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STEPHAN LANGTON or The Days Of King John
by Martin Farquhar Tupper (1801-1889)
who lived at Albury House

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STEPHAN LANGTON

OR

THE DAYS OF KING JOHN

BY MARTIN F. TUPPER

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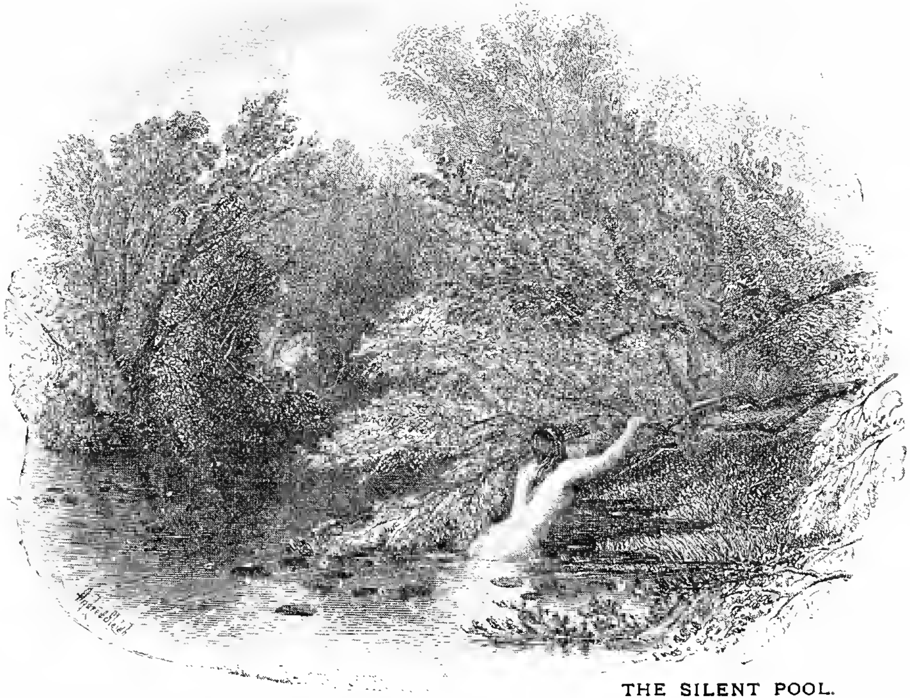

THE SILENT POOL.

STEPHAN LANGTON;

OR,

THE DAYS OF KING JOHN

BY

M. F. TUPPER, D.C.L., F.R.S.,

AUTHOR OF
"PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY," "THREE HUNDRED SONNETS,"
"CROCK OF GOLD," "CITHARA," "PROTESTANT BALLADS,'
ETC., ETC.

NEW EDITION.

FRANK LASHAM,
61, HIGH STREET, GUILDFORD.

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PREFACE.

MY objects in writing "Stephan Langton" were, first to add a new interest to Albury and its neighbourhood, by representing truly and historically our aspects in the reign of King John; next, to bring to modern memory the grand character of a great and good Archbishop who long antedated Luther in his opposition to Popery, and who stood up for English freedom, culminating in Magna Charta, many centuries before these our latter days; thirdly, to clear my brain of numerous fancies and pictures, as only the writing of another book could do that. Its seed is truly recorded in the first chapter, as to the two stone coffins still in the chancel of St. Martha's. I began the book on November 26th, 1857, and finished it in exactly eight weeks, on January 21st, 1858, reading for the work included; in two months more it was printed by Hurst and Blackett. I intended it for one full volume, but the publishers preferred to issue it in two scant ones; it has since been reproduced as one railway book by Ward and Lock.

Mr. Drummond let me have the run of his famous historical library at Albury for purposes of reference, etc., beyond what I had in my own; and I consulted and partially read, for accurate pictures of John's time in England, the histories of Tyrrell, Holinshed, Hume, Poole, Markland; Thomson's "Magna Charta," James's "Philip Augustus," Milman's "Latin Christianity," Hallam's "Middle Ages," Maimbourg's "Lives of the Popes," Ranke's "Life of Innocent the Third," Maitland on "The Dark

Ages," Ritson's "Life of Robin Hood;" Salmon's, Bray's, and Brayley's "Surrey;" Tupper's and Duncan's "Guernsey;" besides the British, and National, and other Encyclopædias and Dictionaries, as required. It was a work of hard and quick and fervid labour, not an idling piece of mere brain-spinning; and it may be depended upon for archæological accuracy in every detail. More than thirty localities in our beautiful county of Surrey are word-painted in the book; of other parts of England, twelve; of France and Italy, twelve. There are more than twenty historical characters honestly (as I think) depicted; and some fifteen ideal ones fairly enough invented as accessories. I preferred Stephan to the commoner Stephen,—for etymological and archæological reasons; it is clearly nearer to the Greek, and is so spelt in ancient records.

The book has had good success, some ten thousand being circulated in England, and (with of course the usual differences from the literary organs of rival publishers) it has been on the whole very favourably received by the critical press. As in the case of all my other works, America has reproduced it largely, and numerous kindly letters to the Author have from time to time been his reward.

There may be some interest to a reader in the mention that the above accurate details of small facts concerning the composition of my "Stephan Langton" are extracted from one of my literary Manuscript Archive Books, now numbering twenty volumes (folio or large quarto), and full of all the newspaper cuttings and magazine reviews, notices and allusions which I could readily obtain from time to time as they appeared. It is curious, and instructive to juvenile authorship, to observe in this large collection how strangely diverse in numerous instances are the verdicts of our self-styled judges of literature about the very same passages, condemned by some and applauded by others of them with a marvellous inconsistency. According to partizanship in politics and religion, an author seems to be systematically praised or blamed, not for his own qualities, but according to the accidents of the critical review which affects to judge him ; and as the present writer has frequently for the merits or demerits of the same work been posted highest and lowest and intermediately, he naturally agrees with a discerning public that such conflicting dicta cannot after all be of any abiding consequence.

The former English Editions having been long out of print, and the work being still frequently asked for, I have entrusted it once more as thus to Mr. Frank Lasham, my local publisher in Guildford, assured that it will be brought out with all due care and excellence, and hoping for another good success.

MARTIN F. TUPPER.

ALBURY HOUSE.

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STEPHAN LANGTON.

CHAPTER I.

TIME: PLACE: BELE ALIZ.

If I lead you back in thought some seven centuries, and attempt to quicken your interest for scenes and persons so far away removed from us, you shall not therefore find your guide an antiquarian idler: for Providence was the Great King then as now; and the men and women of those days were of like passions and affections with our living throbbing selves; and there is wisdom to be culled from their experiences, and amusement to be gained from their adventures; if not also, and in chief, sympathy due from us to them, and justly to be accorded them in homage for their sorrows.

Ay, and even more than simply so; for the acorns just then sown have since grown up to be the gnarled and strong-