they overpowered thee; but it shall never be said that thou wert left to deal alone with such odds while William de Collingham can wield his sword. So, as thy haquenée is clearly unable to carry thee further, we must even turn to bay. If we could but check this drunken knight and his knaves, my horse might yet carry us both to the refuge we wot of, which, as thou knowest, is not far off. But we must first get quit of that pestilent hound. Would that I had but a yew-tree bough! A shaft should speedily put a stop to his baying.”

“Stay,” replied Oliver, who had been closely eyeing the dog while Collingham was speaking. “I think I can manage the hound without the help of thy shaft. By the bones of St. Edward, the brute is mine own! Canmore! Canmore! hi, boy, hi!” cried he, addressing the hound, which had now reached the opposite side of the stream.

The animal no sooner heard his voice than, recognising tones familiar to it, its previously fierce aspect changed, and, plunging into the water, it swam across and commenced fawning upon the squire instead of tearing him to pieces, as Sir Anthony and his followers had anticipated.

“Come,” said Collingham, “that is one foe converted into a friend. We may now manage so to deal with the rest as to indispose them for further pursuit. Have thine axe ready; they cannot all cross at once; strike no blow that does not tell, and I warrant me if we can disable the knight and two or three of the foremost of his fellows the rest will not trouble us further. Strike thou at the knaves, and leave me to deal with the knight.”

“Have with you, then!” answered Icingla. “St. Edward for the right! But down, Canmore, down!” added he, again addressing the hound, which continued to express its joy at meeting him by leaping upon him and licking his hand. “Thou hast helped to get us into a scrape, boy, and must also help us out of it. Seize yonder knave and see that ye hold him fast,” said he, pointing to one of two horsemen who had now, at the heels of Sir Anthony, plunged into the stream.

The sagacious animal at once comprehended his master’s wish, and hesitated not to obey. Crouching upon its haunches in readiness for a spring, its bloodshot eyes glaring fiercely, and every hair upon its shaggy back quivering with rage and eagerness, the hound waited till the foremost horseman had gained the bank, and then sprang upon the horse’s neck, into which the dog’s long and sharp claws were plunged while his teeth were at the rider’s throat. Maddened with pain, the steed plunged, reared, and finally slipping upon the slimy margin of the stream, fell backwards into the water, carrying man and dog with him. The hound, however, did not quit his hold till the struggles of the man having ceased showed that he was harmless. The animal then regained the bank and prepared to take a further part in the fray, which had meanwhile been fiercely waged there. One blow of Oliver’s battle-axe had been sufficient to put Sir Anthony’s second supporter *hors-de-combat*, while Collingham was engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter with Waledger and a third of his men-at-arms. Others continued to cross the brook, and Oliver was now hard pressed by three assailants at once, and, fighting at the disadvantage of being on foot while his opponents were on horseback, had received more than one hurt, though not seriously injured. Collingham, perceiving that his friend could not long maintain so unequal a contest, disregarding his less formidable antagonist, first pressed Sir Anthony so closely as to force him back to the very verge of the stream, and then, backing his own steed suddenly a few paces, gave him the spur and dashed against Waledger with so much force as to upset man and horse into the water in even worse plight than his follower had been before, as, from the weight of his armour, he was in danger of drowning at once. Meanwhile, Oliver had disposed of one of his three assailants, a swinging blow from Collingham’s sword settled a second, and the third, hearing the shout of “Save Sir Anthony! save Sir Anthony!” raised by the rest of his fellows, turned his horse and plunged again into the stream, followed by the yeoman who had attacked Collingham.

“By the mass, Icingla, thou hast plied thine axe well,” shouted Collingham. “But it were folly to risk further fighting. Thou art wounded, I see, and I myself am not scathless, so, while the knaves are fishing their drunken leader out of the water, get up behind me and let us make the best of our way for the refuge in the marshes.”

“I am loth to part with the knaves even thus,” said Oliver; “but thou art right, Sir William. We have a chance to escape now, and can reckon with the rascals another time.”

So saying, he mounted behind his friend, and the two, followed by the hound, dashed off towards a clump of forest not far off, leaving the haquenée to its fate, and the followers of Sir Anthony Waledger to rescue their master how they could.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RUDDY LION RAMPANT

On the 3rd of March, 1213, a great feudal ceremony was performed at Clerkenwell. On that day, at the Priory of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, the King of England knighted twenty-one young men of noble name, the heirs of the great vassals of the crown. Foremost among them was a boy of fourteen, with a thoughtful countenance and handsome, albeit the hair was somewhat too red, and attracted much attention; for he was heir to the crown of Scotland, and, his father being old, he had the prospect of early coming to his kingdom.

Moreover, the alliance of this red-haired lad was contended for by the rival Kings of England and France. John, probably with his young daughter Joan in view, offered to provide the Scottish prince with a suitable bride. Philip Augustus, hoping to make him useful in the struggle so constantly maintained with the Plantagenets, pressed on him a daughter whom Agnes Méranie had borne ere the pope forced her husband to repudiate her. The Scot, who was sagacious and intelligent for his years, perfectly comprehended the game of his royal contemporaries; and while they played he looked on watchfully, and with a keen eye to his own interests.

Alexander—such was the name of the Scottish prince—was the only son of William the Lion and Ermengarde de Beaumont, a kinswoman of the Plantagenets, a lady celebrated for "a soft and insinuating address," which more than once saved her husband from the consequences of his imprudence when he provoked the wrath of his powerful neighbours in the South, as he did rather too frequently for his comfort. On the 4th of December, 1214, however, William the Lion expired of age and infirmity, and Alexander was ceremoniously crowned King of Scotland in the Abbey of Scone; and scarcely was he seated on the throne of Malcolm Canmore and St. David, when the Anglo-Norman barons of the North of England sent to offer him their homage and to crave his protection.

Alexander, then about sixteen, was, naturally enough, rather flattered, and more readily listened to their proposals than he would had he been older and wiser. Accordingly, the barons of Northumberland did homage to him at Felton; the barons of Yorkshire, somewhat later, did homage to him at Melrose. Moreover, Alexander immediately raised the standard on which, in a field *or*, ramped the red lion from which his father William derived the surname by which he is known in history, crossed the Tweed early in October, and laid siege to the castle built at Norham by Ralph Falmbard, "the fighting Bishop of Durham." But his efforts to take the stronghold proved unsuccessful, and, after remaining before it for forty days, he raised the siege, and consoled himself for his disappointment by ravaging North Northumberland. Suddenly, however, he learned that he was not to be permitted to slay and plunder with impunity. In fact, news that John, with a host of mercenaries, was marching northward in hot haste, reached the royal Scot's ears; and he made a timely retreat towards Edinburgh, to the very gate of which he was pursued by the hirelings of the foe whom he had provoked.

It soon appeared, however, that Alexander was not so daunted by the storm he brought on his kingdom as to leave the king and the barons of England to fight out their battle without his interference. Far from it. No sooner was John's back turned than Alexander, bent on retaliation, again mustered an army, buckled on his mail, mounted his steed, and led his wild forces, many of whom were Highlanders, across the border.

It was the spring of 1216; and Alexander, having entered England by the East March, penetrated through the bishopric of Durham, marking his way with carnage and devastation. But, probably alarmed by the attitude of Hugh Baliol and Philip de Ullecotes, whom John had intrusted with the government of the country between Tees and Tweed, the King of Scots, after reaching Richmond, wheeled round, and, carrying his booty with him, bent his way homewards through Westmoreland and Cumberland, halting, however, to attack and pillage the Abbey of Holmecultram, where the Highlanders of his army were guilty of such sacrilege and atrocities as utterly threw into the shade the outrages perpetrated by John's mercenaries at Coldingham, in the Merse. Much indignation on the part of the monks was the consequence; and the monkish chronicler goes the length of saying that, as a judgment for their wickedness, about two thousand of them were drowned in the Eden while attempting to cross with the spoil. But, however that may have been, this raid was not, in any point of view, very beneficial to the cause of the confederate barons; and Alexander remained quiet till he was summoned by Louis of France to leave his home and appear at Dover, and render his homage as one of the vassals of the English crown.

It was August, 1216, when Alexander, for the third time, crossed the border, leaving behind the Highlanders who had brought such disgrace on his former expedition. However, he had a considerable army, and succeeded in making himself master of Carlisle, without being able to reduce the castle. From Carlisle he advanced southward; and, after being joined by his brother-in-law, Eustace de Vesci, he, while passing through Durham, came before Bernard Castle, which belonged to Hugh de Baliol. But here Alexander experienced the loss of a valuable ally. Eustace de Vesci, while riding round the fortress, was mortally wounded by a bolt shot from a cross-bow on the walls; and on De Vesci's death the Northern men were so discouraged that they abandoned the siege, and dispersed.

Alexander, however, pursued his career of carnage and plunder. Sparing the friends of the barons, but treating cruelly those of the king, he marched right through England, reached Dover without interruption, and, going down on his knees, placed his hand in the hand of Louis, and, as a vassal of the English crown, did formal homage to the French prince as his feudal superior. At the same time, Louis and the Anglo-Norman barons swore not to make any peace with John without including the King of Scots in the treaty; and Alexander, having thus been secured, as he supposed, against the consequences of his imprudence, sojourned fifteen days with Louis, and then turning his face towards Scotland, pressed northward, proving as he went his respect for the laws and liberties of England by taking the lives and seizing the property of Englishmen.

For a time Alexander and the Scots met with no enemy, and encountered no opposition; and northward they went, slaughtering, plundering, and burning to their hearts' content. On reaching the Trent, however, they found themselves in the presence of foes as cruel and unscrupulous as themselves, in the shape of John's army of mercenaries. Alexander might well have stood aghast, for he knew to his cost that the hireling soldiers of Falco and of Soltim had more of the characteristics of the wolf than of the lamb; and, with the fate of Malcolm Canmore and his own father, William the Lion, in his memory, he might well despair of crossing the Trent alive and at liberty.

It seemed probable, indeed, that, not for the first time, the banner on which the ruddy lion ramped in gold had waved defiantly in southern gales was to be trampled ignominiously in the dust, when an event occurred which averted the danger, and gave Alexander an opportunity of indulging in fresh carnage, and gathering fresh spoil. King

John was dead, and a new scene opened.

CHAPTER XXXVI

END OF KING JOHN

It was not without good reason that John, on hearing that Louis had landed at Sandwich, left Dover and shrank from a conflict with the prince who, on the invitation of the Anglo-Norman barons, had crossed the sea to dethrone him. His army, in truth, was chiefly composed of Flemings and other vassals of the French crown, who all recognised Philip Augustus as their sovereign, and had no idea of fighting against Philip's heir. Many of them immediately deserted to the French prince, captains as well as men; and Falco plainly informed the king that, in case of coming to close quarters with the enemy, not one could be relied on, save the natives of Guienne and Poictou, who considered themselves the natural subjects of the Plantagenets, and still cherished a romantic veneration for the memory of John's mother, Eleanor of Guienne, as the heiress of the old princes who had led their sires to battle, shouting, "St. George for the puissant duke."

With the object of guarding against the worst, John kept moving from place to place, till he found himself at Stamford, and then moving from that town, he proceeded to Lincoln, which, under Nichola de Camville—that courageous dame—had hitherto held out for the king.

At Lincoln, however, John did not long remain. In autumn he marched to Peterborough, and entering Croyland about October, burned the farmhouses belonging to the abbey, the monks of which sided with his foes; and then to the town of Lynn. Owing to the rumours that had created so much jealousy in the French camp, John's prospects began to brighten; and having rallied many fighting men to his standard, he determined to turn his face northwards, probably to arrest the progress of the King of Scots, who had just led an army all through England, to Dover, and with this view left Lynn and marched to Wisbeach, and from Wisbeach to the Cross Keys on the south side of the Wash, which he was resolved on crossing by the sands.

Now at low water this estuary is passable, but it is exposed to sudden rises of the tide, as John found to his bitter experience. At first everything looked secure, and the royal forces had nearly reached the opposite bank, called Fossdyke, when the returning tide began to roar. It seemed that the king and his army were doomed. By making haste, however, they escaped; but the baggage and sumpter-mules were swallowed up in a whirlpool, caused by the impetuosity of the tide and the descending currents of the river Welland; and John beheld with dismay and despair bordering on distraction the loss of men, horses, sumpter-mules, and baggage, without which he felt it would be almost impossible to pursue his expedition. It was felt by the unhappy monarch as the severest blow that fortune could have struck at him in his perplexity; and brooding sullenly over his misfortune, he made for Swinehead, a Cistercian abbey in Lincolnshire.

It was night when John reached Swinehead, and the abbot and the monks bent their hooded heads, and, perhaps wishing him elsewhere, welcomed him to their religious house, and had supper served to him in the refectory. Already the king was feverish from the excitement he had undergone while escaping from the tide and witnessing the loss of his men and baggage, and he greatly heightened the fever by eating immoderately of peaches, and drinking new cider, and by violent denunciations of the personages to whom he attributed the evils that had befallen him. No sleep nor rest did he take that night, but walked muttering about the chamber in which he was lodged, the fever gaining on him. Early next morning, however, he caused his trumpets to sound, and mounted his steed; but the effort to pursue his journey on horseback proved vain, and he was forced to dismount and submit to be conveyed in a litter to the castle of Sleaford. But still he was impatient to proceed, and from Sleaford he was carried to Newark, where he was destined to end all his journeyings on earth. Already it had become quite evident that he was about to make a journey to another world, and that he would soon be beyond the reach of the enemies who had vowed his destruction.

Nor did John deceive himself at that dread hour, when his soul and body were about to part. Feeling that his end was rapidly approaching, he sent for the Abbot of Croxton, dictated a letter to the Holy See, in which he implored the papal protection for his helpless children, and then confessed his sins.

It was the night of the 19th of October, 1216, the day after the Feast of St. Luke, when John felt that death had come to claim its prey. He moved his head, and raised his hand.

"I commit my soul to God, and my body to St. Wulstan," said he, suddenly, and, throwing up his arms, he instantly expired.

From the circumstance of John having committed his body to St. Wulstan, his corpse was conveyed to the cathedral of Worcester, of which St. Wulstan was patron, and, his head having been wrapped in a monk's cowl, which in that age was deemed a protection against evil spirits, he was laid at rest before the high altar.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE GREAT EARL OF PEMBROKE

It really seemed, after the death of John, as if the Plantagenets had ceased to reign in England, and that all hope of a great national royalty had vanished. It was difficult, indeed, to believe that the monarchy could be preserved, surrounded as it was by foreign and domestic foes leagued for its destruction, and who held most of the chief castles and cities in the kingdom, the capital included. One man of high rank, destined to save all by his moderation and energy—moderation in the midst of violence, and energy in spite of old age—remained faithful and firm. This was William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, a man whose hair was white, and who had seen many years; but whose frame time had not bent, and whose spirit trouble had not broken.

The name of the great earl—albeit of European renown in his own day—does not occupy a very large space in English history, considering the service he rendered England. But the effects of his prudent conduct and disinterested patriotism are visible in the England in which we live. Indeed, the influence which he exercised was immense; and it is necessary, in order to comprehend the events which rendered the year 1217 so memorable, to know something of the career and character of the warrior-statesman on whom devolved the responsibility of redeeming the errors—so numerous, and glaring, and gross—that had been committed both by his friends and by their foes. Personal foes he appears to have had none; and what was said by Lord Clarendon of the great Duke of Ormond might with justice be said of Pembroke, “that he either had no enemies, or only such as were ashamed to profess that they were so.”

The family of which Pembroke was the chief derived the surname of Marshal from an office held by them from the time of Henry Beauclerc, and of that family he became the head on the death of his elder brother in the reign of Cœur-de-Lion. At that time, however, he was no longer a stripling, but had been for many years mixed up with public affairs, and had taken part in important transactions.

It seems that early in life William Marshal was attached to young Henry Plantagenet, that son of Henry II. and Eleanor of Guienne, who, after being crowned in his father’s lifetime, died of fever on the Continent, under somewhat melancholy circumstances. Being very penitent for the part he had acted, the prince on his deathbed expressed strong contrition for arming against his sire, and in token thereof delivered to William Marshal, “as his most familiar friend, his cross to carry to Jerusalem,” which was done in accordance with the ill-starred prince’s request.

Returning to England on the accession of Richard, William Marshal, being in favour with the young king, bore the royal sceptre of gold at Cœur-de-Lion’s coronation, and soon after received in marriage Isabel, daughter and heiress of Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (surnamed Strongbow), by Eva, daughter of an Irish king, at whose instance Strongbow embarked for the conquest of Ireland. With Isabel he got the earldom of Pembroke, and immense possessions in England, Ireland, and Normandy. So he was already one of the wealthiest of English magnates, when, on the death of his brother, he succeeded to the office of King’s Marshal.

After the return of King Richard from his crusade and his captivity, Pembroke fought with him and for him in France, Normandy, and in Ireland; and on John’s accession he had made his name known to fame as one of the noblest men and foremost warriors in Christendom. Naturally enough, he was generally recognised as the most honourable and most sagacious person of rank in England at the time when the quarrel between the barons and the king reached a crisis.

Pembroke, as a man of pure patriotism and clear intelligence, could not, of course, sympathise strongly with either party. Probably he was equally shocked by the gross selfishness and hypocrisy of Fitzwalter’s confederates and the unworthy treachery of John. But, whatever his disgust, he did not desert his country in her hour of need; nor did he spare any effort to avert the horrors of civil war. Indeed, he did all he could to accommodate matters; but he spoke to men on whom moderate counsels were wasted, and who, reason or none, were bent on violent courses. It was in vain, therefore, that the great earl, having the good of his country sincerely at heart, played the part of mediator. He might as well have talked to the wild winds as either to the barons or the king.

Approving neither of the conduct of the barons nor the conduct of the king, the position of William Marshal was trying. But, believing that, whatever John’s faults and failings, the interests of the English people were bound up with the interests of the Plantagenet monarchy, nothing could allure him from his fidelity to the crown; and in the midst of John’s distresses, when he was deserted by all whom he had most delighted to honour, Pembroke continued faithful and true, because he deemed that it was his duty so to do.

Nor when John departed this life, and there was every prospect of Prince Louis and the Anglo-Norman barons completing the work they had so vigorously begun, did the great earl despair. Even then he saw the possibility of saving the crown from the grasp of a foreign conqueror, and, exposing himself to terrible hazard in case of failure, instantly took steps to secure the succession of Henry of Winchester, the eldest of John’s two sons by Isabel of Angoulême.

But the aspect of affairs was most forbidding. Only one circumstance occurred about this time to encourage Pembroke in the patriotic course he pursued. Many of the barons who had originally invited Louis to England, or subsequently done homage to him as their sovereign, were deeply disgusted with the French prince’s hauteur and with the airs and insolence of his followers. Some of them had even sent messengers to John at Newark, offering, on certain conditions, to return to their allegiance. The king was too near the gates of death either to see the messengers or hear the conditions. But Pembroke perceived that such a fact as their having sent at all in the circumstances favoured his policy, and no sooner did he receive intelligence of John’s death than he summoned several prelates, and nobles, and knights to Gloucester, and when Peter, bishop of Winchester, and Sylvester, Bishop of Worcester, and Ralph, Earl of Chester, and William, Earl Ferrars, came thither, as also Philip de Albini, a knight of fame, and John Marshal, Pembroke’s cousin, the earl at once proposed to crown the boy Henry, and to proclaim him king.

It was, however, a perilous step to take, and the prelates, nobles, and knights gasped and stared at the idea of a boy of ten occupying a throne that was menaced by royal and feudal warriors who had hosts of fighting men at their backs, nearly every English county at their feet, and the King of Scots and the Prince of Wales as their humble servants.

But it was a step which Pembroke did not fear to take. His brave heart did not fail him in the day of trial, and he was ready to do all, dare all, and risk all, rather than witness the realisation of the vision which his patriot soul abhorred—the vision of a French prince enthroned at Westminster, and lording it over England with the insolence of a conqueror.

Well was it for England that there was one man at that terrible crisis who had the capacity to think and the courage to act.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CORONATION OF THE BOY HENRY

AMONG the provincial cities of England at the opening of the thirteenth century, Gloucester was accounted one of the strongest, fairest, and most stoutly loyal. It had long, indeed, been of importance, and boasted of historical associations which connected it with the ancient world. Occupied by the Romans, sacked by the sea-kings, and known to fame as the scene of the memorable single combat between Edmund Ironside and Canute the Great—the crown of England being the stake—and a favourite residence of Edward the Confessor, its importance as a barrier against the Welsh had been recognised by William the Conqueror, who selected its castle as his winter palace, and strongly fortified the city on the north and south with strong gates and stone walls, surmounted by frowning battlements. The town consisted of four streets forming a cross, and named Northgate and Southgate, Eastgate and Westgate, and boasted of a royal castle, with a chase or park, and a grand Gothic abbey, with lofty tower and oriel window, surrounded by its fish-ponds, or "vivaries," and physic garden, and vineyards, and all "the means and appliances" for making monastic life comfortable and pleasant. The strength and wealth of the place were such that while England was ringing with arms and the shouts of "Montjoie St. Denis!" Queen Isabel and her son Henry had remained within its walls in thorough security; and while towns had been besieged and fortresses taken, Gloucester had neither been taken nor besieged up to the hour when King John died, in misery, at Newark-on-the-Trent.

It was Friday, the 28th of October, 1216, the Feast of St. Simon and St. Jude, and Gloucester presented a scene of considerable excitement, though the weather was the reverse of exhilarating. Not a glimpse was there of the "merry sunshine, which makes the heart so gay." The sky was obscured with a drizzling mist; gloom hung over the whole city; the Severn, swollen with recent rain, threatened to overflow its sedgy banks; the orchards and woodlands around were soddened with wet; and the deer in the king's park crouched together, sought shelter under the dripping branches of the trees, looking for all the world as if they had some instinctive dread of a return of the flood of Deucalion—

"Piscium cum summâ genus hæsit ulmo,
Nota quæ sedes fuerat columbis,
Et superjecto pavidæ natarunt
Æquore damæ."

Nevertheless Gloucester was excited. Men with white crosses on their breasts strode hither and thither, gossiping citizens ventured forth into the wet streets to hear the latest news, and laughing nymphs with fair faces gazed watchfully from basement and loophole, as if impatient for some spectacle to gratify their curiosity; for on that day, in spite of Louis of France and the Anglo-Norman barons who had brought him into England, Henry, the son of John, was to be crowned king, and the place appointed for the ceremony was the abbey of Gloucester—that abbey to which, more than a hundred years later, the remains of his murdered grandson were to be brought by Abbot Thokey from Berkeley Castle, under circumstances so melancholy.

At this time Henry of Winchester was in his tenth year. He was a strong, healthy boy, and good-looking, with the fair hair and fair complexion of the Plantagenets. But one unfortunate defect there was in his countenance. Part of one of his eyelids hung down in such a way as partly to cover the eyeball, and thus gave an unpleasant expression to a face which would otherwise have been handsome. Such as the boy was, William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, took him by the hand, led him to the castle hall in which were assembled Neville, William Ferrars, Earl of Derby, and the few magnates who had come at his invitation to Gloucester, and, placing him in the midst of them, said—

"Behold your king!"

The nobles, who had been accustomed to the second Henry, and Richard, and John, and who had never pictured to themselves a monarch of ten, scarcely knew how to act. Never, indeed, save in the case of Edgar Atheling, had a child figured as King of England, and how he was to deal with the difficulties that beset the throne was more than they could imagine. For a time they remained silent. But Pembroke again spoke, pointed out the degradation of a foreign prince being in possession of the kingdom, and asked them earnestly to crown the rightful heir and drive out the foreigner and his myrmidons. Suddenly, as if by inspiration, they all threw off their reserve, and cried with one voice—

"So let it be: let the boy be king. Long live King Henry!"

Pembroke having succeeded so far, lost no time in bringing the business to a conclusion. On Friday, the 28th of October, Henry was ceremoniously conducted by the barons and prelates to the abbey church, placed upon a throne, and consecrated; and the crown of St. Edward not being within reach, he was crowned with the golden collar which his mother was in the habit of wearing round her neck. In the absence of Langton, the bishop of Bath performed the ceremony, and the royal boy, having taken the oaths usually taken by the kings of England at their coronation, "to bear reverence and honour to God and to his Holy Church, and to do right and justice to all his people," did homage besides to the Church of Rome, for his kingdom of England and Ireland.

But so utterly had the public mind been poisoned against King John and all related to him, that even in Gloucester, the stronghold of royalty, popular opinion was divided, and the partisans of the young king, who were known by the white cross of Guienne which they wore on their breasts, had frays in the streets with the adherents of Prince Louis.

"By my faith," remarked the Earl of Derby to Pembroke as they returned from the abbey to the castle, riding on either hand of the royal boy, "I much marvel to see that even in this city of Gloucester many faces frown sullenly on King Henry's state."

"Even so," replied Pembroke, thoughtfully, "and the sky is dull and dismal. A little while, and the clouds will clear away and the sun shine as of yore."

"May God and the saints so order it!" said Derby.

A few days later, Henry, at the suggestion of the papal legate, took the cross, that his cause might appear the more sacred in the eyes of both friends and foes; and Pembroke, having been appointed Protector, with the title of "Rector regis et regia," during Henry's minority, appointed Henry de Marisco Keeper of the Great Seal, gave notice

of the coronation to continental countries, and issued a proclamation of pardon to all offenders who should make their submission within a reasonable time. In consequence, Salisbury, Warren, Arundel, Roger Merley de Merley, and William Marshal, eldest son of the Protector, broke with Louis and swore allegiance to Henry. But still the aspect of affairs appeared most gloomy, for Louis was in possession of a large portion of England, and Robert Fitzwalter and the confederate barons were still, in spite of his coldness and affronts, bent on placing the heir of France on the English throne.

And what did Isabel of Angoulême do in this emergency? Not certainly what a woman with a fine sense of duty would have thought of doing, nor what she would have done if she could have foreseen the future. But at that time clouds and darkness rested on the house of Plantagenet, and if a magician could have shown Isabel her future and that of the royal race of England in one of those magic mirrors in which Catherine de Medici was in the habit of seeing the fortunes of her descendants, she would, doubtless, either have deemed the whole a delusion or shrunk from the fate that awaited her new venture in life.

However, she consulted no mirror except that in which she had been in the habit of surveying the fair oval face and the regular majestic features which had won her so much fame throughout Christendom as “the Helen of the Middle Ages,” and she had no difficulty in learning that she still retained the charms necessary to fascinate the hearts of men. In England, indeed, she could not cherish the hope of any great matrimonial success, but there were countries beyond the narrow seas where she might yet achieve conquests, so she thought of her native land, with its sparkling rivers and its beautiful climate, and a few months after John’s death, leaving the boy-king and his infant brother Richard and his three sisters to their fate, she embarked for the Continent and repaired to Angoulême.

Now it happened that Hugh, Count de la Marche, had not exactly been guilty of betraying “the noon of manhood to a laurel shade,” but he had refrained from taking a wife for better or for worse. He had, indeed, entered into a contract of marriage with one of Isabel’s daughters, but the princess was still an infant, and Count Hugh soon showed a decided preference for the mother. Accordingly, a marriage was speedily brought about, and Isabel, as wife of the Count de la Marche, lived many years, and wrought so much mischief that, when finally she fled to Fontrevaud and died penitent within that religious house, people said that she ought to be called Jezebel rather than Isabel for having sown the seeds of so many crimes; and she begged that she might not be laid in the choir with the second Henry and Eleanor of Guienne and Cœur-de-Lion, but buried in the common cemetery as a penance for her sins, which were many.

It was well, perhaps, for the young King of England and for the people which he was to rule under circumstances so difficult, that Isabel of Angoulême took her departure and left him to begin his reign under happier auspices. An intriguing and ambitious woman might have spoiled all. As it happened, Pembroke had his own way, and felt that he was equal to the crisis.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A CONQUEROR IN IMAGINATION

WHEN King John died at Newark, and when the boy Henry was crowned at Gloucester, Louis of France and the Anglo-Norman barons were still before Dover. But Hugh de Burgh held out gallantly; and Louis, wearying of an enterprise in which there was no prospect of success, swallowed the vow he had made never to move from before the castle till he had taken it and hanged the garrison, and resolved on withdrawing from the siege, and employing his energies to consolidate the conquests he had already achieved in England. Accordingly, he returned to London, which was still devoted to his cause, and on the 6th of November took possession of the Tower, which, doubtless, he considered a stronghold which would stand him in good stead, in case of the citizens becoming refractory, and requiring to be kept down with the strong hand.

So far the French prince, notwithstanding his check at Dover, saw no reason to despair of ultimate triumph over the obstacles which barred his way to the throne, and, looking upon young Henry's coronation as a farce, he was already a conqueror in imagination. Moreover, he daily showed himself more and more indifferent to the opinions of his Anglo-Norman allies, bestowing all his confidence on the lords and knights who had accompanied him from France, and not scrupling to make Robert Fitzwalter and his confederates feel the full humiliation of their position. It is difficult to guess whether or not Fitzwalter believed the story which was current as to the death of his daughter, Maude the Fair, by the poisoned egg. But even if so, his conscience must sometimes have reproached him when he reflected that, in order to gratify his revenge for a private wrong, he had played a part similar to that of Count Julian of Spain, when, five hundred years earlier, he, in order to avenge the wrongs of his daughter, Caba, had invited the Moors to seize the kingdom of Roderick, overthrew the monarchy of the Goths, and placed his native land and its inhabitants at the mercy of foreign invaders. Probably, however, Fitzwalter seldom thought either of Count Julian's country or of his own, but gave his whole attention to his own safety and his own interests, and troubled himself very lightly with the misery which he had been the means of bringing on England and on Englishmen.

At all events, when Louis, having taken possession of the Tower, again marched from the capital to pursue his career of conquest, Fitzwalter accompanied the French prince, and aided him in his various enterprises. His position, indeed, and that of the other Anglo-Normans who aided the foreigners to ravage the country, even if they were destitute of patriotism, could hardly have been very pleasant; for at that time there existed no love between the barons of England and the warriors of France; and it appears that the continental adventurers were in the habit of assuming airs of superiority, and treating the islanders with something very like contempt, vapouring about their own prowess, repeating the wretched joke about Englishmen being born with tails like horses as a punishment for somebody having cut off the tail of Thomas à Becket's horse, and describing the islanders, without distinction of race, as "English tails."

Now it must have been sufficiently mortifying to Fitzwalter, and De Quency, and De Roos to be supposed to have tails like horses, and perhaps still more mortifying to them as Normans to be treated as English. Nevertheless, they bore all taunts and insults as best they could, and fought side by side with their laughing allies—no doubt valiantly and well. First they besieged and took the castle of Hertford, and then the great castle of Berkhampstead, a place renowned in the history of the Norman Conquest. Elated by his successes, Louis proceeded to St. Albans, and threatened to burn the magnificent abbey which Offa, the Saxon king, had founded and dedicated to the proto-martyr of Britain, if the abbot did not come and do him homage. Trembling for the edifice, and trembling for his own safety, the abbot, nevertheless, declined to do what, as an Englishman, he could not do with honour. However, the holy man offered a large sum of money as a bribe, and Louis, having accepted the abbot's gold instead of his homage, passed on. But ere this a serious misunderstanding had broken out in his camp, and threatened mischievous consequences. When Berkhampstead was taken by the French, Fitzwalter suggested that the castle, on which he pretended to have an hereditary claim, should be committed to his custody. Louis thereupon consulted the French knights who were with him whether or not he should do as Fitzwalter wished.

"No," answered they, scornfully. "How can any confidence be placed in English tails, who are traitors to their own sovereign?"

Louis returned to Fitzwalter.

"You must wait patiently till the kingdom is conquered," said he, "and I will then give every man what he has a right to possess."

Fitzwalter remonstrated, but Louis curtly refused to listen longer to the proposal; and the Anglo-Norman baron grew purple with rage. A violent quarrel ensued; and it looked as if the French prince was about to lose an adherent whose value in calm moments he could hardly fail to recognise. Fitzwalter, however, had linked himself too firmly with the Frenchman to have it in his power to break his chains, and the matter was accommodated. But the friends of the Anglo-Norman baron, exposed to frequent insults of the kind, grew sullen and discontented; and Louis began to perceive that it would not be prudent to rely too far on the fidelity of men born on English ground, and to concert measures for surrounding himself with a force of foreigners sufficient to render him independent of aid from the natives. With this view he consented to a truce with the Protector from Christmas to Easter, and resolved to employ the interval in a voyage to France, and to make a great attempt to persuade his crafty sire to furnish a force formidable enough to overawe all his enemies, and to terminate his successes as a conqueror with a crowning triumph.

Accordingly, Louis, having appointed the Lord De Coucy as his lieutenant in England, set out for the coast of Sussex to embark at Shoreham for the Continent, dreading no interruption. This time he found himself wrong in his calculations. There was a serious obstacle in the way, in the shape of a small but very formidable body of men, headed by a warrior in his teens, wearing a long white jacket, and wielding a very formidable battle-axe, who rushed to the assault with very little respect for persons—whether royal or knightly—under a white silken banner on which figured a fierce raven with open beak, and spread wings, and outstretched neck.

CHAPTER XL

A CAMP OF REFUGE

IMMEDIATELY after his exploit at Chas-Chateil, William de Collingham, as if a great idea had been suggested to him, repaired with Oliver Icingla to an islet deep in the forests of Sussex, overgrown with willows and rushes, and surrounded by marshes which regularly in autumn overflowed with water and became a large lake, with the islet rising in the midst. This islet had at one period been inhabited, and the ruins of a fortress, of which the origin and history were lost in the obscurity of ancient days, were still visible; but now it had no inhabitant save an anchorite, who dwelt among the ruins in a rude hermitage built of timber and overgrown with moss, and who appeared to be cut off from communication with mankind, occupying himself much with the study of the stars, and enjoying the reputation of being able to predict events, as if he had been privileged to read what was written in the book of fate.

It was in this islet, situated in the recesses of what remained of the great forest which before the Conquest extended all over Sussex, that Collingham determined to establish a camp of Refuge for Englishmen who, like himself, would not bow the knee to Prince Louis and his myrmidons, and he had several reasons for selecting the place; some of these he frankly stated, but the principal reason, which was a very strong one, he, like a prudent man, kept to himself. However, he proceeded to throw up intrenchments, constructed huts of earth and wood, set up his raven banner, and summoned all to come thither who had made up their minds to endure any privations and fight to the death rather than submit to the French invaders and lay down their arms.

The summons of Collingham was not disregarded. Within a fortnight some five hundred men had sworn to follow the raven banner for better or for worse, and never a day passed without some new band of outlaws, or some individual fighting man, or some ardent patriot, coming and adding to the number. No doubt there were bad as well as good among those who took refuge on the islet; but under Collingham's discipline all were under the necessity of living decently and in order.

At this camp of refuge, on the evening of the 2nd of June, 1216, an hour after sunset, arrived William de Collingham and Oliver Icingla, riding one horse, like the old Knights of the Temple, accompanied by the russet bloodhound which Clem the Bold Rider had that morning been patting in the stable-yard of the White Hart, but which now willingly followed its old master, from whom it had been taken by Hugh de Moreville, who coveted the animal as well as the rest of the patrimony which Oliver Icingla ought to have derived from his mother. As for the knight and the squire, they were by no means in the best plight. The garments of both—the rustic garments which they had worn to disguise themselves—were spotted with blood, and their appearance indicated that they had been engaged in a desperate struggle for life or death.

All doubt on this subject, however, vanished when, after passing the water on a raft, Collingham and Oliver entered the camp and threw down their weapons. Both warriors were wounded: the sword of the knight was hacked and red; the axe of the squire was dyed dark with gore. Moreover, the strong steed that had carried them to the place of refuge was so weary and wounded that it died that night of fatigue and loss of blood. Such was the consequence to the patriotic warriors of one of their earliest conflicts with the enemy; they were to have many more equally sanguinary, but not so unequal in numbers.

But fierce as they had found the combat, neither Collingham nor Icingla was daunted. No sooner were their wounds dressed and bound up by the anchorite than, assembling the men by the light of the moon, they took a solemn oath, by the cross on the hilt of the knight's sword, not to sleep under a roof, nor to dine in a hall, nor to drink a brimming can at a chimney corner, till Prince Louis and the French were expelled from England. At the same time, every man present—Oliver Icingla included—engaged never to decline a combat with three of the enemy, and to yield implicit obedience to the commands of their leader, upon which Collingham swore to relieve them from their promise if he was known to shrink from an encounter single-handed with six of the enemy.

And now every man understood what he was expected to do, and the work was begun with spirit, and the camp of refuge soon boasted of a thousand men, mostly archers, who attacked the French, and the Anglo-Normans who sided with them, whenever an opportunity presented itself, and, as historians tell us, made themselves particularly formidable when Louis marched into Sussex to take possession of the county.

"Louis, availing himself of John's weakness," says Carte, "sent William Fitzpiers, Earl of Essex, and Robert Fitzwalter, and William Huntingfield into Essex and Suffolk, and marching himself into Sussex, took all the fortresses in the county, but could not quell William de Collingham, who, with a thousand archers, made incursions from the woods and forests in those parts, killed several thousands of the French in different encounters, and held out all the time that the hostilities lasted. There was no attacking this man," adds Carte, "in the fortresses wherein he kept without great disadvantage."

It was not, however, till the French had learned by severe experience what manner of man Collingham was, and the ferocity of his "Ravens"—for so his followers were called, from the fierce raven on his banner—that they came to regard him as invincible and his camp as impregnable. In the effort to put him down, more than one continental warrior of high name was tried and found wanting. Especially did there fail in this endeavour a very valiant captain of free lances, who had been entrusted with the castle of Lewes, and who was deemed equal to any enterprise of the kind.

He was a native of Rheims, his name was Clarembald, and he was one of the mercenary leaders who had come with Louis to conquer England, bringing with him a rather remarkable surname, which, no doubt, he hoped to exchange for a territorial title derived from some earldom or barony on the Thames, or the Humber, or the Tweed. In fact, from his nocturnal excursions into towns and villages in Anjou and Normandy during the wars of King John and Philip Augustus, Clarembald had won the surname of "Eveille-chiens," or Wake-dog, and he had rendered the surname very terrible to such as had learned what it was to have the misfortune to be the foe of his friends.

When Louis seized the castles of the king's adherents in Sussex, Clarembald was appointed governor of Lewes, one of the castles of the Warrens, and he began to rule the neighbourhood with a rod of iron. Nowhere did the inhabitants of England find the invaders so tyrannical and so merciless. In vain the unfortunate English endeavoured to soften his heart by rendering him every possible honour. It only made him worse. He vexed them, tormented them, plundered them, hounded his dogs on their cattle so as to drive them into the marshes, and by breaking their limbs or backs killed or rendered them worthless. Nay more, he lamed their horses, slaughtered their sheep, and treated

them very much as the French magnates of the fourteenth century treated Jacques Bonhomme, till the said Jacques, rendered furious by cruel treatment, turned on his persecutors, and proved to the world, during that outbreak known as the “Jacquerie,” how much worse than the beasts of the forest a human being can become when brutalised by long and continuous oppression.

Now Clarembald Eveille-chiens received very peremptory orders from Prince Louis to attack and destroy the camp of refuge in Sussex, and the bold warrior immediately prepared for the enterprise, only regretting, as far as he was concerned, that it was not one in which there was any chance of plunder.

It was late in autumn when Clarembald Eveille-chiens left the castle of Lewes, encamped in the wood, set up his standard, which was the colour of blood, and, investing the camp of refuge on all sides, constructed dykes and gangways over the marshes, and commenced on one side a causeway through the waters, so that his soldiers might enter the islet and put its occupants to the sword. But he soon found that the work in which he was engaged was no child’s play. Not only were the workmen harassed and interrupted in their operations by mocking jests and flights of arrows, but, night after night, Oliver Icingla, in spite of the watch that was kept, contrived to cross the marshes in his white jacket, and made attacks so sudden and unforeseen that the French at length verily suspected that he dealt in magic.

One night in December, when the snow lay pretty thick, and the frost was severe, and the ground hard as iron, and Eveille-chiens was absent from his camp on one of the many love adventures with which he diverted his leisure hours, the French were suddenly aroused from their slumbers by shouts of

“Hey for the fierce raven!
Ho for the fierce raven!”

and found that Oliver in his white jacket, accompanied by six men, each of them as fearless and most of them stronger than himself, was among them and felling down everything in his way. Penetrating even to Clarembald’s tent, with the hope of taking the doughty warrior captive, they no sooner observed that it was empty than they seized on his red banner, carried it off as a trophy, and cutting their way with shouts of scorn and defiance through their startled foes, reached the island in safety. Oliver immediately climbed a high tree that grew close to the edge of the water, and fastened the red banner to one of the most prominent branches.

“There,” said he, as he descended and it began to flap in the keen, frosty wind—“there let it hang in wind and rain till Wake-dog plucks up courage to come and reclaim it. By the Holy Cross, the sight of it may tempt him to do something very venturesome, for surely it cannot fail to have the effect on him which scarlet has on the wounded bull.”

But still Clarembald made nothing worthy of the name of progress in his enterprise, whilst Oliver continued to make nocturnal sallies which cost the French so dear that Eveille-chiens was glad when the truce which Louis concluded with Pembroke gave him a fair excuse for leaving his red banner to its fate, drawing off his force, and returning to spend his Christmas at Lewes in the halls of the Warrens. The existence of the truce was also notified to William de Collingham by a messenger despatched by the Protector. But Collingham bluntly refused to recognise it.

“I know nothing,” the knight said, “of truces or treaties with Frenchmen who have come into England as invaders. I have sworn to devote myself to ridding the land of them, and to succeed or die in the attempt; and, come what may, I will never lay aside my arms till the invaders have laid down theirs. I have said my say.”

“What mean you, sir knight?” asked the messenger, astonished.

“I mean what I say,” was the brief answer.

And, in truth, Collingham did soon show that he meant what he said. When Louis, with his train, escorted by the Bastard of Melun—a Frenchman, who was captain of Bramber—was on his way from the castle of De Braos to the coast, to take shipping for the Continent, Oliver Icingla, despatched by Collingham to lie in wait for the prince, suddenly appeared with some hundreds of archers, and made a fierce attack—his men shouting, “Ho for the black raven!” and “St. Edward for Icingla!” Louis attempted to charge the archers; but his horse was killed under him, and he rolled on the ground. His knights assisted him to rise, and he was about to mount a fresh steed, when Oliver and his men penetrated to the very spot where he was drawing his sword; and the axe of the Icingla, having rung well on the prince’s head, was already swung a second time, and descending with a force which would have smashed both helmet and head. But fifty knights spurred to the rescue, and saved the invader’s head from the patriot’s hand. A fierce conflict ensued, and Louis, after finding himself more than once in danger, deemed it discreet to escape while his attendants screened his flight with their bodies.

Hurrying on and hailing his ships, he embarked in haste, confusion, and agitation, and sailed in no joyous mood from the shores on which, seven months earlier, he had set foot with prospects so inviting and a heart so elate. Indeed, a great reaction had already manifested itself; and even in London the exploits of the English at the camp of refuge were celebrated in ballads and sung about the streets—the names of William de Collingham and Oliver Icingla gradually becoming so popular that they were on every man’s tongue, and at length reached the ear of the Count de Perche.

Evil was the hour in which this took place.

De Perche was a martial Frank, who frequently exclaimed “*Mort Dieu!*” and sometimes swore by the bones of St. John the Baptist, which had been secured by Martin Litz as spoil when Constantinople was taken by the Crusaders in 1204, and brought to France, with the arm of St. James and a piece of the true cross, as most precious sacred relics. The count was a handsome personage, with broad shoulders, hazel eyes, and a countenance “prouder than lion or leopard;” and he was cruel towards the people of the country to which he had come as an invader.

One day the count, when about to leave London for the castle of Hertford, and conversing with Constantine Fitzarnulph about the attack made on Prince Louis, suddenly said—

“Foi de mon âme, fair sir, I would you could tell me where lies the domain of this Icingla, for of him I would like well to make an example, in order to encourage others not to follow his footsteps.”

Fitzarnulph smiled at the idea of Oliver’s domain, and explained to the count that the Icingla only possessed an old grange in a woodland occupied by his mother, who was a widow.

“Nevertheless,” rejoined the count, shaking his head, “it is necessary to do something by way of an example;

and if, by your favour, I can but find one familiar with the country to guide me to the house of the Icingla on my way to Hertford, *mort Dieu!* I will teach him, and such as are of his company, to think twice before they defy the authority and attack the person of our good lord Louis."

Fitzarnulph opened his mouth to speak, then paused, reflected, and hesitated; then struggled with his own sense of what was generous; and finally got over all the difficulty which he felt by shifting the responsibility of this business to the shoulders of a man whom he knew would be very willing to bear the burden, heavy and crushing as that burden might one day become.

"Sir count," at length he replied, "I swear to you, by St. Thomas, that I scarce know what to do in this matter; for I own that I can hardly, with propriety, aid you in your wish. But," added the citizen, significantly, "if you will send for that good knight, Sir Anthony Waledger, who is even now at the house of the Lord Hugh de Moreville, in Ludgate, I will answer for his finding you as trusty a guide as you could desire."

CHAPTER XLI

OLIVER'S DREAM

In spite of the truce agreed to by Louis and Pembroke, both of whom expected to profit by the delay, much fighting went on in Sussex in the early spring of 1217, during the absence of the French prince from England, and while the Lord de Coucy was acting as his lieutenant. Philip de Albini and John Marshal, Pembroke's nephew, having undertaken of their own free will to guard the coasts in the neighbourhood of the Cinque Ports to prevent any more of the French from landing, allured many English yeomen to their standard, and were ever on the alert with a body of armed men under their command. William de Collingham, instead of relaxing his efforts, became more and more determined in his hostility to the invaders; and Oliver Icingla, whom, on account of his dress the French called "White Jacket," made such unlooked-for sallies, and presented himself to the foreigners under circumstances so unexpected, that his name inspired something resembling terror even in the bold heart of Eveille-chiens, who began seriously to wish himself safe back on continental soil and under his native sky.

Nor was Oliver satisfied with displaying his courage against the enemy in the fierce skirmishes that almost daily took place in the vicinity of the camp of refuge. Nothing less, indeed, than taking the town and castle of Lewes from the French garrison would content him, and sometimes, accompanied by bands of ten or twenty, sometimes only by Canmore, the bloodhound, he roamed the country on foot to watch his opportunity and gain intelligence likely to aid him in his project. Nobody, however, sympathised very particularly with his aspiration, and Collingham especially, it was clear, thought that the wood and the morass and the intrenched camp were fitter strongholds for people in their circumstances than the walled town, and the fortified castle. Oliver, however, very slow to embrace this conviction, in spite of remonstrances, pursued his enterprise with ardour and zeal, and, in the course of his adventures, found himself in a situation of such peril that he well-nigh gave himself up for lost.

One spring evening, after having been for hours prowling within sight of Lewes, unattended save by the bloodhound, he retreated to the surrounding forest, and, feeling much more fatigued with the exertions of the day than was his wont, he was fain to seek rest under a giant tree which spread its branches over a wide space of ground. Within a few paces the sward was smeared with blood, and at first Oliver supposed that some fray had just taken place there between the French and a party of his comrades. A closer examination, however, convinced him that one or more of the wild bulls which in that age ran free in the oaken forests of England had that day been slaughtered on the spot, possibly to supply food to the garrison, who, being in a hostile country and in a district which they had early exhausted by their rapacity, were known to be pressed for provisions. Not deeming the matter worthy of prolonged consideration, the boy-warrior returned to the root of the tree and laid down his axe with the expectation of enjoying some repose undisturbed.

Resting himself on the lowest bough, and settling himself securely with his feet on the grass and the faithful hound by his side, Oliver Icingla endeavoured to snatch a brief sleep in the twilight. But sleep would not come, and, as twilight faded into darkness and evening deepened into night, and the moon rose and shone through the trees on the grass, he thought of Beatrix de Moreville and of Oakmede and Dame Isabel, and from his home and his mother Oliver's thoughts wandered to the Icinglas and the days when they had been great in England and marched to battle under a gonfalon as stately as a king's.

But no matter what subject presented itself, all his reflections were tinged with gloom, and several times he rose to his feet and walked about with the uneasy feeling of one who has, he knows not why, a presentiment of coming woe. At length, worn out with bodily fatigue and melancholy musing, he fell into a feverish sleep, and dreamt dreams which made his breath come by gasps, and caused his brow to darken, and his teeth to clench, and his frame to quiver.

It seemed to him at first that a sweet voice was singing the popular ballad, "I go to the verdure, for love invites me;" that he was, in fact, in the woodlands around Oakmede, walking hand in hand with De Moreville's daughter, and that suddenly as they moved through the greenwood and reached a spot familiar to him from childhood, they came upon his mother stretched lifeless and rigid under a leafless tree growing on a hillock where there still remained a circle of rough stones, which seemed to indicate that the place had in ancient days been dedicated to the rites of the Druids. Oliver started in great horror, and rapidly his imagination associated the death of his mother with the enmity which had been shown towards himself by Hugh de Moreville. But he did not awake. Suddenly, as if by magic, other figures appeared on the scene, and before him, as he imagined, were all the departed chiefs of the house of Icingla urging him to execute a terrible vengeance, while one of them, arrayed in the long cloak and wearing the long beard in vogue among the Anglo-Saxons up to the time of the Conquest, raised his hand and exclaimed—

"Dally not with the Norman's daughter, O heir of the Icinglas! nor deem that aught but evil can come of her love. Beware of her wiles, and avoid her presence, and wed her not, for harder thou wouldst find the couch of the foreign woman than the bare ground on which thou sleepest while keeping faith with thy country and thy race."

And then Oliver dreamt that, as he uttered something like a defiance of this warning, which, awake or asleep, could be little to his liking, the scene changed, and the Anglo-Saxon chiefs, after frowning menacingly on their heir, suddenly became horned cattle, and they rushed upon him bellowing furiously, as if bent on his instant destruction. Fortunately awaking at that moment, in great terror Oliver sprang to his feet, agitated and trembling, and as he did so the sight which met his eyes was not such as to allay his trepidation. Before him, close upon him, bellowing savagely, he beheld a herd of forest bulls tearing up the ground at the spot where he had observed the traces of slaughter, their milk-white skins, and curling manes, and black muzzles, horns, and hoofs distinct in the pale moonlight. Attracted by the barking of the bloodhound, several were advancing furiously on Oliver, nothing, indeed, intervening between him and their black, sharp horns but the faithful dog, which, with a sullen growl, was springing desperately on the foremost of the herd in a brave endeavour to save its master from the terrible peril with which he was threatened. Oliver Icingla, with his hair standing on end, gazed in consternation on the spectacle before him, and involuntarily uttering an exclamation of horror, grasped his battle axe with some vague intention of defending himself against the ferocious herd by which he was assailed.

CHAPTER XLII

BURNING OF OAKMEDE

WHILE Oliver Icingla was exerting himself so strenuously against the French who garrisoned the castles of Sussex, and while ballads in his praise were sung in the streets of London, and in the very hearing of the invaders, Dame Isabel was passing her time sadly in the old halls of Oakmede.

The life of a Norman dame of the thirteenth century was, no doubt, somewhat monotonous; but it was not solitary, and generally could not be very dull. In fact, the castle of almost every Norman baron was a school of chivalry, where young men of noble birth, first as pages, and afterwards as squires, served an apprenticeship to arms, and were taught "to serve God and the ladies," as Oliver had been in the household of the Earl of Salisbury and Hela Devereux, his pious countess. Moreover, the spouse of every powerful noble had a number of damsels in attendance, whom she instructed in the art of needlework and embroidery, as also how to make salve, and bind up wounds, in the event of a siege, and in some very homely domestic duties connected with the larder and the dairy, the dame working in their company, setting them their tasks, and at times reading to them from some holy book or romance of chivalry.

Dame Isabel Icingla's position, of course, was very different in many respects from that of the wife or widow of a Norman baron, and her household much more limited. Moreover, she could not seclude herself as they could do—in fact, as her husband had been known among the Saxons as Hlaford, which signified the bread-giver, so she as his wife was known as Hleafdian, which signified the server of bread; and she was fain to avoid the charge of being denounced as "niddering" by conforming to the system of lavish hospitality and free intercourse with humble neighbours which the Icinglas, as Saxon thanes, had ever practised—their door having always stood open, from morning to evening, to all comers, and their cheer, such as it was, having been dispensed with open hand.

All this, of course, was very homely and primitive, and perhaps Dame Isabel did not relish it. But while enacting her part as a Hleafdian, she never for a moment forgot that she was a Moreville, and never really descended from what she deemed the dignity of a noble lady. Born a Norman, and heiress to vast possessions, her pride was naturally high; and though she was perhaps unconscious of the fact, her original pride as Moreville and Norman had been much increased by her marriage with an Icingla, and all that she heard of their vague and indefinite pretensions; for, having little of their old grandeur left, save their pride, the Icinglas made the most of it in season, or out of season, and regarded their own strength in battle and wisdom in council as nothing compared with the lustre which they borrowed from ancestors who had held princely rank, and headed great armies in England, before the Danish kings turned England upside down.

For various reasons, therefore, Dame Isabel Icingla entertained a very high opinion of her own importance; and even in going through the duties of hospitality which devolved upon her as Hleafdian, she was grave and stately almost to affectation. In the evening, however, she was in the habit of unbending so far as either to converse with her three maidens on domestic affairs, or—being a woman of notable piety—to read to them some passage from the lives of the saints, albeit she may have been aware that these damsels would have much preferred a little lighter literature. But however that might have been, Dame Isabel, dressed in her russet gown, and wearing the wimple which concealed her grey hairs and gave a conventual appearance to her face, was seated in her chair of state, and thus occupied, with her three maidens around her, when a strange murmur ran through the house, and a spaniel which lay at her feet started up and uttered a low growl, and then barked, and, as the dog barked, Wolf, the son of Styr, rushed in with terror on his countenance.

"Oh, noble lady," cried he, so agitated that he could scarcely articulate, "fly! They are coming; they are here!"

"Who are coming?" asked the dame, bending her brows somewhat sternly on the intruder. "Who are here?"

"The outlandish men," answered Wolf, excitedly, "who spare neither sex nor age; for, as my father Styr says, the French soldiers are the refuse and scum of the kingdom."

A few words will suffice to explain how the son of Styr, knowing that Dame Isabel was such a stickler for ceremony, deemed himself justified in rushing unbidden to his lady's presence.

It was a gusty Monday evening, about the beginning of March, and Wolf, having paid his last visit for the day to Ayoub and Muradel, was loitering about the stable-yard, and, boy-like, watching eagerly the movements of two young game cocks which he expected would win applause in the Barnet cock-pit and do honour to the training of Oakmede on the morrow, which happened to be Shrove-Tuesday, when his ear was arrested by the "steady whisper on the breeze and horsemen's heavy tread" which intimates the approach of cavalry.

Rumour had recently brought to Oakmede some terrible reports of the havoc wrought by the invaders, and the inmates had often instinctively felt alarmed and drawn closer together as tales of ravaging and pillage were told by pilgrims and pedlars around the winter fire of wood. But somehow or other, from the home of the Icinglas having stood through so many civil turmoils without being scathed or attacked, they never realised the idea of armed foemen appearing at the gate.

Wolf, however, as he listened, began to suspect that this confidence was to meet with a rude shock, and, as he rushed out of the stable-yard, and looked up the long glade that served for avenue, his worst suspicions were confirmed by the sight of a band of horsemen whose aspect would have left no doubt that they were foreigners and coming on no friendly errand, even if his keen eyes had not recognised in their guide his ancient enemy Clem the Bold Rider, mounted on one of Sir Anthony Waledger's horses, and pointing out the way with vindictive intent. Not a moment did he then lose in performing what he deemed his two great duties under the circumstances. The first was to give the alarm to Dame Isabel; the second to fly back to free Ayoub and Muradel from their stalls, to lead them to the rear of the buildings, and to drive them through the orchard into the woodland, confident that they, at least—thanks to their aversion to strangers and their swiftness—would escape the hands of the marauders.

When this was done—and it was but the work of a minute—Wolf deemed it high time to think of his own safety, and pondered the propriety of escaping to his father's cottage, to which foreign invaders were not likely to find their way. But his anxiety was so intense that he could not, for the life of him, muster resolution enough to leave the neighbourhood of the danger, and making such a circuit among the trees as kept him out of the way of the enemy, he drew as near to the front of the old house as he could without the risk of detection, and entering the hollow of an old

pollard, peered cautiously out on the armed band.

Meanwhile, guided by Clem, the Count de Perche—for he it was—halted before the great wooden gate, sounded trumpet, and demanded admittance. No answer being returned to his summons, the count grew wroth, and ordered his men to shoot. His order was promptly obeyed; but the flight of arrows produced no effect, and the count became red with rage.

"Mort Dieu!" exclaimed he, turning round, "are we to be kept here all night by these stinking swineherds? Break open the gates."

Several men sprang over the moat, and soon their hammers and axes were applied with such vigour and energy, that the time-worn gate gave way before the heavy blows aimed at it. At the same time the drawbridge was lowered.

"Now," said the count with a significant gesture and in a decisive tone, "enter, and do your duty."

As he spoke, such of his men as had dismounted passed the drawbridge, rushed through the courtyard, and with little difficulty forced their way into the house; but, to their surprise, nobody appeared either to yield or resist. The place was deserted, and they roamed from chamber to chamber without meeting with a human being. It seemed by their ejaculations, and by their searching and re-searching, that the French soldiers were disappointed at the absence of flesh and blood. However, they laid hold of everything as spoil that was not too heavy to bear away, and returned to the count to report the result of their adventure; and he, after muttering a few oaths, gave his final order.

"Set fire to this den without loss of time," said he sharply, "and dally not, for we have far to ride. Mort Dieu! if this Icingla should think fit to visit his house this night, I will provide him with light sufficient to guide him on his way through the woods."

The count's order was speedily obeyed. His men, indeed, seemed to relish the duty. Having ransacked the barns and the cow-houses, and killed the old cowherd, who, unluckily for him, arrived at that moment from the neighbouring hamlet, the soldiers brought wood and straw, and proceeded, with business-like precision, to the work of destruction, and the house, being chiefly constructed of timber—and that timber old and dry—was soon in a blaze.

"Now mount, every man, and let us begone," said the count triumphantly. "By the bones of John the Baptist! we have made an example of this Icingla, and done enough to deter others from setting themselves against our good Lord Louis. Ride on;" and as the count spoke he turned his horse's head, and, followed by his band of ruffians, rode leisurely by the twilight, up the glade by which he had come on his errand of devastation.

Nor had the French in any degree failed in the work which they came to do. When Wolf, seeing that the coast was clear, emerged from his hiding-place, and came into the open space to gaze on the burning house, night had already fallen, and the sight was terrible to behold, and all the more so to him that he feared the inmates had fallen victims. The fire, indeed, was raging, and devouring its prey like a fiend, and coiling, as the serpent does, round its victim. In some places it had reached the roof, and was leaping towards the sky, on which the reflection of the flames was red as blood, and there was every prospect of the flames meeting in such a way as to reduce the old house to a heap of ashes and ruins. Driven by the wind, the fire reached the outbuildings, and stables, barns, brewhouse, and cow-houses, and pigeon-houses were involved in one general conflagration. Only the little chapel dedicated to St. Dunstan, from the fact of its standing apart from the other buildings, and in the quarter opposite to that towards which the wind was blowing, had a chance of escape.

At this stage, and while all but one wing of the house was enveloped in flame and smoke, Styr the Anglo-Saxon, having accidentally learned that some catastrophe had occurred, joined his son in the darkness, and he did not come a moment too soon. Scarcely had Wolf, in hurried accents, explained what had happened, when shouts and screams of agony reached their ears, and, listening to ascertain the direction from which the cries came, they, by the lurid light which the fire threw around, descried, at the casement of an upper chamber in the wing still unscathed, faces of men and women in mortal terror of the most terrible of deaths. Styr guessed all: the inhabitants of Oakmede had fled to the hiding-hole to escape the hands of the foreign soldiery, and, ignorant that the house was on fire, had remained in concealment till the flames had seized the stairs, and their means of escape had been cut off. Their position was now truly awful; and the old man shuddered at the sight.

Nevertheless, Styr's presence of mind did not desert him. He remembered that in the orchard was a ladder, and he hoped that it might be long enough to enable them to descend. Thither, as if he had suddenly shaken off twenty years of his age, he rushed, Wolf, in keeping pace with him, much marvelling at his father's swiftness of foot. But when the ladder was brought, and when, to the joy of those who were imperilled, it was placed against the wall, their joy was suddenly turned into sorrow, and a simultaneous cry of despair rose from their lips as they perceived that it was too short to serve the purpose of saving them.

But Styr did not despair: it was not his way in life. Calmly he ascended the ladder step by step, till he was almost on the highest, while Wolf held it below to keep it steady. And much had the domestics to rejoice that the veteran's stature was tall, and his shoulder strong. One by one he caught them in his iron arms—first the women, then the men—and descended with them on his shoulders, and all this he did calmly and in solemn silence, like a man who felt his responsibility, and was determined to acquit himself of it with credit. But when the last of the domestics was saved—and by that time the moon had risen—he turned round and gazed on them with the air of a person who wishes to ask a question, but dreads to receive the answer.

"Where," said he at length, struggling to find words—"where, in the name of St. Dunstan and St. Edward, is the Hleafdian?"

Men and maids alike stared at each other, but for a time returned no answer.

"Marry, we know not," at last said the steward.

Styr the Anglo-Saxon raised his shaggy eyebrows, and darted on the circle a look of reproach, such as, even seen by moonlight, none of those present ever forgot during their lives, and then hid his face in his hands, as if praying.

"Now," said he, after a moment, "let everybody who would be saved bear back and away, for danger cannot be far distant."

"Move away," repeated Wolf, setting the example; and everybody with precipitation got out of reach of the tottering walls.

The prescience of the old man was speedily vindicated. All was soon over, and flames rushed from every casement, including even that by which the domestics had made their narrow escape. Then the roof gave way, a cloud of vapour darkened the sky, a pillar of fire rose high, and the old walls tottered and fell with a crash.

Next morning, when tidings of the catastrophe spread through homesteads and hamlets, and when the peasantry flocked to see what was to be seen, the old hall of the Icinglas was a heap of blackened ruins. But what had befallen Dame Isabel was the question which everybody asked, and the question which nobody could answer.

CHAPTER XLIII

FOUND DYING

WHEN Dame Isabel Icingla comprehended the cause of Wolf the varlet's intrusion, and meditated for a moment on the intelligence he brought, she became pale as death, uttered an exclamation of terror, and shuddered with horror at the idea of herself and her household being at the mercy of men who knew nothing of mercy but the name. Nevertheless, she was true to herself and her dignity. Falling on her knees, she prayed earnestly for heavenly support, and called not only on St. Moden, the patron of the Morevilles, but on St. Edward and other Saxon saints whom the Icinglas were in the habit of invoking at moments of anger and in times of trouble, to shield her from the danger that beset her; and having done this, the Norman lady doubtless felt that she had done her duty, at least, in placing herself under powerful and holy protection.

It appeared, however, that the three maidens who had been listening, or pretending to listen, while she read to them a narrative of saintly life, did not thoroughly sympathise with Dame Isabel's pious sentiments. At all events, they failed to follow her example in so far as concerned the invoking of saintly aid. In fact, no sooner did they become aware of their peril than they fluttered, and started up, and screamed, and fled like larks at the approach of the sparrowhawk, and, hurrying pell-mell from the room, followed the other inmates of Oakmede, who were rushing in haste and consternation to a hiding-hole which was formed by a kind of double wall in one wing of the old building, and in which, according to tradition, the Icinglas had found refuge when assailed by the Danes in the days of Harold Harefoot and other of the Danish kings who ruled in England before the coronation of the Confessor.

When, therefore, Dame Isabel rose from her knees and looked round, she found herself unattended, save by the spaniel which had growled and barked at Wolf's entrance, and which now looked up in her face, and, in default of the faculty of speech, seized the skirt of her russet robe, as if to implore her to fly. The instinct of self-preservation seconded the suggestion of the dog, and after rushing into the passage, and in vain summoning the fugitive nymphs to return, she, hesitating no longer, tottered tremblingly down the stair that led to the hall in which Oliver and De Moreville had supped on Christmas Eve, and, escaping by the rear of the house, she made for the little chapel dedicated to St. Dunstan, with some vague notion that she should be safe under the roof and before the altar of an edifice which in her eyes was so sacred.

But here Dame Isabel was exposed to a severe disappointment. In her hurry and tremor she had forgotten that the door of the chapel was locked; and as she paused in extreme perplexity, and stood for a moment pondering what to do next, or where she was to betake herself, she almost fainted from the intensity of her alarm as the tramp of steeds, and the ringing of bridles, and the clash of steel, and the voices of men, sounded in her ear, and intimated that the outlandish soldiers, whom she knew to be so brutal and bloodthirsty, were passing within a stone's throw of her, and that she was only concealed from their eyes by the trees and the roofs of the outbuildings.

Under such circumstances, Dame Isabel hesitated no longer, but, attended by the faithful spaniel, she passed with trembling steps through the orchard, and, just as darkness was about to descend on the earth, she, recking little of mud and mire, fled into the woodlands. For a time she wandered about, not knowing whither she went, and aware that the woodland was not without its dangers, but fearing little from the bear, or the wolf, or the yellow hyæna, in comparison with her dread of the monsters in human form, at whose approach she had left the home where for years she had dwelt, sadly indeed, but in peace and safety. Fatigued at length, after wandering for hours without reaching a house, she came to a halt, and seating herself under a tree, in the moonlight, the faithful dog at her side, she thought of her dead husband and her absent son, and shed bitter tears, and then stretched herself on the cold grass and fell asleep.

Next day, Styr the Anglo-Saxon made a diligent search for Dame Isabel in the neighbourhood of Oakmede. But, though aided by Wolf and others, he utterly failed to discover any traces of the Norman lady, and was driven to the conclusion that she had perished in the fire. The old man, however, was not satisfied with the part which had been played by the domestics; and when after his fruitless search he returned towards evening to his cottage, he bitterly reflected on the conduct both of the men and maidens who had, on such an occasion, left the Hleafdian to her fate, not even sparing his own son. Indeed, Styr reproached Wolf so sharply, that the boy, to avoid a quarrel, left the cottage to look after Ayoub and Muradel, which, in the morning, were found quietly standing near the spot where their stable had been, and apparently wondering at the change that had been wrought by the fire in the aspect of everything around.

Wolf had not departed five minutes when Styr and his wife were startled by a strange scratching and whining at the other door, which caused their watch-dog to bark loudly, and when it was opened, Dame Isabel's spaniel entered, looking the picture of woe, and ever and anon turning and pointing towards the door, and gazing earnestly in their faces, as if imploring them to follow. Styr and his wife guessed all, and without loss of time followed the dog into the woodland till they reached the leafless oak associated with traditions of Druidical rites, and there, within the broken circle of rough stones, lay a woman in a wimple and a russet gown, her hands clasped as if she prayed. It was Dame Isabel, and she was not dead but dying.

The Anglo-Saxon and his wife carried her reverentially to their cottage, and used all the means in their power to restore her; but their efforts proved vain. She recovered, indeed, sufficiently to tell the sad story of her flight and of her wanderings; but, this done, she sank into a sleep from which she never awoke. Next morning she was a corpse, cold and rigid, and the monks from a neighbouring religious house, to which she had been a benefactress in the days when she was a great baroness and wife of one of Cœur-de-Lion's most puissant knights, came and removed the body to their church, where masses were said for the soul that had departed under circumstances so melancholy, and then the remains of Dame Isabel were conveyed with all honour to Oakmede and laid among the bones of the Icinglas in the little chapel dedicated to St. Dunstan.

CHAPTER XLIV

A MYSTERIOUS EXIT

FORTUNATELY for Oliver Icingla, he did not persevere in his resolution of doing battle with a whole herd of wild bulls, for if he had he could hardly have failed to get the worst of the encounter, and died much more obscurely than, as the last of his line, it was his ambition to do. Immediately changing his plan, he hastened to climb the tree under whose branches he had made his couch; and having called the bloodhound to desist from the fray, he resolved on keeping the seat which he occupied till the cattle thought fit to take themselves elsewhere.

However, Oliver very soon became convinced that he was likely in that case to have a much longer vigil than suited his inclination or convenience. Adopting, therefore, the expedient of moving from tree to tree—which was just possible, seeing that they grew thick and that the branches interlaced—he ultimately, with much difficulty, and not without considerable danger to neck and limb, and which was all the greater from his being incumbered with his axe, contrived to get to a safe distance from the spot where the herd were still madly and furiously tearing up the ground that had been smeared with blood, and bellowing with savage rage. Muttering his thanks to the saints for his release from a peril which he had so little foreseen, Oliver took his way towards the camp of refuge, which he contrived to reach a little after sunrise. But he soon found that he was scarcely himself: his dream haunted him awake and asleep, and next day he was prostrate, and so feverish that the aid of the anchorite of the isle was invoked.

In a few days, however, Oliver recovered his strength sufficiently to move about, and he was seated among the ruins and conversing with Collingham about their position and prospects when Wolf the varlet suddenly presented himself, and related, with tears in his eyes, all that had befallen at Oakmede, from the moment when he was alarmed by the approach of the French to the hour when Dame Isabel was laid at rest in St. Dunstan's Chapel. Oliver listened sadly and in silence, and did not indicate even by a gesture either his indignation or his wish to have revenge. But he internally swore a solemn oath to fight the Count de Perche whenever and wherever he should meet him, and not to part till one or the other had fallen, and in the event of his killing the count to cut off his head and carry it to Oakmede and hang it by the hair on a tree, that it might be food for crows.

Collingham was differently affected, and intimated that he, at all events, was determined to have an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

"By the rood," exclaimed he, as Wolf told the story, "this noble Count de Perche shall know better ere long with what manner of man he has to deal. He has whetted the beak of my raven, and there is not a raven in Sussex like to lack its food this spring if I can find French carrion enough to supply them."

Within half an hour of Wolf's arrival in the island proclamation was made in a loud voice—"Let no man in this camp henceforth take quarter from or give quarter to the foreign invaders, on pain of being held mean and niddering; and if any man in the camp will not conform to this rule let him depart on the morrow at break of day."

Not a man, however, left the island at the time appointed for malcontents to depart, and from that day the war against the French garrisons was carried on with greater energy and fierceness than before. Blood flowed daily. The soldiers, indeed, could scarcely stir from their quarters to procure forage without being attacked by bands of ten, or twenty, or forty, just as it happened. Oliver spoke little, but he was seldom at rest. His dream had made a strong impression on his imagination, and he never thought of Beatrix de Moreville without feeling desperate. His mother's sad fate, silently as he had heard of it, had affected him acutely, and, alone and friendless in the world, he felt reckless. Nothing cheered him but action, and he pursued the war so unsparingly that wherever he and his band appeared, the French, unless in strong force, fled, shouting, "Gare le corbeau!" The struggle, as it became more intense, was felt throughout all Sussex. It appeared that the county was rapidly becoming too hot to hold both the foreigners and the patriot warriors of the camp of refuge; such of the natives as had submitted to the yoke and owned Prince Louis as their lord, and given hostages for their good faith, trembled for their lives; and being between two fires, as it were, with Collingham and his thousand volunteers on one side and Eveille-chiens with his mercenary bands on the other, they cursed their hard fate, and durst not walk abroad, not even in the grounds around their houses. So that the dwelling of every Englishman who had bent his knee to the French prince was in the condition of a besieged town, the inmates being furnished with weapons to defend themselves in case of need, and the gates and doors with iron bolts and bars. When the family was about to retire to rest, the head of it, after ascertaining that everything was secure, rose and recited the prayers which are offered up at sea on the approach of a storm, he saying in conclusion, "The Lord bless and aid us!" and all his household answering, "Amen."

When the Lord de Coucy became aware of the stage which affairs had reached in Sussex, he despatched thither fresh troops and orders to Eveille-chiens to destroy the camp of refuge at all hazards and at any cost, and to put all within it to the sword, and at the same time prevailed on Hugh de Moreville to send Ralph Hornmouth with a body of archers and crossbowmen to aid in the operation. Not much relishing the commission, Eveille-chiens nevertheless mustered his forces, both horse and foot, and approaching the islet—not now environed by water, but merely by marshes—he surrounded the place so completely that he flattered himself that his success was certain.

Collingham took no notice of this arrival; but the French could distinctly see the outlaws as they moved about among the trees and shrubs and stood behind the trees watching the preparations making for their destruction.

"Now by St. Remy, to whom the doves brought the sacred oil," exclaimed Eveille-chiens, gaily, "this stinking crew can no more escape me now than birds can escape from the net of the fowler!" and, with exultation in his countenance, he turned to Ralph Hornmouth.

"Not unless they have the wings of birds," replied Hornmouth; "for nought else could save them at the press to which matters have come."

"But mark you how boldly they show themselves," said Eveille-chiens, a little indignant that they treated his presence so coolly. "Sir squire," added he, gravely, "deem you that they have gathered much booty into this stronghold of theirs?"

"Fair sir," answered Hornmouth, "small chance is there, I trow, of booty being collected by men who follow William de Collingham, who has ever been like the rolling stone that gathers no moss. Besides, if my eyes see aright, they are so poverty-stricken that the beggar would disdain the ragged clothes they wear; and I have heard that when

Master Icingla, who is known to your soldiers as ‘White Jacket,’ and six others of the gang fought last week, one to three, against the captain of Bramber, whom the French call Bastard of Melun, and the captain’s mail was well-nigh hacked to pieces, and his sword-arm so disabled that he is never like to couch lance again, he had little to cover his nakedness save his boots, and the long white garment by which he is known to his enemies.”

“Ha, sir squire!” exclaimed Eveille-chiens, vindictively; “you do well to remind me that I owe this White Jacket the only kind of debt which I never, by any chance, forget or fail to pay. If I take him alive I’ll have his eyes put out and his hands cut off by the wrists. By St. Remy, the Bastard of Melun shall have such revenge on the outlaw as I can inflict on his behalf.”

With such feelings, Eveille-chiens pushed on the labours of the men who, under the protection of Hornmouth’s crossbowmen and archers, were busy with the construction of a causeway by which the cavalry might pass the morass, enter the island, and charge and trample down the English patriots in a mass.

Collingham, however, offered no interruption to the operations; and on the second day the aspect of the island was such, and the silence so unbroken, that Hornmouth began to suspect that Collingham meditated some desperate achievement, or had sure intelligence that Philip de Albini and John Marshal were coming to his rescue. About the close of the third day all doubts as to the state of the camp, and the cause of no interruption having taken place, were set at rest.

It was about seven o’clock on the evening of the Feast of St. Mark the Evangelist, and the causeway having been completed, the forces of Eveille-chiens, both cavalry and infantry, were drawn up in order to make the assault. Having stationed his archers and crossbowmen on the margin of the morass to keep the enemy at bay during the passage of the causeway, Hornmouth assumed the post of danger, and led the van across the morass, and penetrated into the island. De Moreville’s squire naturally expected an obstinate and terrible resistance—the resistance of men, under a daring chief, reduced to despair, and determined to sell their lives at the dearest rate. But, to his astonishment, he encountered no opposition while passing the causeway; he entered the island without striking a blow; and penetrated to the ruins in the centre without meeting with a human being.

At first Hornmouth could hardly believe his senses, and next he suspected an ambush; but a little investigation convinced him that there was no mistake about the matter. The island was deserted. Even the anchorite was not to be found among the ruins which he had so long haunted while endeavouring to read the stars and penetrate the future. Hornmouth gave way to superstitious fright, and he felt as if his hairs were standing on end, and when Eveille-chiens came up he found the stout squire staring in blank amazement.

“By bread and salt!” exclaimed he, regaining his courage; “they are gone—vanished, every man and mother’s son of them; and I am no true Christian if this is not magic, or something worse.”

“May St. Remy defend us from the devices of the devil!” exclaimed Eveille-chiens, growing pale—“St. Remy defend us against the devil and our enemies, the tailed English! and I vow, on being restored to my own sweet land, to make a pilgrimage to his shrine, and to present two silver candlesticks and an image of wax to his church.”

CHAPTER XLV

A FRENCH ARMAMENT

Louis of France, after being so roughly handled by William de Collingham and the sturdy patriots who followed that knight's banner that he turned pale at the thought of the injury done to his dignity, embarked in haste and confusion, reached the French coast sea-sick, but in safety, and hastened, with visions of a coronation at Westminster, to the court of Paris. But the result was not quite satisfactory. Indeed, he found his royal father in no mood to grant the assistance which he required to complete the conquest of England. Philip Augustus naturally held the papal power in such dread, since the humiliating close of his quarrel with the pope about his marriage with the beautiful Agnes de Méranie, that he protested against being mixed up with the business so distinctly condemned by the holy see. However, he pointed out that, though his hands were tied, there was no particular reason why Blanche of Castile should not aid her husband to the utmost of her power, and hinted that he had no objection to furnish the means of hiring warriors and freighting ships. A word, says the proverb, is sufficient to the wise. Blanche took the hint, and—perhaps without even for the time neglecting her maternal duties to the young St. Louis, the eldest of what Fuller calls "that princely quaternion of brothers which exceeded each other in some quality: Louis the holiest, Alphonso the subtlest, Charles the stoutest, and Robert the proudest"—applied herself, with characteristic energy, to the task of fitting out an armament powerful enough to finish the work which with such high hopes her husband had boldly begun.

The prince, however, did not linger in France. Ere the truce agreed to with Pembroke had expired he was on the sea. Attacked furiously on his voyage by the ships of the Cinque Ports, he lost several of his vessels, but personally escaped all harm, and, landing at Sandwich, he, enraged at the Cinque Ports, burned that town, which enjoyed the reputation of being the first place in England at which ships were built, and then marching to Dover, he made a second attempt to take the castle. But this attempt proved as unsuccessful as the first had done, and, finding Hubert de Burgh still obstinate, Louis abandoned the enterprise, and proceeded to London, where, however, his reception was infinitely less enthusiastic than it had been on that too-memorable day of June when the citizens shouted "Chaire Basileus!" and where, indeed, in spite of Constantine Fitzarnulph, there was at work that dangerous spirit of discontent which is the parent of popular insurrections.

Meanwhile, Blanche of Castile was all activity and determination in promoting the objects of her absent husband, and at Calais a fleet of eighty large ships and a great number of small vessels was equipped under the eye of Eustace the Monk. The work, however, notwithstanding Blanche's energy and Eustace's experience, went on slowly, and it was not till the day preceding the Feast of St. Bartholomew that everything was ready, and the military force, consisting of three hundred knights and many thousands of ordinary fighting men, embarked with large anticipations. Indeed, they might, from all they heard, entertain hopes of rivalling the achievements of the Norman adventurers of a hundred and fifty years earlier, of whom it is written that "men who had crossed the sea in the quilted frock and with the dark wooden bow of foot soldiers appeared upon war horses and girded with the knightly baldric to the eyes of the new recruits who crossed the sea after them; and he who had come over a poor knight soon had his own banner and his company of men-at-arms, whose rallying cry was his name; so that the drovers of Normandy and the weavers of Flanders with a little courage and good fortune soon became in England great men, illustrious barons, and their names, base or obscure on one side of the Channel, were noble and glorious on the other." No wonder that, with such encouraging examples before their eyes, the recruits of Blanche of Castile were enthusiastic and eager.

On the day before the feast of St. Bartholomew the French armament left Calais, and never, since he left his monastery in Flanders to adopt the life of a sea-rover, had Eustace the Monk felt more in his element; never, since Robert Fitzwalter and Sayer de Quency reached Paris to offer Louis a crown, had Blanche of Castile seen so fair a prospect of sitting, by her husband's side, on her maternal grandsire's throne. It was, in truth, a noble armament, with a magnificent display of painted shields and gorgeous banners, and much feudal pomp to strike the eye and impress the imagination; and Eustace the Monk was in great glee as he put to sea, with a fair, swelling wind which rapidly carried him towards the English coast, his own ship leading the van, and guiding the others on their way to the land which they looked on as their prey.

Next day, however, when their voyage seemed most prosperous, and all on board were rejoicing in the prospect of ere long being in London, and ready to march at the bidding of their Lord Louis, and when they were endeavouring to make the estuary of the Thames, and sail up the river, the watch stationed on the mast of Eustace's ship suddenly shouted aloud.

"What is it?" cried Eustace, eagerly.

"I spy a ship, and it appears to me to be an Englishman," answered the watch.

"Are there more than one?" inquired Eustace, with an air of indifference.

"Ho!" cried the watch, after a pause, "I see two, three, four, and so many, God help me, there must be twenty!"

Eustace the Monk laughed scornfully, and made a gesture which expressed lofty contempt of such foes.

"Doubtless," observed he, "they are the mariners of the Cinque Ports; these English wretches are on their way to Calais. But they are not worthy of our thoughts, and they will find that it is of no use; for the Calesians have been forewarned against them, and forewarned is forearmed. So on to London; and Montjoie, St. Denis! for us and our good Lord Louis."

And as Eustace spake, soldiers and sailors with one accord raised a long and deafening cheer which passed from ship to ship.

But ere that cheer died away the scene had very considerably changed, for the fleet of which the monk-pirate had spoken so contemptuously was bearing down before the wind on the French armament, as the hawk does upon the quarry.

Eustace grew pale.

CHAPTER XLVI

A SEA-FIGHT

WHILE Blanche of Castile and Eustace the Monk were fitting out the armament at Calais for completing the conquest of England, Hubert de Burgh, keeping watch from the castle of Dover, and in constant communication with the mariners of the Cinque Ports, was well informed of what was going on, and Hubert, being bold as a lion, resolved to risk everything in order to prevent the French force that had just embarked at Calais from setting foot in England.

"By the blood of Christ!" said he to the Bishop of Winchester, "if these people are allowed to come to England the kingdom is lost. Let us, therefore, go forth and encounter them with courage, for God is with us, and they are excommunicated."

Now Hubert de Burgh had no fleet which appeared sufficiently formidable to encounter the French armament. However, he had about sixteen large ships, and twenty small vessels belonging to the Cinque Ports, his galleys being peaked with iron, and likely, therefore, to do terrible execution in the event of coming to a close conflict, with the wind in their favour. Moreover, the English were elated when they called to mind the great naval victory which the Earl of Salisbury had won over the French some years earlier at the mouth of the Seine; and in the seamanship of the mariners of the Cinque Ports, whose superiority over the sailors of France had been repeatedly proved, they had great and well-grounded confidence. It was, therefore, with something like the hope of a happy result, in spite of the odds against him, that Hubert sent for Luke, his chaplain, took the sacrament, and prepared to go on board his little fleet. Before doing so, however, he intrusted the castle of Dover to knights on whose fidelity he could depend, and charged them not on any account to surrender.

"I beseech you, by the blood of Christ!" said he earnestly and solemnly, "not to waver or yield to threats. If I happen to be made prisoner, allow me to be hanged rather than surrender this castle to the French, for it is the key of England."

"We promise faithfully to defend it, or die in the attempt," replied the knights; and Hubert de Burgh then went on board, with many crossbowmen and archers, and accompanied by Henry de Turville and Richard Siward, two gallant knights, as well as by Richard, one of King John's illegitimate sons, who married Rohesia, heiress of Fulbert de Dover, and who on this day was destined to signalise at once his courage and his cruelty.

And now the mariners of the Cinque Ports—weatherbeaten men who had long fought with the winds, and the waves, and the French—having lifted their anchors and set their sails, put out to sea, and the ships went tilting over the waves, and proceeded boldly on their course, and steered as if bound for Calais. Suddenly, however, when near the French fleet, they altered their course, and, having gained the weather-gage, sailed, much to the surprise of Eustace the Monk, right among the French, and, driven by the wind, charged at the enemy's ships with the iron beaks of their galleys, and sank several large French vessels with all on board.

This, however, was but the beginning of the battle, which speedily assumed a terrific aspect, and became sanguinary and stubborn, "for," as Froissart remarks, "combats at sea are more destructive and obstinate than upon land, for it is not possible to retreat or fly, every one being under the necessity of abiding his fortune and exerting his prowess and valour." Throwing out grapnels and iron hooks and chains, to be more certain of having their enemies in close fight, the English moored their ships to those of the French, and while the mariners of the Cinque Ports, with loud shouts of defiance, threw hot lime-dust into the air to blind their adversaries, which, blown by the wind, did its work well, the archers and crossbowmen made such terrible execution, that Eustace the Monk, seeing that all his calculations were baffled, stamped and roared with rage and vexation.

It was indeed most mortifying for the monk to be beaten by foes for whom he had recently expressed such contempt, and Eustace made great efforts to redeem the fortune of the day, and a terrible struggle ensued. The English, bearing their axes, boarded the ships of their adversaries, and engaged hand to hand with all the fury which national animosity could inspire, directing their energy especially against the ship on board of which Eustace the Monk was fighting with the courage of despair and hurling defiance at his foes. Great indeed was his fury.

The combat, however, became every moment less and less doubtful. The English, accustomed to the narrow seas, fought as if on their native element, while the French, unused to naval warfare, found that they were fighting at great disadvantage, and soon lost courage and hope. Many in their despair and perplexity threw themselves into the sea, and sank to rise no more, while others, seeing that all was lost, threw down their arms and yielded themselves prisoners. But still Eustace struggled on, as if sternly resolved rather to die than yield. At length, however, Richard, son of King John, who had boarded the ship of the pirate chief, axe in hand, shouted to his men to cut away the rigging that supported the mast and yards, and "the expanding sail falling," says the chronicler, "the French were caught like birds in a net."

The English now raised the cry of victory, and the heart of Eustace the Monk at length failing him, he attempted to save himself by hiding in the hold. But he could not avoid any more than he could resist his fate, and being discovered he was instantly dragged on deck and surrounded by his foes. Overwhelmed by a sense of the danger in which he found himself, the pirate begged that his life might be spared, and offered to pay a large sum of money as ransom.

"No," cried the English, who hated him for the mischief he had wrought them, and also because his brothers had seized some of the isles, and commenced a system of piracy which was ruinous to English commerce; "you are a pirate, and not entitled to the privileges of honourable warriors."

"I will not only pay a large ransom," urged Eustace, passionately, "but I promise faithfully in future to serve your King Henry. Only spare my life!"

"No, wicked traitor!" cried Richard, the son of King John. "Never again in this world shall you deceive any one with your false promises." And as he spoke the bastard's sword waved in the air, and next moment the head of Eustace the Monk rolled on the deck.

And now all was over, and the mariners of the Cinque Ports, taking their prizes in tow, returned with them and a host of prisoners to Dover. As soon as they neared the coast, the Bishop of Winchester, attended by the garrison of Dover and the people of the town, came forth to meet them, singing psalms and praising God for the victory that had been vouchsafed to them. The news of Hubert de Burgh's success at sea ran quickly through the country; and Prince

Louis, and the captains who commanded the castles which he held, learned with dismay that the great armament fitted out by Blanche of Castile, and intended to complete the conquest of England, no longer existed. Louis and his captains trembled at the perils of their position, as they well might, for the destruction of the armament commanded by Eustace the Monk was not the only blow which Fortune had struck at the enterprise on which the heir of France had ventured at the request of the Anglo-Norman barons.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE SIEGE OF MOUNT SORREL

SEVEN miles to the north of Leicester, built on a steep and rugged hill, overlooking the river Soar, with a fair town and priory at its feet, the castle of Mount Sorrel, in the spring of 1217, frowned with feudal pride, and seemed to bid defiance to all comers. It was not, however, so impregnable as it looked, but had more than once changed hands during the terrible and sanguinary conflict then raging in England. However, the custody of Mount Sorrel was claimed as part of his inheritance by Sayer de Quency, Earl of Winchester, one of the twenty-five conservators of the Great Charter, and held by his deputy, Henry de Braybroke, in the interest of Prince Louis and the Anglo-Norman barons.

Mount Sorrel, however, was deemed a very important stronghold; and the Earl of Pembroke was anxious to gain possession of it for the king, with the object, as would appear from the result, of levelling it with the ground on which it stood. No sooner, therefore, did the protector's truce with Louis expire, than Pembroke mustered an army, and, carrying the boy-king with him, marched to Mount Sorrel and laid siege to the castle, with such an appearance of determination to make himself master of the stronghold, that Henry de Braybroke, in great alarm, sent messengers to De Quency, declaring that, unless reinforced, he could not long hold out against such overwhelming odds.

On hearing that Mount Sorrel was invested by Pembroke, the Earl of Winchester went to Louis, and entreated him to send an army to relieve the fortress without delay; and the prince, who deemed it politic at the time to remain in the capital, summoned the Count de Perche, and entrusted him with the command of six hundred knights and twenty thousand men in mail—a force composed of Flemings, French, and Anglo-Normans—a large proportion being cavalry. Robert Fitzwalter, the Earls of Winchester and Hereford, William de Roos, William Beauchamp, William Moubray, with many other barons, accompanied the Count of Perche on his northward expedition, and the citizens of London manifested what zeal still existed among them for the invaders by furnishing funds to pay the cost of equipping so many warriors. It was thought that the Count de Perche and the Anglo-Norman barons were certain to strike a shattering blow at the royal cause, and Louis, on parting with the leaders of the enterprise, believed that he was simply sending them forth to put his enemies under their feet.

Moving from London on the 30th of April, the French and Anglo-Normans signalised their march northward by every kind of outrage. Never had the youths and maidens of Middlesex and Hertfordshire known a May Day associated with such painful memories. The foreign invaders and their Anglo-Norman allies, indeed, celebrated the festival in a way which raised a general shout of horror, but seemed to revel in the crimes of which they were guilty. They slew men, outraged women, plundered houses, and wantonly destroyed churches and abbeys as they went, pursued everywhere by the maledictions of the English, who vowed vengeance, and prepared the means of executing it, as if admonished by instinct that the day was not very distant.

The Count de Perche, however, pursued his march in triumph, paying no attention whatever to the curses and threats of the insulted and the injured, no matter how flagrant the insult or how deep the injury, and only eager to come up with the royalists. Pembroke, however, was well informed of all that was taking place, and acted with his wonted prudence. Knowing the impossibility of contending with so superior a force as that headed by the Count de Perche, the protector raised the siege, marched to Nottingham, and summoned the king's adherents in all quarters to come to his support; and then removing from Nottingham to Newark-on-Trent, he calmly awaited the arrival of his friends and intelligence of his foes.

Meanwhile the Count de Perche made his way to Leicestershire, and on reaching Mount Sorrel found that Pembroke had raised the siege and gone northward. Perche and Fitzwalter, however, did not follow the foe. In fact, they resolved, without delay, to march to Lincoln, where there was still work to be done for their Lord Louis. Accordingly they marched through the vale of Belvoir, and, continuing to perpetrate every enormity as they advanced, at length reached the city which had been so long and so bravely defended by the royalists.

But in the interim Pembroke was not idle. In fact, the old warrior-statesman was every day proving himself, by his sagacity and energy, worthy of the position he occupied. His efforts were even more successful than he could have anticipated, and to the royal standard at Newark gathered chiefs of great name and high reputation. Thither came Ralph, Earl of Chester, William, Earl Ferrars, William, Earl of Salisbury, William, Earl of Arundel, and William, Earl of Albemarle; thither also, from the castles which they held for the king, came William de Cantelupe, Robert de Vipont, Brian de Lisle, Geoffrey de Lucy, and Thomas Bassett; thither, with his mercenaries, came Falco, who had almost become popular by fighting very earnestly against mercenaries ten times less scrupulous than his own; and thither came Philip de Albini and John Marshal, whose crossbowmen had done such good service on the English coast. Four hundred knights, many yeomen on horseback, and a considerable body of foot, formed the army which Pembroke headed to save England from the foreigner; and though it was much inferior, especially in cavalry, to that under the Count de Perche, the old protector did not despair of dealing with his foes in a manner satisfactory to the king and country.

It was Friday, the 19th of May, the sixth day of Whitsuntide, when Pembroke, having made all his arrangements, prepared to leave Newark and put everything to the test. Before marching, however, the warriors of England took the sacrament, and received from the papal legate white crosses, to mark them as men engaged in a holy war. At the same time the legate excommunicated Prince Louis and his principal partisans by name; and, having addressed the king's adherents in encouraging language, he sent them on their way rejoicing in the hope of a glorious victory or a brave death.

On the evening of Friday, Pembroke, too prudent to fatigue his army with long marches when about to encounter so formidable an enemy, halted at Stowe, a village with a park and a Norman church, and there the royalists passed the night. Next morning the protector entrusted the king to the care of the legate, with whom the royal boy was to remain while warriors did battle for that crown which he was destined to find so thorny, and which, after causing him half a century of trouble, would have been torn from his hoary head, had not his mighty son, breaking chains and defying difficulties, prostrated Simon de Montfort and the baronial oligarchy on the field of Evesham. Pembroke was not gifted with the genius which fifty years later guided Edward on the way to victory, nor animated, as was the greatest of the Plantagenets, by the ambition of creating a free and prosperous nation out of hostile races, and enrolling his name in the annals of fame as one of the greatest leaders in war and rulers in peace;

but the good earl was guided by an instinctive sagacity which made him equal to the work he was called on to do, and albeit he coveted no reward save the ennobling consciousness of having done his duty, he was not the less anxious to perform that duty faithfully and well.

And in a cautious spirit, but with a fearless heart, Pembroke marshalled his army skilfully in seven battalions, and set his face towards Lincoln to make the great venture, Philip de Albini and John Marshal, with the crossbowmen, leading the van and keeping about a mile in advance, and the baggage waggons, well guarded, bringing up the rear. Bucklers glittered and banners waved in all directions, for each knight had on the occasion two standards, one of which was borne before him, and the other carried by the soldiers in charge of the baggage, and thus the army of England had the appearance of being a much more numerous host than it in reality was, as on that Saturday morning, in the merry month of May, Pembroke left Stowe, and, in admirable order, took his way to Lincoln.

CHAPTER XLVIII

LINCOLN

LINCOLN is situated on the summit and side of a hill that slopes with a deep descent to the margin of the river Witham, which here bends its course eastward, and, being divided into three small channels, washes the lower part of the city.

Viewed from the London road, on the south, in the month of May, the aspect of Lincoln is particularly beautiful. Before you is the Witham's silver stream flowing on the east, the open country on the west, and in front the ancient city itself stretching from the level ground up a hill, studded with houses and embowered in trees, its eminence crowned with the keep of the dilapidated castle, and the still magnificent cathedral.

Far different, no doubt, was the appearance of Lincoln in the days when the third Henry was king, and the great Earl of Pembroke protector. It is difficult, indeed, mentally to annihilate the rich and varied scene presented from the spot referred to, and to substitute the ancient prospect in its stead. But if to the gazer's view, "by some strange parallax," the mediæval Lincoln were suddenly presented, with its noble castle and grand cathedral; its palace, its churches, and wealthy religious house keeping the flames of piety and learning still burning; its hospital for the sick, and its hospital for decayed priests; its narrow streets, with their projecting houses, tenanted by burgher and chapman; its Jewry, with its strange inhabitants with outlandish garments and olive complexions, trembling for their lives during every commotion, yet too covetous not to be cruel and harsh when Christians were at their mercy in times of peace; its Roman arches, and its strong walls, with gates, and towers, and turrets—all unlike as such a scene might be to the present, save in its hill, and vale, and silvery stream, he would still confess that it was more picturesque and not less fair than that which now lies so beautiful before the arrested eye.

From an historical point of view, Lincoln is one of the most interesting of English cities. It still boasts monuments of its importance when England was Britain, and when Britain was in the hands of the Romans; and at the time of the Norman Conquest, when six centuries had rolled over, it was one of the richest and most populous places in the kingdom. Moreover, the citizens were chiefly men of Danish origin, and therefore to be dreaded; and the Conqueror, on taking Lincoln, resolved to build a strong castle, not only to keep the inhabitants in awe, but to guard against any attempt made by them, in concert with their kinsmen the Danish sea-kings, to throw off the Norman yoke; and having demolished about two hundred and seventy houses to make room for the edifice, the Conqueror crowned the hill with a stronghold, which frowned sullen on the city over which it looked, and awed all malcontents, whether Dane or Saxon. The Empress Maude added to the fortifications while struggling with Stephen; and Lincoln was the scene of important events and a great battle during that war which, after tearing England to pieces, resulted in the peaceful accession of Henry Plantagenet.

But Lincoln, as time passed over, was exposed to other horrors than those of war. In 1180, an earthquake shook the city to its foundations, and almost rent the cathedral in twain. But the citizens repaired their dwellings, and Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln—since celebrated in history as St. Hugh of Burgundy—rebuilt the cathedral and restored all its former splendour.

Before the era of the Great Charter, however, Bishop Hugh had been carried to his last resting-place on the shoulders of King John and the two sub-kings of Scotland and Wales, and the place which he had filled with so much honour was occupied by Henry Welles, a prelate who resolutely espoused the cause of the Anglo-Norman barons and their "good Lord Louis." Nevertheless, the royal cause was well supported in Lincoln, and its adherents were headed by a dame somewhat like the widowed Countess Albemarle, whom the chronicler describes as "a woman almost a man, being deficient in nothing masculine but manhood."

It seems that, in the reign of Richard Cœur-de-Lion, Gerard de Camville held the castle of Lincoln, "the custody whereof was known to belong to the inheritance of Nichola, the wife of the same Gerard, but under the king." However, when Richard was absent in the East, on his way to the Holy Land, and when a feud broke out between Prince John and the Bishop of Ely, who was chancellor and regent of the kingdom, Gerard took part with John, and, in his absence, the castle of Lincoln was besieged by the chancellor-bishop. "But," says the chronicler, "Nichola, proposing to herself nothing effeminate, defended the castle like a man." In fact, she held out till the siege was raised.

Nichola de Camville was now a widow, and could not have been young. But neither her courage nor her energy had departed; and though Gilbert de Gant, whom Prince Louis had rewarded with an earldom before he conquered, had been exerting himself strenuously to take Lincoln, his efforts had been in vain; the royal standard still waved over the town and castle when the Count de Perche and Robert Fitzwalter brought their army to the besiegers' aid.

The arrival of a force so formidable, however, soon changed the face of matters, and the town surrendered. But the castle showed no signs of being likely to yield; and De Perche and his Anglo-Norman allies were fain to commence a very systematic siege, bringing into play their engines of war, battering the walls with huge stones, and hurling other missiles against the garrison. However, they had great confidence in their numbers and in their warlike engines; and they were pressing the siege on the morning of Saturday, the 20th of May, with high hopes of a speedy success, when informed by their scouts that the English were approaching in hostile array with banners displayed.

The Count de Perche at first treated the intelligence with something like indifference, and continued to direct the soldiers, who were hurling missiles from the "mangonels" to destroy the walls of the castle. But Robert Fitzwalter and the Earl of Winchester did not take the matter so coolly. Mounting their horses forthwith, the two barons rode out to survey Pembroke's army, and returned somewhat flurried, elate with the idea of their own superiority as regarded numbers.

"Our enemies come against us in good order," said they to De Perche, "but we are much more numerous than they are; therefore our advice is to sally forth to the ascent of the hill and meet them, for if we do so we shall catch them like larks."

It appears to have been sound advice, and such as the count ought to have adopted, for his superiority in cavalry would have given him a great advantage in the country; but the very fact of its coming from Fitzwalter and Winchester made it distasteful to the French.

“No,” replied De Perche, who, like all Prince Louis’s captains, treated his Anglo-Norman allies cavalierly; “you have reckoned them according to your own judgment and given your opinion; but I must go forth and count them in the French fashion. Besides, I hardly deem the English would be mad enough to attack us in a walled town.”

“No more than stags would dream of attacking lions,” added the Marshal of France, jeeringly.

“Their fate would be sealed,” said the Castellan of Arras.

However, that they might judge for themselves as to the extent of the danger to which they were exposed, the count and his French knights and the marshal and the castellan rode forth and surveyed Pembroke’s army as horsemen and footmen came dauntlessly on, the sun shining on their weapons and their armour. Indeed, the spectacle was not calculated to increase De Perche’s confidence of conquering. Mistaking the baggage and the standards carried by the men who guarded it for a second army, he formed a very erroneous notion of the numbers coming against him, and spurred back to the city a sadder if not a wiser man than he had left it.

And now the French and Anglo-Normans held a hurried council of war, and it was proposed to divide their forces, so that while one party was defending the gates and walls to prevent the English entering the city, the other party should continue to besiege the castle and keep the garrison in check. The count’s friends took different views as to the policy of such a course. Some approved of the plan; others condemned it as not suited to the emergency. But there was no time left for argument, and the proposal was hastily adopted as the best thing that could be done under the circumstances.

And having in this manner decided on the course to be followed, the leaders repaired each to the post assigned to him and prepared for action—one party to guard the gates and walls, the other to direct their efforts against the castle. But scarcely had they taken their places and encouraged their men by word and gesture to do their duty boldly, when both from French and Anglo-Normans rose a loud yell, followed by a long wail, as of men in mortal agony, and ere this died away Pembroke’s trumpets were sounding and his men were thundering at the gates, and the conflict which was to render that May Saturday memorable had begun in earnest, the fate of England trembling in the balance.

CHAPTER XLIX

COLLINGHAM'S RAVENS

It has been before stated that William de Collingham had a very strong reason for forming his camp of refuge where he did form it—on the islet in the heart of a forest in Sussex, and near the sea-coast. His adventure at Chas-Chateil had very forcibly reminded the stout knight that connected with the ruins tenanted by the anchorite at the islet was a secret passage formed by the hand of man in the earlier days of England's history, and leading to a precipitous little vale in the wood, at the distance of half-a-mile. This passage was not, indeed, in the best condition, the ground having in some places fallen in, so as almost to block it up; but the knight, on examining it carefully, saw that with a little labour it might be rendered passable without inconvenience, and not only give his followers a great advantage over their foes in the partisan warfare which he intended to carry on, but afford them the means of a secret retreat in case of being threatened by any overwhelming force.

In both respects the subterranean passage served his purpose admirably. By means of it, even when the islet was invested, Oliver Icingla was enabled to sally forth on such nocturnal expeditions as that during which he entered the tent of Eveille-chiens, and seized that leader's banner, the display of which gave the foreigners an idea that preternatural influences were at work against them; and by means of it, when the islet was invested by Eveille-chiens and Ralph Hornmouth with such a body of troops that resistance would have been hopeless, Collingham, while his enemies were occupied with the construction of the causeway, gradually withdrew his whole force, and left his camp the solitude which, to their amazement, the French captain and the English squire found it when they entered.

Nor, in truth, did Collingham very much regret the necessity under which he was of leaving the place associated with so many daring deeds. By the time, indeed, that he was menaced by Eveille-chiens and Hornmouth in company, he had received intelligence that Pembroke was preparing to renew the war in the heart of England, and he had resolved that his raven banner should flutter in the conflicts likely to ensue. The knight was eager, indeed, to take part in the opening war, and to give his aid to the royal cause where it was likely to be of most value.

However, Collingham resolved not to stake all upon the cast which was about to be made. He therefore divided his force into two bodies. One of them he left to harass the French garrisons in Sussex; at the head of the other he marched right northward, and, keeping to the woods and unfrequented places, so as to avoid coming in contact with the foreign and Anglo-Norman soldiers who held towns and castles for Prince Louis, he contrived, after many days' journey, to reach the neighbourhood of Lincoln in the very nick of time—in fact, on the evening of Friday in Whitsuntide, when Pembroke and the king reached Stowe; and, learning that the protector intended on the morrow, without fail, to march upon the foe, Collingham halted and encamped on the verge of a wood to the north of the city, that his men might rest from their fatigue, and be in readiness and the best condition to join the royalist army on its march from Stowe. All were in strong health and spirits. None of the brave band were very magnificently arrayed; many of them, in truth, were almost in rags. But most of them were armed with bows or crossbows and short swords, and a few, like Oliver Icingla, had axes and shields. As for Collingham, he had a long sword, and that terrible iron club which had often served him well in times of need, and which on the morrow was likely to do its work thoroughly.

All went well with the bold yeomen and foresters, and with their leaders, who well-nigh twelve months earlier had vowed never to sleep under a roof till England was cleared of the invaders, and who rigidly kept their word. Under the May moon they reposed tranquilly till daybreak, and, having then risen and refreshed themselves with food, they awaited the approach of Pembroke and the army that was about to do battle for England.

And right glad at that crisis was the great Protector to have such an addition to his force, and infinite was the curiosity of nobles and knights and fighting men to see the rough and ragged warriors who, as "Collingham's ravens," had been celebrated in town and hamlet as the terror of the invaders. But none were more curious on the subject than the knights and squires of the Earl of Salisbury, who gasped and stared at the sight of Oliver Icingla—in other days, when at Salisbury, and in Spain and Flanders, the pink of youthful chivalry in his dress and equipments—with his shaggy beard, his tattered white jacket, and his battle-axe, so antique in appearance that one of Salisbury's knights asked laughingly if it had been wielded by some of the Icinglas who were comrades of Hengist or of Cerdic.

However, the warriors who excited so much curiosity, and, it must be added, some ridicule, had a pride of their own, and felt a kind of satisfaction which few even in Pembroke's army could know. When loyal earls and barons were submitting to the invaders, they had treated the invaders with defiance; they had attacked Prince Louis himself, and forced him to make an undignified flight to his ships—the first rough treatment he experienced in England—and, through good and evil reports, they had adhered to the cause of England and England's king, enduring all hardships and despising all odds.

Verily such things might well make Collingham's band a little proud under the circumstances; and proud they felt of their fidelity and their exploits as they marched towards Lincoln, their raven banner fluttering and their stalwart chief towering in front like some giant Dane of the days of Canute. Nor was Oliver Icingla idle. He was still much under the influence of his strange dream in the Sussex forest, for, like most of his race, he had the element of superstition largely in his composition, and considered dreams and omens too serious to be disregarded. This made him all the more joyous to go into battle, if only for change and excitement, moving from front to rear, talking pithily to all the men, stimulating their enthusiasm, and firing their courage and patriotism.

"Englishmen and freemen," so ran the words of the heir of the Icinglas, "remember your vows as the hour of battle approaches; for a battle there will be, strong and obstinate, albeit not so bloody as some that have been fought on English soil; and that the men whom you are going to encounter are aliens and oppressors. So strike and spare not! Spare neither French count nor Norman baron! This is no day for dainty chivalry, as when a feudal sovereign takes the field against a refractory vassal about some petty dispute, to exchange a few blows, without inflicting a wound, and then feast together in the hall of the nearest castle or abbey, as if nothing had happened. This is, in truth, a very different kind of war. It is a war of Englishmen against foreign invaders—a war of true and loyal men against false men and traitors—a war for our homes which they have burned, and our hearths which they have rendered desolate. Wherefore I say to you, smite and spare not! Down with every ruffian Frank who crosses your path, and down, down with the traitors who invited the ruffian Franks hither! I myself will not fail, if opportunity serve me, to show you in this an example such as an Icingla should show to Englishmen fighting for their country,

and may God and good St. Edward aid us in doing battle for our young king and our ancient rights!”

And as the boy-warrior thus spoke, on with Pembroke’s army Collingham’s band moved steadily and courageously till they reached the north gate of Lincoln, and stood, straining impatiently, like greyhounds in the leash, in their anxiety to enter and close, foot to foot and hand to hand, with foreign invaders and Anglo-Norman oppressors.

Meanwhile, under the auspices of Falco, a movement was taking place which caused within the walls of the city that yell which announced that the carnage had begun.

CHAPTER L

THE BATTLE

WHILE Pembroke was approaching Lincoln with his army, marching in the admirable order already described, with banners waving in the sunshine, a messenger, instructed by Dame Nichola de Camville, having left the castle by the postern door, took his way northward, and escaping the observation of the Count de Perche and his riders, who, having gone forth to reconnoitre, were then returning to the city, came to the protector, and doffing his cap with much deference, bent low to the great warrior-statesman.

"All hail, my lord earl!" said he, gaily. "My lady greets thee by me, and bids me say that never was young lover more welcome to lady's bower than is thy coming to her in this hour of peril; likewise, if such be your good pleasure, you can enter the castle by the postern gate, which has been opened on tidings of your approach, and thence make your way into the city. But be that as you will, lord earl."

Pembroke acknowledged in courteous phrase the greeting of Nichola de Camville, and mused for a moment over the message. However, he declined the invitation to enter by the postern, deeming a bolder course the more expedient. But he nevertheless resolved to profit by the postern, and instructed Falco to enter with his whole division and the crossbowmen, with the object of distracting the enemy, and, if possible, making a sortie and forcing open one of the gates. Without delay the necessary arrangements were made, and while the protector led his forces to the north gate, and caused his trumpets to sound an onset, Falco, with practised skill and characteristic promptitude, threw his mercenaries and the crossbowmen—mostly English yeomen—into the castle by means of the postern, and conveying them to the roofs and ramparts with a rapidity that seemed magical, gave the signal to shoot.

The order was obeyed to some purpose. Instantly a murderous discharge of bolts from the crossbows answered the signal and did terrible execution both among the cavalry and infantry of the French count and Anglo-Norman barons, and caused such a yell of agony from the wounded as intimated unmistakably to the protector that the foreign warrior was doing his work with zeal and determination.

In fact, the effect was terrific. Horses and their riders rolled on the ground, and while yet men were struggling to rise, and chargers were kicking, mad with the pain from their wounds, and all was confusion, Falco boldly threw open the castle gate, pushed into the city, and throwing himself into the midst of the enemy, endeavoured to clear a space around the north gate, at which Pembroke's trumpets were sounding and his men thundering for admittance.

But Falco found that here he had terrible obstacles to encounter. Recovering from their surprise, the French and Anglo-Normans came rushing to the spot like eagles to the carnage, and answered Falco's Poictevin war-cry of "St. George for the puissant duke!" with loud shouts of "Montjoie, St. Denis!" "God aid us and our Lord Louis!" A hand-to-hand conflict then took place, and Falco and his band were surrounded by a host of foes, and while this was going on a charge of Norman cavalry rendered their predicament quite the reverse of enviable. In vain they struggled and battled valiantly against the numerous assailants who swarmed to the spot. It was of no avail. Numbers embarrassed their movements and impeded their action. Reginald, surnamed Crocus, a brave knight of Falco's, was killed by his leader's side; Falco himself was carried away by the crowd of foes and made prisoner; and for a brief period it seemed that the mercenaries and crossbowmen were doomed either to yield or to perish to a man.

But, meanwhile, this scuffle had been so exciting that the French had thought less than they ought in prudence to have done of the formidable host outside the walls, and the knights and barons appointed to guard the north gate had been allured from their post. The consequence was fatal to their leader and their cause. Making a great effort as the din of the conflict within the walls reached his ears, Pembroke succeeded in forcing the gate, and no sooner was it opened than his infantry rushed in, carrying all before them, and shouting, "Down with the foreigners! Down with the outlandish men!" and Falco's division, availing themselves of the confusion caused by the entrance of the English, charged once and again upon the enemy with such right good will that they rescued their leader, and enabled him to renew the combat which he had so bravely begun.

And now the Count de Perche had reason to discover and to repent the error of which he had been guilty when he rejected the advice of Robert Fitzwalter, and refused to march out of Lincoln and give his enemies battle in the open country. Engaged in a desperate struggle in narrow streets where cavalry could not charge, the French from the beginning had so decidedly the worst of the encounter that they fought almost without hope of victory. Horses and riders alike suffered in the conflict, and while the chargers were "mown down like pigs" by the crossbowmen, the French knights, dismounted and at the mercy of their assailants, surrendered almost in a mass. Nor did the Anglo-Norman barons display any of that high spirit with which, in later civil wars, such nobles as Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, faced the danger that they had provoked and defied. On the contrary, they gave up their swords almost to a man, and resigned themselves sheepishly to their fate. Robert Fitzwalter yielded himself prisoner, so did the Earl of Winchester, so did the Earl of Hereford, and William de Roos, and William Beauchamp, and William Moubray, and Gilbert de Gant, who must have felt crestfallen indeed as he thought of the earldom which had been given to him by a man not entitled to grant it, and for a victory that was never to be won. All these magnates, who had talked so boastfully a year earlier, when they brought Prince Louis into England and did homage to him at Westminster, now stood with mortification in their faces, and perhaps remorse at their hearts, baffled, conquered, and captive, after having failed in their criminal endeavour to reduce the country, for whose laws and liberties they had professed such respect, under the rule of a French prince, who, they well knew, could only rule as a conqueror.

But the love of life, or the fear of death, which prompted Fitzwalter, and De Quency, and Bohun to surrender rather than fall bravely was not so contagious as to reach the heart of the Count de Perche. Never even for a moment did he show the white feather, or any abatement of the defiant courage that had characterised his career in England. Not, indeed, that there remained even a chance of redeeming the fortunes of the day. Roland and Oliver, and all the Paladins of Charlemagne, could they have come out of their graves, would have struggled in vain to rally the broken ranks of the army that had, a few hours earlier, been so confident, and which was now flying in terror through the south gate. On all sides the count was deserted. His Anglo-Norman allies were yielding before his eyes, his French comrades were endeavouring to save themselves by flight, forgetting in their haste that in order to do so they must pass through the country whose inhabitants they had recently exasperated by their outrages, and who were panting for an opportunity of avenging the wrongs that had been done to them and to theirs.

Still, so daunted were the French with the more immediate dangers that beset them, that they no sooner saw how the day was going than they bethought them of escaping, and began to move towards the south gate of Lincoln, with the idea of making for London, the Marshal of France and the Castellan of Arras heading the flight.

It was no easy matter, however, for the French to get out of the city which they had entered as conquerors, for the flail of the south gate had been placed transversely across, and greatly impeded their egress, especially that of the cavalry. In fact, when they rode up to escape, they were fain to dismount to open the gate; and when they passed out it immediately closed, and the flail again fell across it, so that the process of dismounting had to be gone through by every party of fugitive horsemen, and almost by every individual horseman. It was well for them that the English were that day in no sanguinary mood, for had there been any strong inclination in Pembroke's ranks to deal summarily with the foe, few, if any, of the vanquished would have left Lincoln alive.

As it was, their position was not enviable. All over the country through which they had to pass on their way to London the yeomen and peasantry were abroad, armed with swords and bludgeons, and did terrible execution among the fugitives, both horse and foot, smiting them hip and thigh, and giving them no quarter. Nevertheless, two hundred knights reached the capital, and carried intelligence to the citizens that all was lost, that the grand army, which had on the last day of April marched out of their gates with such high hopes of triumph, was utterly destroyed, and that Pembroke was in a fair way of putting all King Henry's enemies, whether barons or citizens, under King Henry's feet.

Moreover, the news was speedily carried by the French fugitives to Dover, where Louis was making his third attempt to take the castle, which held out so bravely under Hubert de Burgh.

"By St. Denis!" said the prince with a sneer, "it is all owing to your flight that your comrades have been taken captive. Had you acted the part of brave men you might have saved all."

CHAPTER LI

DE MOREVILLE IN BATTLE HARNESS

As Pembroke was marching on Lincoln from the North, and the French and Anglo-Normans were arraying themselves for the combat, a very important arrival took place. In fact, Hugh de Moreville—attended by Sir Anthony Waledger, Ralph Hornmouth, and his young kinsman Richard—with a strong body of horse at his back, entered the city by the south gate. De Moreville's arrival was hailed with cheers; for, however unpopular generally, his fame as a warrior made him welcome in the hour of danger; and the Count de Perche could not conceal his satisfaction as the haughty Norman presented himself.

Now it may as well be mentioned at once that De Moreville had not been attracted to Lincoln by any enthusiasm for Prince Louis, of whom he was weary, nor by any love of the French warriors, of whose arrogance he was heartily sick, and of whose affectations of superiority he was very much more impatient than others of his class. But since the night when Collingham so suddenly found his way into Chas-Chateil, De Moreville had been much more nervous on all points than of yore, and reflecting seriously on the past and speculating keenly on the future, he saw that his interests were bound up with the cause of Prince Louis, and that a decisive triumph of young Henry's adherents would lead to his utter ruin. All would go that made him the great personage he was—castles, and manors, and feudal power; and he would have to hide his head in a cloister or fare forth to foreign lands and fight as a soldier of fortune.

No man was therefore more interested in the issue of the struggle going on; and having left his daughter at his house in Ludgate, under the charge of Dame Waledger, he hastened to Lincoln, which he knew was likely to be the place where the crisis of the war would come. But he did not dream of giving any hint of the motives by which he was animated; and even De Perche was so convinced of the Norman's hearty good-will towards Louis and himself, that he ascribed the arrival to pure enthusiasm, and the count gave him so flattering a reception that De Moreville was fain to be more hypocritical than was his wont.

"Ha! my good Lord De Moreville," exclaimed De Perche, joyfully, "welcome in the hour of danger. Our enemies are even now at the gates, and are coming in greater force than I anticipated."

"Let them come," said De Moreville, smiling grimly; "we have no reason to grow alarmed at their approach. William Marshal and William Albini are Norman nobles, like myself, and falcons fear not falcons."

De Perche started and looked suspicious in De Moreville's face; but the Norman smiled so frankly that the count blushed at the suspicion that had crossed his mind, and said, carelessly—

"O, mort Dieu! they are doubtless puissant foes."

"However," replied De Moreville, "I have in my day fought with braver men than they are, albeit no braggart, and I say by St. Moden I am ready to do so again, and ever shall be, while I breathe the breath of life and have strength enough to mount a steed and shake a spear."

"Who could dream of the Lord De Moreville knowing fear?" said De Perche between jest and earnest.

"Anyhow," said De Moreville, earnestly, "I have sworn allegiance to Lord Louis, and I shrink not from any sacrifices which that allegiance involves. For one's lord we are bound to suffer any distress, whether heat or cold, and lose both hair and leather, and flesh and blood; and, sir count, I am not the man to shirk a duty. True it is that duty sometimes marches between rocks, and that the path of duty is often the path of danger. Nevertheless——"

"Nevertheless," said De Perche, interrupting, "it is not less true that the path of duty is often the road to honour and glory; that is what you have found it, as you were about to say; so," added the count, gaily, "let us forth and meet our foes, and upon them with the lance, in the name of St. Denis and our good Lord Louis."

Accordingly, De Perche and De Moreville mounted and sallied into the streets, to take each his part in the conflict that was even then beginning. And while the count joined his knights and headed the resistance well, the Norman baron that day maintained the reputation which he enjoyed in England and on the continent as a bold knight and a terrible man-at-arms. In the midst of the confusion and the panic which prevailed throughout the baronial forces, De Moreville fought with energy and courage not exceeded by any man in either army. It was he who made the charge during which Falco was taken; it was he whose lance threw Richard, surnamed Crocus, to the ground from which he was to be raised a corpse; it was he who, when his lance was broken, drew his mace, and, sweeping all before him, cleared the causeway of Falco's mercenaries when they were pushing on to open the north gate in order to allow Pembroke's army to rush into the city. Moreover, even after the struggle became close, and Collingham's band were proving how well they merited the fame they had won, and the French and Anglo-Normans, huddled together and terror-stricken, were yielding themselves like sheep to the shearer, De Moreville and his riders were still bearing themselves valiantly in the *mêlée*, and still breaking into the ranks of the conquering foe and riding triumphantly through Collingham's men with the well-known battle-cry of "St. Moden for De Moreville! Strike! strike! and spare not!"

In the midst of one of his fiery courses, however, the Norman baron reined up at a short distance from the north gate, on a spot which was literally surrounded by the carcases of the horses that had been slain; and he ground his teeth in bitter wrath as he surveyed the scene before him, and listened to the shouts of the victors as they pressed on in a mass towards the spot where, around De Perche, fighting bravely against odds, the war still centred.

"All is lost!" exclaimed De Moreville, in the tone of a man vexed to the heart's core. "By St. Moden, methinks the heirs of the heroes of Hastings have lost their very manhood while feasting and bull-baiting in the company of citizens. Beshrew me if children with willow wands could not have made a better fight than the Anglo-Norman warriors have this day done."

"My lord," said Sir Anthony Waledger, nervously, "it seems to me that we had better save ourselves."

De Moreville, in spite of the serious position in which he was, laughed at the drunken knight's suggestion.

"On my faith, Sir Anthony," replied he, as he exchanged a smile with his young nephew Richard at the knight's expense, "methinks, for once, you are in the right in thinking rather of safety than renown, for, if we escape not, we either yield or die. But whither are we to go?"

"To Chas-Chateil," suggested Hornmouth, in a significant tone. "No safer stronghold in all England, if matters come to the worst."

“True,” said De Moreville, thoughtfully. “But,” added he, slowly, “after this day’s work, no fortress in England, however strong, will long hold out against King Henry. Therefore it is expedient to hold our course northward, and take refuge at Mount Moreville. But my daughter, left to her fate in London, and London certain to be surrendered!”

“She will be safe under the wing of Dame Waledger,” replied Hornmouth, “and all the more for your absence, seeing that she is a kinswoman of my Lord of Salisbury, and can easily, therefore, secure protection. Come, my good lord, time flies; let us ride. This day fortune is against you, but you may live to conquer again. Our enemies have broken near the north gate as they entered; let us charge towards it, and fly while there is yet time.”

“Ay,” said De Moreville, fiercely, “let us charge, but slaughtering the rascally rabble as we go. See how they swarm. On! on! St. Moden for De Moreville! Strike! strike! and spare not!”

And, setting spurs to his steed, the Norman baron, at the head of his riders, charged towards the north gate.

But this charge proved no such child’s play as De Moreville had expected. The rascal rabble of which he had spoken so contemptuously was Collingham’s band of patriots, who, after doing good service to their king and country in the deadly struggle, had rallied to their celebrated standard, bringing their prisoners with them, ere dispersing to secure their share of the booty, which they did not despise. No further thought of fighting that day had they; for, save on the spot where De Perche still struggled, all resistance had ceased, and the royalists, not interested in the count’s fate, were striding through the streets without finding a foe to encounter, or spreading themselves over the city to begin the work of plunder. But when Collingham suddenly descried De Moreville’s banner, and observed that the Norman baron was about to charge, he formed his men with marvellous rapidity into a phalanx resembling a wedge, and there, with their captives in the midst, they stood, presenting a wall of shields, every man grasping his axe or bending his bow, and their dauntless chief still towering in front, with his heavy club in his hand, and his attitude that of good-humoured defiance.

It was not without an unwonted thrill that De Moreville beheld that brave phalanx as he spurred forward; but he was not a man to be easily daunted. Bravely and resolutely he charged on that wall of shields; as bravely and resolutely his charge was resisted. He might as well have ridden lance in rest against the ramparts of the castle. De Moreville’s rage knew no bounds. His heart beat wildly; his eyes rolled in flames; his nostrils snorted fire; violent exclamations burst from his lips; his whole frame quivered with his angry passions. Furious at his own repulse, he again, and this time more fiercely, led on his riders to the assault, and with a charge so vehement that he all but penetrated into the midst. But as he came face to face and hand to hand with Collingham, he was hurled back with such force that his horse was thrown on its haunches, and his band of cavalry was broken on the rampart of shields as a hammer on the anvil, young Richard de Moreville falling, bruised and senseless, by the axe of the Icingla, and Sir Anthony remaining Collingham’s prisoner.

“By the bones of St. Moden!” exclaimed De Moreville, as, having drawn back, he surveyed the wreck of what had been a gallant feudal following, “this passes all patience. Why do I live to be baffled by such a rabble rout? Why am I man in mail, and not monk in minster? Let us charge once more; for rather would I die by their hands, rather would I forfeit all chance of tasting the joys of Paradise, than live to remember that they had foiled me.”

And laying his lance at rest, and spurring his horse, De Moreville loudly shouted his battle-cry, and led on his riders with such ferocity that Collingham’s phalanx gave way, and the men went whirling hither and thither, like leaves blown about by the November blasts. At that moment Philip de Albini and John Marshal, attracted by the fray, rode hastily up to take part in it, and De Moreville, dashing side by side with Ralph Hornmouth to the north gate, darted rapidly through it, and spurred fast away on the first stage of his long journey.

And now Collingham hasted to where Oliver stood, and said, “The Count de Perche has retreated to the churchyard of the cathedral.”

Immediately the Icingla threw his battle-axe over his shoulder, and rushed off with the speed of the wind, muttering the word “Revenge!”

CHAPTER LII

DEFIANT TILL DEATH

The Count de Perche found himself in a woeful plight. He was on foot, for his charger had been killed under him, and he was almost alone in the midst of the foes whom he had ever treated with such contempt. His friends and allies had fled or yielded, but he neither thought of flying nor yielding. At that moment, life, as life, had no charms for him; but, unfortunately, the prospect of death was bitter and horrible; for being, like his lord, an excommunicated man, he knew that he was not even entitled to Christian burial.

De Perche's proud soul was wrung with bitter agony, and as his enemies slowly advanced he groaned aloud and uttered a sharp cry, the groan and cry of a superlatively proud warrior in extreme mental anguish. Scarcely knowing what he did in his perplexity, the count retreated slowly to the churchyard of the cathedral, and, setting his back against a wall, he shouted defiance at his assailants as they came resolutely on.

De Perche's foes formed themselves in front of him in a semi-circle, and the Earl of Pembroke, who could not but admire the count's dauntless bearing in the hour of defeat and despair, invited him to surrender.

"Yield, sir count," said the earl in accents which he meant to be persuasive. "You have done all that a brave man could. Therefore yield and live. Life has its sweets."

"No; not with glory gone," replied De Perche with energy. "Never shall it be told in Christendom, to my dispraise, that sweet France fell into contempt through me. Let those yield who love life better than honour. Never by me shall such evil example be set. But before I die I will sell myself dear."

"Yield, yield!" cried Pembroke, and Salisbury, and others of the English, impatiently. "Yield, sir count."

"Never!" exclaimed De Perche, irritated by the impatience of their tone. "By the bones of St. John the Baptist, never shall any but liars have it in their power to tell that I yielded to a pack of tailed English, who are traitors to their lawful sovereign, Lord Louis."

The victors, who stood before De Perche in a semi-circle, still hesitated; for, in spite of the count's insulting language, the courage he displayed in the presence of such manifest peril excited their admiration. But one English knight lost temper and sprang forward.

"By the mass," exclaimed he, setting his teeth on edge, "such pride and petulance merit sharp punishment: and if this scornful Frank will not yield to Englishmen, he must die by an Englishman's hand."

A keen combat ensued, but it was brief as keen. The knight aimed a blow at De Perche; the count warded off the blow, and returned it with such force that sparks of fire flew from the knight's helmet, and he was almost beaten to his knee. But quick as thought the English knight recovered himself, and making a fierce thrust at De Perche's eye, pierced him to the brain. Without uttering a word, the count rolled lifeless on the ground.

A brief silence succeeded De Perche's fall; and as the victors stood in a circle, gazing on the lifeless body of their foe, who while living had been so scornful, the silence was rudely interrupted by a shout of vengeance. Breaking through the crowd, a young warrior burst wildly into the circle, in a guise which made nobles and knights stare—his steel cap battered, his shield bruised with blows, his axe reeking with gore, his white jacket spotted red with that day's carnage, his eyes flashing fire, his teeth grinding with rage, and the word "Revenge!" on his tongue.

It was Oliver Icingla; and he came to execute the vengeance he had, weeks earlier, sworn to take on the head of the Count de Perche, whenever and wherever he might meet the man whom he regarded as his mother's murderer.

"You are too late, Master Icingla," said the Earl of Salisbury to his former squire and fellow-captive. "De Perche has fallen by the hand of another."

"I grieve to hear it," said Oliver.

"The noble count, pierced through brain and eye, has already gone to his account."

"So perish all England's enemies!" exclaimed Oliver, glancing at the fallen Frenchman.

"But we war not with the dead," said Salisbury, solemnly; "and in the hour of victory it grieves me to call to mind that the body of a warrior who died so bravely cannot be laid in a Christian grave. But," added the earl in a whisper, "may his soul be admitted within the gates of Paradise, and may it repose in holy flowers!"

"Amen," added Oliver earnestly, as he crossed himself. "My lord, I doubt not you are right. Death clears all scores; so they say, at least. And I trust that his soul will be pardoned, and find repose in the regions whither it has winged its flight."

CHAPTER LIII

AFTER THE BATTLE

No sooner did intelligence that the day was going against the Count de Perche and the Anglo-Norman barons spread through Lincoln than consternation prevailed among the women whose kinsmen were connected with the army doomed to defeat. Many of them, indeed, left their houses to avoid insult, and, embarking on the Witham in boats, endeavoured to escape with their children and servants, and such valuable property as they could carry. Events proved that their fears were not unfounded.

In fact, notwithstanding the discipline maintained by Pembroke, and the desire which he naturally felt to save the country from violence and spoliation, he could not, in the hour of triumph, save Lincoln from the horrors of war. Flushed with victory and eager for spoil, the royalists, after having assured themselves that their foes were utterly beaten, assumed all the airs of conquerors, and acted as if they had a right to everything in the shape of plunder on which they could lay hands.

At first the victors contented themselves with rifling the waggons and sumpter-mules containing the baggage of the French and the barons, and found much booty in the shape of silver vessels and rich furniture of various kinds. But this merely whetted their appetites for booty, and, spreading rapidly over the city, they began to pillage the houses, rushing from place to place with axes and hammers, and breaking open store-rooms and chests, and seizing upon gold and silver goblets, and jewels, and gold rings, and women's ornaments, and rich garments.

Nothing, in fact, seems to have come amiss to them that was not too hot or too heavy, and the churches were not respected any more than the houses. Even the cathedral was not spared. In fact, the clergy of Lincoln, being, like the bishop, stanch partisans of Prince Louis, and under sentence of excommunication, were not only odious to the king's friends, but looked on by the English soldiers as persons whom they, as faithful sons of the Church, were justified in plundering.

Meantime the women who had embarked on the Witham with their children and domestics had not been fortunate in their efforts to escape. Much too eager to leave the scene of carnage to be cautious in the mode of doing so, they overloaded the boats to a dangerous degree, and when fairly afloat they neither knew how to row nor steer. As a consequence, serious evil befel them through the boats getting foul of one another, and by various causes, and many of the fair fugitives went to the bottom of the river with the property which they had been anxious to save, "so that," says the chronicler, "there were afterwards found in the river by searchers goblets of silver and many other articles of value, for the boats had been overloaded, and the women, not knowing how to manage them, all perished."

At length the riot and pillage came to an end, and the king's peace having been proclaimed through the city, the conquerors ate and drank merrily in celebrating the victory they had so easily gained against great odds. Ere this, however, everything having been settled, Pembroke prepared to carry to the king tidings of the great triumph which had crowned the efforts of his adherents. Having, therefore, instructed the barons and knights to return to the fortresses of which they were castellans, and to carry their prisoners with them, and to keep them safely in custody till the king's pleasure was known, the protector, without even dining or taking food, rode off to Stowe to inform young Henry of the great victory, which made him in reality sovereign of England.

Even next day the consequences began to appear. Early on Sunday morning couriers reached Stowe with intelligence that Henry de Braybroke and his garrison had abandoned Mount Sorrel, and the king sent orders to the Sheriff of Nottingham to raze the castle to the ground.

Of all the men of rank who fought in the battle few fell. Indeed, only two are mentioned by name—Richard, surnamed Crocus, and the Count de Perche—one on the winning, the other on the losing side. Richard, who was Falco's brave knight, was carried by his companions to Croxton and laid with all honour in the abbey. The Count de Perche, whose comrades-in-arms were slain, or taken, or fled, and who, as an excommunicated man, could not, of course, be laid in consecrated ground, was interred in the orchard of the hospital of St. Giles, founded by Bishop Remigius outside the walls of Lincoln as a house of refuge for decayed priests.

And so ended the battle of Lincoln in a victory of which Pembroke might well and justly be proud. It not only overthrew the army on which Louis relied for success in his enterprise, but it utterly undid all the work which he had been doing in England since that June day when he rode into London amidst the cheers of an unreasoning multitude.

As for the feudal magnates who had offered him a crown which was not theirs to give, and who had done him homage as their sovereign, they were no longer in a position to aid him, even if they had been so inclined, but captives at the mercy of a king whose father they had hunted to death, and whose inheritance they had attempted to give to a stranger. Besides Robert Fitzwalter and the Anglo-Norman earls and barons, three hundred knights and a multitude of men holding inferior rank were prisoners.

Moreover, the spoil was regarded as something marvellous, and the English, remembering the multitudinous articles of value that fell into their hands that day as booty, and the ease with which they had obtained it, though so much the weaker party, were long in the habit of talking jocularly of that very memorable Saturday in the Whitsuntide of the year 1217, and with grim humour describing the battle as "Lincoln Fair."

CHAPTER LIV

AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT

WHEN the army of the Count de Perche had been routed at Lincoln during Whitsuntide, and the armament of Eustace the Monk destroyed at the mouth of the Thames, on St. Bartholomew's Day, the position of Prince Louis became desperate, and he felt infinitely more eager to get out of England without dishonour than he had felt to invade it a year earlier. But this proved no easy business; and the prince had to pass several months of such intense anxiety as he was little prepared to experience.

On hearing of the catastrophe of Lincoln, Louis immediately abandoned the siege of Dover, and made for London, perhaps still hoping against hope. But even in the capital, which had been his stronghold, he soon discovered that he was the reverse of secure. Plots and conspiracies to drive out the French were almost every week brought to light, and countenanced by many who had once shouted most loudly, "All hail, Lord Louis!" Constantine Fitzarnulph, indeed, continued true to the end; but, as a body, the rich citizens were most anxious to get out of the scrape into which they had been beguiled by the confederate barons who at Lincoln had surrendered like so many sheep.

Such being the state of affairs, Louis never knew what a day might bring forth; and he became somewhat apprehensive of consequences, as he informed Philip Augustus by letter, saying, at the same time, "Our losses are brought on by God more than by man."

The King of France, somewhat alarmed, summoned the messengers of Louis to his presence.

"Does William Marshal still live?" asked he.

"Yes, sire," answered they.

"Then," said Philip, much relieved, "I have no fears for my son."

The French king was so far right that the adversaries of Prince Louis had now much more compassion for him than his friends, who blamed him for all their misfortunes; and Pembroke was as moderate in the day of triumph as he had been inflexible in the day of adversity. But he did not, therefore, fail in his duty to the young king or to the country, the affairs of which, as protector, he had undertaken to administer. He was a man who understood not only how to conquer but how to conciliate; and in order to begin the work of conciliation he felt strongly the necessity of ridding England of the invaders without any unnecessary delay. Therefore he marched his army on London, while the mariners of the Cinque Ports sailed into the Thames, and, beleaguering the city both by land and water, so that no provisions could enter it, he reduced the French prince to such extreme distress that he shouted out very earnestly for peace. Accordingly a conference was appointed with a view of settling the terms on which peace was to be concluded.

The 11th of September was appointed for this important conference; and on that day, Henry, attended by the protector, and Louis by such of his nobles as had survived the war, met near Kingston, on an islet of the Thames. Everything went smoothly, for Louis was all eagerness to shake himself clear of his perplexities; and Pembroke, so far from being inclined to bear hard on vanquished foes, was sincerely anxious to convert them into friends. Accordingly, such terms were agreed to as enabled the French prince to leave England without dishonour, and gave the captive barons an opportunity of recovering their liberty and returning to their allegiance.

"It was concluded," says the chronicler, "that Prince Louis should have fifteen thousand marks for the charges he had been at, and abjure his claim to any interest in the kingdom; and withal to work his father for restitution of such provinces in France as appertained to the English crown, and that when he himself should be king he should resign them in a peaceable manner. On the other hand, King Henry takes his oath, and after him the legate and the protector, to restore unto the barons of the realm, and others his subjects, all their rights and privileges, for which the discord began between the late king and his people. After this, Prince Louis is honourably attended to Dover, and departs out of England about Michaelmas."

Almost ere the ships which carried the French prince and his surviving comrades from the land which they had hoped to make their own had reached France, affairs in England assumed their wonted aspect, and Englishmen most devoutly thanked Heaven that peace was restored to the suffering country. Nor did Pembroke leave his work half done. The Great Charter having been carefully revised, and so modified as not to interfere with "the king's government being carried on," was solemnly confirmed, to the satisfaction of all parties; and young Henry, when he entered London, on the occasion of going to be crowned with the golden crown of the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, "was received with great joy by the people."

Gay indeed was the city of London on that day, and gladly the citizens, rejoicing in the restoration of peace—with the exception of Constantine Fitzarnulph, who muttered vague threats about "biding his time," and shut himself up in his high, large dwelling—decked their houses, and rushed to window and housetop to witness the procession, which certainly contrasted marvellously with the procession which, twelve months earlier, had been witnessed, at a period so gloomy, by the citizens of Gloucester. Keen was the curiosity of the dames and damsels to see what they could of the pageant; and even Dame Waledger, albeit looking somewhat sullen, and Beatrix de Moreville, albeit looking somewhat sad, came forth to view the magnificent cavalcade from the balcony of the great mansion of the De Morevilles, in Ludgate. De Moreville himself was away in the far North, shut up within the strong walls of Mount Moreville, his mind alternating between vague hopes and desperate resolutions, never even mentioning his daughter to Ralph Hornmouth, but one day forming a project for placing Alexander, King of Scots, on the English throne, another day vowing by the bones of St. Moden to raise his own banner and make an effort to redeem the lost cause of Louis, and on a third declaring that his career was run, and that nothing remained but to take the cowl and become a monk in the great abbey which his ancestor had founded at Dryburgh, on the Tweed; but Sir Anthony Waledger, who, freed from his captivity and solaced by the wine-cup, bore defeat more easily, was, though carefully concealed, looking scornfully out on the triumph of those against whom he had fought, if not with chivalrous courage, at least with fiendish malevolence.

And grand and brilliant indeed—with its banners, and martial music, and heralds—looked the company of earls and barons and knights and squires who attended the boy-king in his procession, their plumes and mantles waving and their bridles ringing as they rode haughtily along, their steeds stepping proudly, as if they disdained the ground.

But no one looked that day higher and braver than Oliver Icingla, who, side by side with William Longsword, Salisbury's young heir, rode gallantly along on his black horse Ayoub, no longer wearing the white jacket in which he had made himself so terrible to the French, but arrayed, as beseemed his rank, in cap and white feather, and gay mantelet of scarlet, now and then, also, recognised by the crowd, and cheered as "The Icingla," and as the boy-warrior whose axe had been wielded with such good effect against England's foes.

And as the cavalcade reached Ludgate, on the way westward, the gate presented a slight impediment and there was a brief halt in the procession, and as Oliver raised his eyes to that balcony where De Moreville's daughter was under the wing of Dame Waledger, they encountered that marvellously fair face, with eyes like the violet and hair like the raven's wing, which had haunted him in all his adventures, and, as he gallantly raised his cap, his heart for a moment leaped with the emotion of a young lover suddenly face to face with her he adores. But it was only for a moment. Quick as the lightning's flash his memory recalled that terrible dream, the recollection of which he had in vain endeavoured to banish, and so powerful was the impression which it had left, that he almost involuntarily breathed a prayer to be delivered from temptation. As he did so the procession resumed its course towards Westminster, and Oliver rode on, musing silently, and all that day and all that night his thoughts were gloomy, and he was still in melancholy mood next morning when, having been roused at sunrise, he mounted to accompany William de Collingham to take possession of Chas-Chateil in King Henry's name.

And Beatrix de Moreville became more sad. Part of her sadness arose from the belief that Oliver Icingla had all but forgotten the fair kinswoman whose presence had cheered his heart in captivity as sunshine lights up the landscape in latest October, or only remembered to think of her with dislike as the daughter of a man by whom he had been deeply injured. But this was not all that preyed upon the mind of Beatrix de Moreville, and brought the tears to her eyes. She was aware that Constantine Fitzarnulph, known to her only as a person of strong will and violent ambition, had become madly enamoured of her; that he had vowed that the Norman maiden should be his bride. She was aware that he had secured the co-operation of the Waledgers, male and female, who, reflecting on De Moreville's harshness in other days, and deeming him now ruined and powerless either to benefit or to injure, had neither scruples nor fears so far as the Norman baron was concerned; and she was aware, also, that Fitzarnulph had, in all the confidence of untold wealth and municipal influence, sworn by the blood of St. Thomas, citizen as he was, he should wed the proud demoiselle, even if it cost the country a revolution and ten thousand lives to fill up the social gap that separated them.

Such being her position, and being endowed with all the sensitive delicacy of a flower reared in a forest, De Moreville's daughter, finding herself abandoned by her sire, shut up in that great house in Ludgate, worried daily by Dame Waledger, pestered by Sir Anthony, and with no one of her own age, and rank, and sex to sympathise with her woes, brooded pensively as she recalled the past, with all its romance, and sighed heavily as she thought of the future, with all its hazards.

It was, in truth, a woeful termination to the sweet and fanciful musings of which Oliver's captivity at Chas-Chateil had been the origin. Why, O why, did the heir of the Icinglas dream that frightful dream in the Sussex forest?

CHAPTER LV

SUNSHINE AND CLOUDS

All now went well with King Henry and with England under the auspices of the old Earl of Pembroke, and the Christmas of 1217 was celebrated with gladness and festive mirth alike in court and city, in castle and in cottage, and people breathed more freely than they had done for years, and thanked God and the saints that the country was free from the terrible mercenaries whom Prince Louis had brought to conquer them. The protector administered affairs so wisely and vigorously that general satisfaction was felt throughout the country, so lately torn by civil war and ravaged by foreign foes. No man was treated with harshness on account of the part he had taken in the struggle, and when the barons who had adhered to Prince Louis appeared at court, they were so graciously received that they did what they could by their influence and example to aid Pembroke in the patriotic course of policy which he was pursuing. Even the King of Scots and the Prince of Wales perceived the necessity of making peace with the government. Accordingly, Alexander came southward and did homage to Henry at Northampton. Llewellyn, after compromising with his savage pride by indulging in a little delay, condescended to go through the same ceremony at Worcester.

Meanwhile the protector laboured earnestly to execute the treaty to which the king had sworn, and on all points scrupulously maintained faith with those who had been his adversaries. Having restored castles and manors to the barons who had returned to their allegiance, he took measures for securing the observance of the Great Charter, as revised, and modified, and confirmed. Not content with issuing orders to all the sheriffs to do their duty as regarded the Charter, he no sooner found that these orders had not the effects he intended than he intrusted the business to justices-itinerant, and sent them into the various counties of England, with instructions and power to hear complaints and redress grievances. His determination to redeem all his pledges was evident, and nobody capable of forming an opinion could entertain any doubt of his sincerity.

In fact, the conciliatory spirit, good faith, and moderation displayed by Pembroke wrought marvels; and the course of policy he pursued did so much to popularise the monarchy which he had rescued from destruction that ere long young Henry reigned over a loyal people, “the evil will borne to King John seeming to die with him, and to be buried with him in the same grave,” and there was every prospect of England enjoying a long season of peace and prosperity. But unfortunately a change was at hand, and a change for the worse. Almost as Henry’s throne appeared to be firmly established, there occurred an event which opened up a new scene, and which was destined to lead to fresh troubles.

Pembroke, as has been mentioned, was an old man at the time when he, in the autumn of 1216, applied himself to the terrible task of saving his country from foreign dominion, and, while occupied with the good work of healing his country’s wounds, his days were “dwindling to the shortest span.” Perhaps the protector’s great exertions hastened his end. At all events, in May, 1219, he breathed his last at his manor of Caversham, and his body, having been carried to the abbey of Reading, where mass was solemnly celebrated, and afterwards conveyed to Westminster Abbey, where mass was again solemnly celebrated, was finally borne with all honour along the Strand, and laid in the Temple Church on Ascension Day.

Naturally the great protector’s death was much bewailed by the nation, and patriotic Englishmen mourned as if each of them had lost a near and dear friend. Nor was it possible for reflecting men to speculate on the future without feeling uneasy as to what might be the consequences of the sudden removal of a ruler of patriotic spirit, and firm heart, and strong hand. For a time, however, the inspiration of his example was strong enough to influence his successors in the government, Peter, Bishop of Winchester, enacting the part of regent, and Hubert de Burgh, who had won so high a reputation by his defence of Dover and his naval victory over Eustace the Monk, holding the high office of justiciary. Moreover, peace was rendered more sure on the side of Scotland by the marriage of Alexander, King of Scots, with Joan, Henry’s sister, and by the marriage of Hubert de Burgh and Margaret, one of the sisters of the Scottish monarch, and at first matters went on satisfactorily. As time passed over, however, a reaction in public opinion took place, and the voice of discontent was again heard; and, to make matters worse, the Bishop of Winchester and Hubert de Burgh, at a crisis when union was so necessary, began to quarrel, and to struggle desperately for the mastery.

Most unfortunate for the king and country was this contention under the circumstances, and the evil effects soon became visible. Men who were at daggers drawn were not likely to be very happy in their efforts at governing a nation of all others most difficult to govern, and the Londoners began to show their old spirit of insubordination, and to shout loudly against everything bearing the semblance of a grievance. As usually happens in such circumstances, persons of restless spirit and violent ambition were not wanting to fan the flame; and in the city of London there was one person, at least, who was too vigilant not to recognise the opportunity for mischief, and too earnest in his discontent not to seize the occasion and turn it to account. This man was Constantine Fitzarnulph.

And so the sunshine departed from around Henry’s throne, and clouds began to gather over the boy-king’s head.

CHAPTER LVI

THE WRESTLING MATCH

It was the 25th of July, and King Henry was keeping the festival of St. James at the Palace of Westminster, and laying the foundation-stone of the magnificent addition which he was about to make to the abbey built by the Holy Confessor, whom he regarded as his tutelary saint.

And on St. James's Day, after the king had gone through this ceremony, there was a great wrestling match between the Londoners on one side and the inhabitants of Westminster and the adjacent villages on the other. The match had been got up by the Londoners, and was presided over by Constantine Fitzarnulph, and the scene of athletic strife was a broad, level space hard by Matilda's Hospital, afterwards St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, which for the most part were overgrown with bushes and so secluded that even a century and a half later the Lollards, having secrecy in view, deemed them the fittest place to hold the midnight meetings which were so disagreeably interrupted by the tramp of the fifth Henry's cavalry.

Robert Serle, a mercer, who was Mayor of London, being a wise and prudent person and suspecting ulterior objects, refrained from being present at this wrestling match. In fact, the mayor had a secret dread of Fitzarnulph, who was now regarded by the rich and reputable citizens as "a great favourer of the French," and one who had dealings with sorcerers—who was much given to playing on the passions of the populace and cherishing projects unworthy of a peaceful citizen. In fact, he had lost nearly all influence with his equals, and, though treated with respect as "a man eminent for his birth and property," he was avoided by them as a dangerous man.

Nevertheless, Fitzarnulph adhered steadfastly to the objects on which he had set his heart, one being the restoration of Prince Louis, the other his union with De Moreville's daughter, and defied all discouragements in pursuing the path to which he was tempted by ambition and by love. Deserted by the middle classes, he found adherents on whose prejudices he could more easily work, and he exercised his art to insinuate himself into the good graces of the unreflecting multitude, and played demagogic tricks with such success that he became the popular darling. Ever brooding, ever scheming, and ever aspiring, he was constantly on the watch for people whom he might use as instruments to advance his projects when occasion served, though, in truth, his projects were so vague and fanciful that, if questioned, he would have found difficulty in explaining the nature of the revolution which he intended to accomplish. In fact, his heart was still with Prince Louis. His admirers, however, being such as they were, made no inconvenient inquiries, but believed that if he had the upper hand toil and poverty would cease, and a golden age come into existence.

And therefore Fitzarnulph was popular, and great was the crowd around the spot railed off for the sport over which he was to preside as patron. Thither came many grave and sober citizens to enjoy the spectacle; thither the London 'prentices, whose notion of enjoyment centred in mischief and brawls; thither many of the sons of toil to spend their holiday; and thither also the riff-raff of the capital in the shape of gamblers, parasites, and desperadoes, who never appeared anywhere without causing quiet and orderly people a good deal of apprehension. Loud was the shouting, great the excitement, keen the curiosity; and the feeling of jealousy and rivalry was sharpened by the circumstance of the steward of the Abbot of Westminster appearing to lend his countenance to the wrestlers of Westminster and other villages.

At the time appointed the contest began by two striplings, who, each mounted on the back of a comrade, encountered like knights on horseback, each endeavouring to throw his antagonist to the ground. This served as a prelude to the more serious struggle. The spectators, however, soon wearied of this species of sport, which they looked upon as "boys' play," and manifested their impatience for the more real and manly encounter.

The real work of the day then commenced, and the wrestlers, in light clothing so shaped as not to impede their movements, entered the arena. At first there were several couples contending at the same time, but they were matched two against two, and the rule was that a combatant must fight three times successively and throw his antagonist at least twice on the ground before the prize could be adjudged to him. The great aim of the wrestler was to throw his adversary on the ground; but that was not decisive. If the combatant who was down happened to draw his antagonist along with him, either by accident or art, the contest still continued, and they kept tumbling and twining with each other till one of them got uppermost and compelled the other to own himself vanquished.

Now on this occasion, though the wrestlers from Westminster contended keenly and made every exertion, the Londoners were triumphant in almost every encounter; and when the contest was at an end, Martin Girder, of Eastcheap, a young man of twenty-five or thereabout, of tall stature and immense strength, stood in the arena the undefeated victor of the day, having thrown to the ground adversary after adversary, and so dealt with the Westminster men that they were thoroughly humbled for the time being, and that the steward of the abbot was much crestfallen.

Nor did the Londoners bear their triumph meekly. Mingled with shouts of "Hurrah for London town!" "Hurrah for Martin Girder!" "Hurrah for the bold 'prentices of London!" and "Long live Constantine Fitzarnulph!" arose mocking laughter and railleries directed against the vanquished foes, and now and then bitter denunciations of the men of Westminster, not even excepting the abbot and his steward.

"By St. George!" exclaimed the steward angrily, "the insolence of these Londoners is intolerable. My lord's honour and mine own are concerned in humbling their pride."

"Sir seneschal," said Fitzarnulph, with a sneer that was at once significant and provoking, "you see that the Londoners can hold their own when occasion presents itself."

The steward's brow darkened, but he curbed his rising wrath, and spoke calmly and a little contemptuously.

"Good citizens," said he, "be not puffed up with too much conceit, nor imitate the airs of the cock, which crows so loudly on its own dunghill. But hear my challenge. I will hold a match at Westminster this day week, and I will give a ram as the prize; and beshrew me if I produce not a wrestler who will dispose of your London champion as easily as a game-cock would deal with a barn-door fowl."

"Seneschal," replied Fitzarnulph, with a mock smile and an air of very lofty superiority, "I accept the challenge, and hold myself surety for Martin Girder's appearance at the time and place you have named. For the rest, I wish you joy of such a champion as you have described, when you find him; but I cannot help deeming that you might as

well attempt the quest of the Sangreal; and sure I am that you will have to search carefully from Kent to Northumberland before you find a champion who will not get the worst of it in any encounter with Martin Girder."

"Good citizen," replied the steward, scornfully, "leave the search to me, and trouble not thy head as to the difficulties thereof. Credit me," added he, with a peculiar emphasis, "I will use no sorcery in the business, nor will it be necessary to go out of Middlesex to find a young fellow with strength and skill enough to lay this hero of Eastcheap on his back with as little trouble as it has taken him to do the least skilful and strong whom he has wrestled with this day."

And so saying, the steward caused a proclamation to be made that a wrestling match was to be held at Westminster at noon on the 1st of August, which was Lammas Day, and having then nodded coldly to Fitzarnulph, he turned his horse's head and rode towards Westminster, while the Londoners, conspicuous among whom were the 'prentices, were escorting the victor in triumph from the arena.

This ceremony over, the eyes of the spectators were gratified with no less exciting a spectacle than the sword-dance of the Anglo-Saxons, which was a sort of war-dance performed by two men in martial attire, armed with shield and sword, who plied their weapons to the sound of music—a man playing on the horn and a woman dancing round the performers as they fought.

The more reputable citizens then took their way homewards, criticising the combats that had taken place, and lauding the athletic prowess of Martin Girder, not failing, at the same time, to speculate on the event that was to come off the following week at Westminster, and to hazard predictions very much the reverse of favourable to the steward's chances of making good his boast.

But it was not till a later hour that the crowd dispersed. The booths, the gleeman, the mountebank, and the merry-andrew were strong attractions, not to mention the dancing bear, and the tents at which liquor was liberally dispensed to all who would pay on the nail; and as the crowd remained, so did Constantine Fitzarnulph. Scenting mischief in the steward's challenge, and hoping to turn it to account, he was that day peculiarly eager to ingratiate himself with the multitude, and to add to his popularity; and he succeeded so well that he was ultimately escorted to Clerkenwell by a riotous mob, who loudly cheered him as he entered his suburban villa, and shouted vociferously, "God and the saints preserve thee, Constantine, King of the People!"

And Fitzarnulph's head was so turned with the popular applause and flattery, that he overlooked the probability of any such trifling contingency as his neck being ere long in danger.

Already he was, at least, a viceroy in imagination, and far too elate with the visions of power and authority with which he delighted his soul to allow his fancy to conjure up, even for a moment, the gloomy spectacle of gallows and hangman, so likely to figure at the end of such a career as that on which he was rushing.

CHAPTER LVII

A MEDIÆVAL RESTAURANT

AMONG the wonders of London at the opening of the thirteenth century, when Constantine Fitzarnulph ranked as "one of the noblest citizens," was a restaurant on the banks of the Thames, which satisfied every want of the stranger or traveller, and seemed to old Fitzstephen to realise Plato's dreams.

"Here," says the chronicler, going into details, "according to the season, you may find victuals of all sorts, roasted, baked, fried, and boiled; fish large and small, and coarse viands for the poorer sort, and more delicate ones for the rich—such as venison, fowls, and small birds.

"In case a friend should arrive at a citizen's house much wearied with his journey, and chooses not to wait, an hungered as he is, for the buying and cooking of meats, recourse is had to the bank before mentioned, where everything desirable is instantly procured. No number of knights and strangers can enter the city at any hour of the day or night but all may be supplied with provisions; so that those have no occasion to fast too long, nor these to depart the city without dinner.

"To this place, if they are so disposed, they resort, and there they regale themselves, every man according to his abilities. Those who have a mind to indulge need not hanker after sturgeon, or a game fowl, or a *gelinotte-de-bois*—a particularly delicate bird—for there are delicacies enough to gratify their palates. It is a public eating-house, and it is both highly convenient and useful to the city, and is a clear proof of its civilisation."

At one of the tables of this celebrated eating-house, on the last day of July, the day for Lammas, a young warrior, strong and handsome, rather brilliantly attired as a squire of noble Norman birth, was seated with a companion somewhat his junior, whom he called Rufus. They had finished their meal, which had been of the most costly description, and were indulging, though moderately, in the most expensive Bordeaux wine which the establishment boasted, the squire justifying his extravagance by quoting—

"Nullus argento color est,—
—— nisi temperato
Splendeat usu,"

when Constantine Fitzarnulph entered, and cordially saluted them.

"Welcome back to England and to London, fair sir," said the citizen, seating himself, and addressing the elder of the two, while he helped himself to a cup of wine. "You have come in the very moment of time to serve your country; but, as my trusty messenger doubtless informed you, I have much to say of a private nature; and this place being somewhat public, and the drawers, moreover, being parlous spies, I would fain conduct you to my own house that we may converse more freely."

"Thanks, good Fitzarnulph," replied the other, nodding easily as he raised a wine-cup to his lips; "I arede your meaning. But, in sober earnest, I am free to confess that, the business being of such a nature as your trusty messenger gave me to understand, I see not how it can have other than a disastrous issue. Credit me," added he, looking round cautiously to assure himself that he was not overheard, "it is vain to expect the country to come around you unless your enterprise be headed by a man bearing a great and renowned name, and one about which clusters a halo of associations to dazzle the multitude."

"Faint heart never won fair lady," said Fitzarnulph, "and men must run some risks in regenerating a nation. Besides, there will not be wanting such a leader as you picture, if once it is known that there exists a ladder by which such a man may climb to a splendid eminence."

"In the days of my youth," said the other, almost sadly, "I had great faith in the Lord Hugh de Moreville. By St. John of Beverley! he was a great man, and of high lineage, but he made a false step and fell; and I could almost weep when I think how the feathers drooped from that day, one by one, from the De Moreville eagle."

"Wherefore not recall Louis of France, a prince who has both the will and the power to aid us?" asked Fitzarnulph, cautiously.

"By the Holy Cross!" replied the other, striking the table in his enthusiasm; "as soon would I consent to invoke the aid of the Sultan of Egypt, or the King of the Tartars. No foreign prince for me, least of all a Frank, and of all Franks, least of all a Capet."

"The Lord Robert Fitzwalter yet lives," suggested Fitzarnulph, in a significant tone.

"He lives, indeed," said the other, half scornfully; "but he lives with a reputation much the worse for the wear. The man who played towards England the part which Count Julian played towards Spain is not the man to head Englishmen when hazarding everything to regenerate their country. Therefore let us speak no more of Robert Fitzwalter."

"By St. Thomas! fair sir," exclaimed Fitzarnulph, testily, "you are somewhat difficult to please in the choice of a leader; and, since the names I have mentioned are so ungrateful to your ear, I know not who is capable of assuming the truncheon of command in this great enterprise—for great it is destined to be—unless, indeed, it be a Norman lord, young in years, but already well known to fame—I mean Walter Merley."

The young warrior smiled complacently, cast his eyes up to the roof, and then around him, with the air of a person contemplating his own perfections, and then looked Fitzarnulph in the face.

"Good Constantine," said he, with his colour slightly heightened, "I know not whether you speak in jest or earnest, and, in good sooth, it matters little. But this I do know, and say fearlessly, that I have not fought for the Venetian Republic and for the Emperor of Constantinople without making my name, in some degree at least, known to fame; and that had I castles, and baronies, and manors, and retainers, I should little fear to occupy an eminence even more perilous than that to which you allude. But a younger son, without land and without followers, I feel strongly that Fortune beckons me to other lands than that of my birth, and that there are many countries in Christendom where my sword would be welcome. All over Christendom are wars and rumours of wars. Not to mention what the Venetians and the Emperor of Constantinople are doing against the Greeks, I know that in France war is going on against the Albigenses; in Spain against the Moors; in Germany, Otho and young Frederick, a prince

of rare promise, are contending for the imperial crown; in Sweden, King Eric, surnamed the Lisper, is at war with the Tole Kungers; Waldemar, King of Denmark, is contending with Albert of Lauenburg, who is essaying to make himself master of Holstein; Lescus, the King of Poland, is valiantly resisting the Tartars; John de Brienne, King of Jerusalem, is defending himself desperately against the Turks. Mayhap I have some difficulty in choosing, under such circumstances, whither to direct my course; but no fear have I of finding a welcome wherever swords are drawing and blows being exchanged. It is only in mine own country that I am without honour; and, by the mass! I see not wherefore I should sacrifice the prospects of carving out a principality with my sword in order to risk my head in an enterprise into which, as it seems to me, you are being hurried rather by the promptings of despair than the beckoning of hope."

Fitzarnulph sat for a few moments in an attitude of reflection, and appeared to muse deeply; then suddenly he raised his head, and addressed the young warrior with an expression of peculiar earnestness on his countenance.

"Accompany me to my house," said he, "and I will there show such reasons for venturing upon this enterprise that you will not only agree to take part in it, but consent to do so in the character of its leader."

Walter Merley smiled as if gratified, so far as his vanity was concerned, with the prospect of heading an enterprise for the regeneration of England, and, rising with his companion, they attended Fitzarnulph to his house. When, three hours later, Walter Merley left Fitzarnulph's house, and walked through the narrow streets, he was the wily citizen's dupe.

CHAPTER LVIII

WRESTLING FOR THE RAM

On Lammas day the Londoners flocked towards Westminster to witness the great wrestling match which was to decide the comparative superiority of the athletes of the city and the suburbs. Long ere noon the level turf which had been railed off for the encounter was surrounded by a crowd impatient for the commencement of the combat—so impatient, indeed, that they would not deign to be diverted by the gleemen, and jongleurs, and mountebanks, and merry-andrews, and tymberteres, who nevertheless made every effort to attract attention. Curiosity as to the champion who was to encounter Martin Girder had reached a high pitch, and was all the keener that even his name had not transpired.

At length, just before noon, Constantine Fitzarnulph, coming from London, and the abbot's steward, coming from Westminster, reached the ground, where tents had been erected for the champions; and while the men of Westminster loudly cheered the steward, the Londoners raised their voices not less loudly in praise of Fitzarnulph, some of them adding, "Hail, Constantine, King of the People!"

At the appointed hour, and while yet this storm of cheers was raging, a signal was given for the champions to come into the arena, and forthwith Martin Girder presented himself, looking so big and strong and in such excellent order that the Londoners signified their enthusiasm by cheering him to the skies. Ere the din had subsided, Martin's adversary, a young man of twenty-one, came from his tent, and his appearance so much disappointed the spectators who wished him well as the steward's champion, that hardly a voice was raised in his encouragement, and the Londoners laughed loudly in scorn of his audacity. Only one person—the landlord of the Walnut-tree, out of which William de Collingham and Oliver Icingla had been hunted by Sir Anthony Waledger on the day when Prince Louis entered London—expressed confidence in the champion, and spoke favourably of his chance.

"Cog's wounds!" exclaimed mine host, "I know the younker well. It is Wolf, the son of Styr, my wife's kinsman; and, albeit he does not inherit the height or bulk of his father, yet he has enough of old Styr's pluck and devilry to make the London loons laugh on the wrong side of their mouths ere he is done with their champion. As the Scots say, 'muckleness is no' manliness, or a cow could catch a hare.'"

"Right, mine host," said a tall archer who stood by, and who was one of the heroes of the camp of refuge; "the son of Styr is game to the backbone like his father before him, and the Icingla spoiled a stout soldier when he made Wolf the forester he is."

In truth, Wolf, though now a man and a handsome one, was neither tall nor largely proportioned, and in both respects his adversary had an overwhelming advantage. Nevertheless he was a model of manly strength and beauty—his body compactly formed, his limbs well knit and hardened by constant exercise, and his sunburnt face comely and calm in its expression of fearless courage and resolute will.

And now, all preliminaries having been settled, the combatants advanced upon each other and closed in stern encounter. Nor had anything witnessed on St. James's Day equalled its ferocity. They seized each other by the arms, drew backwards, pushed forwards, locked their limbs into each other, seized and pressed furiously, dashed their heads against each other like rams, and did all they could to lift each other from the ground. At length, however, the struggle ended. Wolf was on the ground, and Martin Girder, who stood over him, was loudly applauded for a victory which it had cost him all his heart and all his energy to obtain.

After a brief interval the champions came forth for the second encounter, and this time the struggle was not prolonged. Scarcely had they closed when Wolf made himself master of his adversary's legs, and a fall was the immediate consequence. The Londoners this time had not a word to say. Fitzarnulph looked very black, and the archer remarked with a knowing glance—

"All right, mine host; the son of Styr is too much accustomed to brutes not to understand the nature of the animal he has to deal with. St. Hubert! but it was well and resolutely done."

Between the second and the third trial of strength and skill there was a considerable interval, that the champions might rest and refresh themselves ere engaging in the struggle which was to decide the victory; and the interest of the crowd in the result being as intense as ever was felt when two knights rode into the lists to combat with lance and battle-axe for life and death, they awaited their reappearance with impatience, and shouted repeatedly for them to come forth. A loud murmur ere long announced that the combat was about to be renewed, and all eyes were fixed on the wrestlers, each party praying for the triumph of their favourite. And fierce indeed was the struggle which ensued, as, after facing each other for a few moments, Wolf and Martin Girder sprang forward and closed to prove decisively which was the better man. For a time neither seemed to gain any advantage over his adversary, and the crowd looked on in breathless silence. At length Wolf, by a skilful effort, threw his antagonist to the ground. But Martin Girder, remembering even at that moment that his own fame and the credit of the city were at stake, drew down his adversary with him, and the contest was continued on the ground, the combatants tumbling and twining with each other in a hundred different ways. But who can resist his fate? Martin's breath was gone, his hopes of success with it; and the Anglo-Saxon, getting uppermost, forced the Londoner to confess himself vanquished, and rose to his feet a conqueror.

So far, matters had been conducted decently and in order. But at the moment when Wolf's victory was secured, the scene suddenly changed, and all was uproar and confusion. Blows were exchanged, swords were drawn, blood was shed—in fact, a fierce fray was going on between the Londoners and the men of Westminster. It soon appeared that the Londoners were getting the worst of the encounter, and they were fain to fly eastward, fighting as they fled, not, however, without threatening vengeance on their pursuers.

Fitzarnulph was among the fugitives, and, having rallied them within Ludgate, and led them up to St. Paul's Churchyard, he did all he could to exasperate them to fury by his violent speeches; and the commotion was such that the mayor and several influential citizens came hastily to prevent mischief, and commanded them to go to their homes. The crowd slowly and sullenly dispersed, only, however, to meet again, and Fitzarnulph did not conceal his determination to have a speedy revenge.

"Master Fitzarnulph," said the mayor, solemnly, "I grieve to see a citizen such as you egging on the commonalty to do what is not lawful and right, and I warn you that you will rue it. Remember William Fitzosbert, who, in

Richard’s time, was called King of the Poor, and for leading the commonalty into lawless courses was hanged at the Nine Elms. Think of him, I say, and let his fate be your warning.”

But the mayor might as well have talked to the waves of the sea. Fitzarnulph treated his admonition with lofty scorn.

“Gramercy for your warning, Mr. Mayor,” said he; “but let me tell you that your neck is not safer than mine own. Hang a Fitzarnulph! Did ever Londoner dream of such a thing before? By St. Thomas! hang me on the morrow at sunrise, and ere sunset you would look round England in vain for a throne.”

CHAPTER LIX

A STARTLING SPECTACLE

A FEW minutes before sunset on the evening of the day on which the wrestling match had taken place at Westminster, a body of horsemen, about a dozen in number, were seen passing through the little town of Barnet, and riding in the direction of London. Both men and horses looked as if their journey had been long, and as if they were weary of the road.

At the head of this small cavalcade rode two horsemen. One was a young knight, so juvenile-looking, indeed, that but for the gold spurs unworn by squires, he would have been thought too lately out of his teens to be girded with the belt of knighthood. The other was a squire, tall and strong, over whose head many a winter had passed, and on whose face and rough-hewn features the conflicts in which he had taken part had left their marks in the form of scars. One was Oliver Icingla, the other Ralph Hornmouth; and as Oliver now and then made remarks to Hornmouth, and now talked caressingly to a tall greyhound that trotted by his horse's side, he did so with the tone of one who held no vague pretensions, but possessed very substantial realities in the way of rank and wealth, and whose presence even in the palace which was his ultimate destination that night could not be treated as a matter of indifference. In fact, his position had very much changed in a worldly point of view. Now the heir of the Icinglas was not only a belted knight, who had rendered important services to England during the great Pembroke's Protectorate, but Lord of Chas-Chateil and Mount Moreville, with ample manors, and the power, in the event of any civil war, of bringing into the field a formidable band of feudal warriors. At this time especially his importance was fully recognised, for both the Bishop of Winchester and Hubert de Burgh were naturally eager to secure him as an ally, and all the more so that the young king was understood to listen with a ready ear to the Icingla's counsels.

A few words will suffice to explain how this came to pass.

Hugh de Moreville had for years ceased to give Oliver the slightest uneasiness. The active career, indeed, of that Norman of Anglo-Normans had closed with his escape from Lincoln. For months after his arrival at Mount Moreville he had remained shut up in that stronghold, fretting and fuming, giving way to wild bursts of rage, and devising every kind of wild scheme for redeeming the disasters of the baronial party. But all his schemes ended in air, and meantime want of food, want of sleep, and constant worry did the wear and tear of years. His hair became grey, his countenance haggard, and his form, lately so erect and so strong, began to bend under the load of regret, of remorse, and mortification, and disappointed ambition. At forty-five he had the appearance of an old man, and he gave way to fancies which made the faithful Hornmouth apprehensive that his lord's reason was departing.

De Moreville's habits, indeed, became most eccentric; and when he sauntered broodingly from the castle from which in other days he had been wont to ride forth with the air of a man who claimed an immense superiority over his kind, he made a point of saluting any children whom he met, "to the end," as he humbly expressed it, "that he might have a return of the benediction of the Innocents." Gradually the inclination he had expressed to seek consolation in the cloister became stronger, and at length the world, in which he had played so conspicuous a part, learned that De Moreville, the haughty and iron-handed, was a monk in the abbey of Dryburgh. But it ought to be mentioned that in a feudal age, when life presented such violent contrasts, this created no surprise, for many warriors as haughty and stern as De Moreville took the cowl, and endeavoured to make their peace with Heaven by ending their days in penance and prayer.

When, therefore, Oliver Icingla reached years of legal discretion, he did homage for his mother's inheritance, and took possession of Chas-Chateil without an obstacle being interposed; and he was even now returning from the court of the King of Scots, at the castle of Roxburgh, whither he had repaired to go through the feudal ceremony which was to constitute him lord of Mount Moreville.

Ralph Hornmouth stuck steadily to De Moreville till the Norman baron turned monk; and when De Moreville hid his head in a cowl, and his body in a cloister, Hornmouth made a complete transfer of his fidelity to Oliver Icingla, and pursued life as if unconscious that he had made a change of masters. Ever ready to ride at half an hour's notice from Chas-Chateil to Mount Moreville, and from Mount Moreville to Oakmede, where the hall of the Icinglas had again risen in stately proportion from its ashes and ruins, he was worth his weight in gold during troublous times; and as for political creed, Hornmouth was content to leave that to the warrior whose banner he followed. He had ridden willingly with De Moreville to fight for Prince Louis and the Norman barons, and he was prepared to ride as cheerfully with the Icingla to fight for King Henry to the cry of "St. Edward!" It was, as he thought, for the Anglo-Norman baron or the Anglo-Saxon Hlaford to take the responsibility of choosing a side; it was his duty to fight his best on whatever side they drew their swords.

And De Moreville's daughter no longer inhabited the great mansion in Ludgate, from the balcony of which she looked forth on the cavalcade that escorted the boy-king through the city of London, but a much humbler dwelling on the banks of the Thames, near Scotland-yard, where stood the palace with which, in an earlier age, Edgar had gifted Kenneth, and in which the King of Scots still resided when he came to Westminster to enact his part at a coronation. Dame Waledger was still her guardian and companion, an arrangement most convenient to both; for Beatrix had no kinswoman to whom she could cling for protection, and Sir Anthony, living at his manor in Berkshire, was in the habit of carousing so freely in the day and contending with so many imaginary antagonists at night, that the dame, not indifferent to her own safety in life and limb, dreaded nothing so much as living under the same roof with a husband who might any night slay her, under the delusion that he was engaged in mortal combat with the wild boar which he had encountered under the oak at Donnington.

But one circumstance had much changed the colour of Beatrix's life: Oliver Icingla had not persisted in avoiding her company and praying to be delivered from the temptation of seeing her. On the contrary, as time wore off the impression that had been left by his frightful dream, the memory of the romantic interview at Chas-Chateil had returned upon him with an effect before which other considerations rapidly gave way. In short, while the Icingla was returning from the North, Beatrix had the prospect of being his bride ere Christmas; and as he passed the village of Charing, riding side by side with Hornmouth, and talking to the tall greyhound, De Moreville's daughter was uppermost in his thoughts, and her hand seemed to beckon him on as his journey southward drew to an end.

It was ten o'clock, however, and the night had fallen, but the rising moon afforded a pale light, when Oliver, having skirted London, reached the village of Charing, from which then, and for centuries afterwards, cross roads

branched out in various directions away to rural regions; and on reaching Charing he directed his course towards Westminster, at the palace of which King Henry was keeping his court and watching over architectural additions to the abbey. Oliver, however, was bound, in the first place, to visit the fair Beatrix, and with a lover's ardour he spurred on Ayoub, to shorten by half a minute the time that must elapse ere he could be in her presence.

But at that instant a sight met the eye of Oliver Icingla which made him start with alarm and vague terror. Before him gleamed hundreds of torches in the moonlight, and enabled him dimly to descry a countless mob, swaying and surging in masses, and uttering shouts of triumph as they rushed on to havoc and spoliation. It was a terrible spectacle, and as Oliver checked his steed he uttered an exclamation of horror.

"By the Holy Cross!" exclaimed he, on finding breath to speak, "I would fain hope my eyes deceive me; but, certes, nothing less than the agency of the devil and a rising of the Londoners can have brought about such a tumult as this."

"And, credit me, Fitzarnulph the citizen is at the bottom of it," said Hornmouth, quickly, "and the Lady Beatrix may be in danger. By salt and bread!" added the rough squire, "we must look forthwith to the demoiselle's safety."

As Hornmouth spoke he turned round to call upon the armed men to follow apace; and, ere he did so, Oliver Icingla had drawn his sword, set spurs to his steed, and darted in the direction of Scotland-yard.

CHAPTER LX

A DEMAGOGUE AND HIS DESPERADOES

THE crowd driven so unceremoniously from Westminster did not separate before agreeing to assemble again at a given signal; and no sooner did Bow bell toll the hour of curfew, than, like bees swarming from their hives, all the desperadoes and riff-raff of London assembled from lanes, and alleys, and slums, and the purlieus of the Thames, and, joined by many hundreds who were neither desperadoes nor riff-raff, but honest men led away by the excitement of the hour, filled the narrow streets, and, jostling each other as they went, made for St. Paul's Churchyard. Here Constantine Fitzarnulph, accompanied by two or three other persons whom he had allured into his enterprise, was ready to receive them and place himself at their head.

And then Fitzarnulph mounted a temporary platform, and harangued the mob in such inflammatory language, that their excitement was rapidly converted into frenzy, and they raved like maniacs. No longer condescending, as in former days, to treat the Anglo-Norman barons as friends, he denounced them as tyrants and oppressors who ground the faces of the poor, and lived in luxury by the sweat of their neighbours' brows. Proceeding, he attacked the young king and his ministers, and traced suffering and sorrow to the misgovernment that prevailed, and asked whether there was not something radically wrong in a system under which such oppression could exist. He concluded with a fierce invective against the Abbot of Westminster and his steward, and called on the Londoners to wipe out the disgrace they had that day suffered in the person of their champion, Martin Girder, who, he asserted, had been foiled by foul means; finally, either by premeditated design, or led away by his own enthusiasm and the cheers with which he was greeted, he boldly stated that there was only one remedy for their woes, and that was to invite Prince Louis to return to England, and deliver them from the evils under which they were groaning. "Montjoie, St. Denis!" exclaimed he, in conclusion, as he waved his hat. "God help us and our good Lord Louis!"

The desperadoes loudly applauded the proposal to recall the French prince, just as they would have applauded if Fitzarnulph had proposed to invoke the aid of the prince of darkness. But some of the crowd murmured, and the oration, especially towards its close, seemed to give great offence to a young warrior who stood by Fitzarnulph's side. Several times while the harangue was drawing to a close he started as if to interrupt, but on each occasion checked the impulse. But no sooner did Fitzarnulph, waving his hat, shout "Montjoie, St. Denis!" than he raised a very noble countenance towards the demagogue, and eyed him with a glance of fiery scorn. It was Walter Merley.

"Citizen," said he, after forcing himself to be calm, "your speech to this multitude has belied all your professions to me, and I despise you as one whom the truth is not in. You have basely deceived me, and shame upon me that I have been fooled by such as you are! and, but that I deem you all unworthy of my steel, you should have three inches of my dagger to punish your presumptuous perfidy, and silence your lying tongue. Come, Rufus, let us begone!"

A shout of indignation arose from the mob on hearing their hero thus bearded, and several of the desperadoes moved as if to lay hands on the bold speaker, but he paid no attention to their cries and gestures. Calling one of his companions to follow, he strode right through the midst, and that with an air so fearless and fierce, that they opened their ranks and made way for him to pass, and carried their hostility no further than uttering a yell and indulging in a little banter as he disappeared.

"Now," said he, as he took a boat and was rowed towards the Surrey side, "farewell to home and country; and, since fortune so wills, let my lot be among strangers and in a strange land. All over Europe and in Syria swords are flashing bravely, and it will go hard with me if I carve not out a principality with my sword, which has never failed me. Shame upon me that I allowed myself to be fooled by that citizen! and a malison on his presumption in fancying that, after deceiving me, he could use me for his purposes!"

Meanwhile, Fitzarnulph did not allow the excitement of the mob to evaporate. Finding that they were quite in the humour in which he wished them to be, he proposed to go forthwith to Westminster.

"Our first duty," said he, "is to avenge ourselves on the abbot and his steward; and the best way to avenge ourselves on them is to pull down their houses, whereby they will be made sensible that the citizens of London are not to be affronted with impunity. So let us on. Montjoie, St. Denis! God for us and Lord Louis!"

"To Westminster!" shouted the desperadoes; and, led by Fitzarnulph, the mob descended Ludgate-hill, and pushed through the gates like so many furies.

It was already sunset when Fitzarnulph led the mob from St. Paul's Churchyard, and darkness was descending ere they reached Westminster. Many of the desperadoes, however, had furnished themselves with torches, and what with the glare of the torches, and the fierce faces of the desperadoes, and the brandishing of weapons and bludgeons, and the shouts, the screeches, the bellowing, and the confusion, the inhabitants might, even had they been less superstitious than they were, have imagined that a host of fiends was upon them.

Great was the alarm, loud the shouts for aid, each man calling on his neighbour, as the startled indwellers suddenly found their houses and hearths exposed to such danger, and at the mercy of such a multitude. But it soon appeared that the mob were, in the first place, intent on vengeance, and went direct to destroy the houses of the abbot and his steward. Warned in time, the abbot fled, trembling for his life, and, getting into his barge, escaped to Lambeth. Determined to defend himself and his property, the steward drew bolt and bar, and armed his household. But a few minutes' experience told him that resistance was vain, and, escaping with his household by the rear, he left his home to its fate. The riot and uproar then became more terrible every moment; house after house was torn down or given to the flames; and the mob, whooping, and yelling, and braying, as their appetite for destruction was whetted, rushed into outrage after outrage, and enacted such a scene as Westminster had seldom or never witnessed.

And what was Constantine Fitzarnulph doing all this time?

Fitzarnulph, in truth, had other game, as his movements speedily indicated, than the abbot and his steward, and, leaving the mob to destroy and plunder without restraint, he proceeded with a chosen band of twenty desperadoes towards Scotland-yard, and on to a house that stood in a garden on the margin of the river. At first he endeavoured to gain access by gentle means, and loudly knocked at the gate. No answer was returned, and he ordered the desperadoes to break it open. His command was immediately obeyed, and he passed into a courtyard, and knocked vehemently at the door; but, seeing that his knock at the door was as little regarded as his knock at the

gate had been, the desperadoes broke it open, and Fitzarnulph, making a signal to the band to remain where they were till summoned by him, entered alone, found several domestics, who fled at his approach, ascended a stair, and, advancing along a corridor, opened a door and entered.

It was a large chamber, furnished after the fashion of the period, brilliantly lighted, and occupied by four women, who, alarmed at the riot and the uproar, and the breaking in of the gate and door, were giving themselves up for lost. One was Beatrix de Moreville, another Dame Waledger, and the other two were Beatrix's waiting-women. As Fitzarnulph entered, a simultaneous cry of horror and despair burst from their lips, and three of them fell on their knees. De Moreville's daughter, however, rose to her feet, and stood facing the intruder with an air of haughty defiance which showed that, gentle as was her usual manner she inherited some portion of her sire's spirit.

"What seek you here, sir citizen?" asked she, with a gesture and in a tone before which most men, under the circumstances, would have quailed.

"Demoiselle," answered Fitzarnulph with equal pride, "it is vain to assume such airs at the stage at which matters have arrived; vainer still to deem that I, Constantine Fitzarnulph, am likely to be daunted by a haughty tone and a frowning brow. I therefore answer frankly—it is you I seek. You have treated me with a scorn to which I am but little accustomed; however, of that anon. You are at length in my power, once and for ever, so prepare to go hence. My barge awaits you at the stairs to convey you to a place of safety. Nay, frown not; I say it is vain; for, come what may, by the blood of St. Thomas! ere to-morrow's sun is high in the heavens, you shall stand at the altar as Fitzarnulph's bride, and women neither less fair nor less exalted in rank than yourself will envy your lot. I have said."

Scorn, amazement, terror, succeeded each other rapidly in the face of Beatrix de Moreville as Fitzarnulph spoke, and she was nerving herself to reply when he advanced and seized her arm, as if to bear her off as his prey; but she clung so tenaciously to Dame Waledger, who was literally speechless with affright, that he found all his efforts to separate them in vain. Suddenly he relaxed his grasp.

"Maiden," said he, looking earnestly into her face, "you are fighting against fate, and against a destiny you can no more avoid than you can the death which comes to all flesh. You struggle in vain. It is not my wont to be baffled, as the world well knows, and will yet know better. Loath am I to use force, but, since you make it necessary, I needs must. Below are twenty men, who, if I said the word, would bring me the head of the pope or the caliph. One sound of this, and they come to my aid;" and he pointed to a silver whistle that hung at his belt.

De Moreville's daughter, retreating behind Dame Waledger, gazed with alarm at the citizen, but did not venture to speak. It seemed that her stock of courage was exhausted. Fitzarnulph appeared to hesitate. After a moment's pause, however, he took the whistle and sounded it loudly. As he did so, voices were heard as if in altercation below; steps as of persons ascending, and the ring of steel on the stone stairs, succeeded; and then there entered, not the twenty desperadoes, but Oliver Icingla, with his spurs of gold on his heels and his trusty sword in his hand, just as he had jumped from his good steed Ayoub.

De Moreville's daughter uttered an exclamation of rapturous surprise, and darted forward to throw herself on the young knight's protection. Fitzarnulph stood as much like an image of stone as if the heir of the Icinglas had brought the Gorgon's head in his hand.

CHAPTER LXI

AN OFFERING TO THE WINDS

The sudden appearance of Oliver Icingla changed the aspect of affairs so completely that Constantine Fitzarnulph could not but curse the folly which had placed him in a position so thoroughly perplexing as that in which he found himself. He would have felt relieved if Oliver had burst into one of the brief but violent rages in which, like most men of Anglo-Saxon race, the Icingla frequently indulged. But Oliver was perfectly calm, treated Fitzarnulph as a madman not responsible for his actions, and with cool contempt showed the citizen the door, and expressed a hope that his kinsfolk would take better care of him in future.

Fretting with mortification, boiling with rage, and uttering bitter threats, Fitzarnulph departed to join the mob; but he discovered that they were fast dispersing, owing to intelligence that Falco, having mustered his men, was mounting to put them to the sword; and, making for the Thames, he entered his barge, for which a fairer freight had been intended, and was rowed rapidly down the river to his house in the city. Fitzarnulph, wearied with the fatigues of the day, retired to rest, but for many hours sleep did not visit his pillow. He was of all men the most wretched. Not only were his reflections bitter, but he had a vague presentiment of coming danger which he in vain endeavoured to banish. At last, as day was breaking, he fell asleep; but his repose was disturbed by feverish dreams, in which the Abbot of Westminster, and the abbot's steward, and Oliver Icingla, and Beatrix de Moreville figured prominently; and when he was roused by one of his domestics about ten o'clock, it was to inform him that the mayor had summoned him to the Tower on urgent business.

Fitzarnulph was brave, but could not feel otherwise than alarmed at this summons, and he even thought of flight as he recalled the mayor's ominous warning as to the fate of William Fitzosbert. But, he rose, dressed hastily, and, confident in his powers of browbeating and in his influence with the commonalty and desperadoes of London, he manned himself with dauntless air, and was soon in the great hall of the Tower—that great hall in which Oliver Icingla was presented as a hostage to King John, at that monarch's Christmas feast of 1214. Here Fitzarnulph found not only the mayor, and aldermen, and many of the chief citizens, but no less important a personage than Hubert de Burgh, Justiciary of England, with Falco in his company. Fitzarnulph had great difficulty in bearing himself with his wonted dignity, but when he observed that his fellow-citizens were inclined to shun him, his spirit of defiance rose, and he resolved to brave the business out and take the consequences, let them be what they might. It was a resolution of which he was to repent, but to repent when too late.

Hubert de Burgh gravely opened the business which had brought him to the city, that business being neither more nor less than to inquire into the origin of the riot that had taken place on the previous day, and to bring its authors to condign punishment. The mayor thereupon justified his own conduct as the highest municipal functionary, and added that "he had earnestly entreated the people to be quiet, but that Constantine Fitzarnulph had so inflamed their minds by his seditious speeches that there was no hope of appeasing them;" while the aldermen and citizens all disclaimed any connexion with the disturbance, and to a man charged the said Constantine as its author.

"Constantine Fitzarnulph," said Hubert de Burgh, gravely, "you hear of what you are accused. What have you to say for yourself?"

By this time Fitzarnulph had thrown prudence to the winds and banished every thought of discretion, and reckless for the moment of the danger to which he was exposing himself, he first eyed his fellow-citizens with scorn, and then turned fiercely on the justiciary.

"Sir," said he in a loud tone, as he knitted his dark brow and clinched his hand, "I do hear of what I am accused, and I am ready to answer on my own behalf. I avow myself the author of the disturbance that has taken place, and I glory in the thought of so being. Nay, more, I tell you to your beard, Lord Hubert de Burgh, that I therein did no more than I ought; and, by the blood of St. Thomas! I add, I did not do half as much as I intended."

Having thus expressed himself, with a tone and manner before which every listener quailed, save Falco, who smiled a little grimly at the citizen's vehemence, Fitzarnulph strode from the hall, and, wrapping his gabardine closely round him, was about to leave the Tower by the great gate. But he was wholly mistaken as to the degree of terror he had inspired. As he reached the gate, and was about to step forth, the hand of Falco was laid meaningly on his shoulder, and two of Falco's men-at-arms arrested him in the king's name. Fitzarnulph was amazed at this summary proceeding, but he knew that resistance would be vain. He was placed in a boat, rowed up the river to Westminster, and confined in the gate-house till the king's pleasure was known. But it soon appeared that there was no hope of pardon, and ere sunrise next morning he was carried to the Nine Elms and handed over to the hangman, Falco and his armed men being present to witness the execution.

So far Fitzarnulph had shown no sign of shrinking from the fate he had defied. But at sight of the gibbet his heart failed him, and as the hangman put the halter round his neck he lost all his self-possession, wrung his hands and beat his breast, bewailed his sad plight, and offered Falco fifteen thousand merks to save his life. The sum sounded enormous, and the eyes of the foreign warrior sparkled with avarice. But it was too late, and he shook his head. The sentence had gone forth, the hangman did his office, and just as the bells of the neighbouring convent were ringing the hour of prime, and as the monks were rising to sing the morning hymn in Latin, Falco gave the signal, and in the twinkling of an eye Constantine Fitzarnulph was dangling between heaven and earth; or, in the language of his contemporaries, he was hung up "an offering to the winds."

And so ended the last feeble effort to disturb King Henry's government in the name of Prince Louis, and with Fitzarnulph expired the faction that had survived Pembroke's wise and vigorous protectorate. From that time no man, save in ridicule of French claims, ventured to shout "Montjoie, St. Denis! God aid us and our Lord Louis!" Whatever the troubles of Henry's long reign—and they were many—no faction devoted to the French interfered to rouse hostilities between the two antagonistic parties, one of which had been represented by the great barons who forced John to sign the Great Charter under the oak of Runnymede; and the other by the patriot warriors who, to save their country from thraldom to France, fought so valiantly on the memorable day of Lincoln Fair.

A few words will suffice to satisfy any curiosity the reader may feel as to the further career of the personages who have figured in the foregoing history. In due time Oliver Icingla led Beatrix de Moreville to the hymeneal altar, and in due time, also, goodly sons and daughters grew up around them to perpetuate the ancient lines of Icingla and

De Moreville, both of which names, however, were soon veiled under the title of one of England's proudest earldoms. Years afterwards, Icinglas were in the train of Prince Edward when he so rashly chased the London militia from the field of Lewes; and, later still, they followed him in the battle of Evesham, when the life and the faction of Simon de Montfort were both extinguished; when, again, that great prince went upon his crusade, there were scions of the old Anglo-Saxon lords of Oakmede by his side; and, indeed, throughout the whole of the long and wise reign of the first Edward, Moreville-Icinglas were his faithful and cherished friends. As for Oliver himself, he and his friend William de Collingham occupied a foremost place in the field and in the council under King Henry, who, had he paid more heed to their advice, and less to that of the foreign favourites by whom he surrounded himself, might have been saved many of those troubles which distracted his reign. To Ralph Hornmouth was committed the task of teaching the young Icinglas how to govern their steeds and to handle their weapons, and of this business he was as proud as if he had been made Lord High Marshal of England. Wolf, the son of Styr, succeeded to his post. Sir Anthony Waledger, in one of the paroxysms of madness brought on by his deep potations, leaped from the battlements of his castle while in fancied combat with a wild boar, and was dashed to pieces on the stones of the courtyard. Hugh de Moreville, as Abbot of Dryburgh, found a field in which to gratify his love of power and rule, which he exercised so sternly as to be called and be long remembered as "The Hard Abbot." The other personages who have strutted their little hour upon our mimic stage need not be further noticed.

LETCHWORTH
THE TEMPLE PRESS
PRINTERS

Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber:
the blood of Cerdic in my viens=> the blood of Cerdic in my veins {pg 5}
resolve to hesitate no longer=> resolved to hesitate no longer {pg 51}
elate at the prospect=> elated at the prospect {pg 64}
Philip de Ullcotes=> Philip de Ullecotes {pg 118}
When Berkhamstead was taken by the French=> When Berkhampstead was taken by the French {pg 188}
exclaimed Evielle-chiens=> exclaimed Eveille-chiens {pg 213}

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance

with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.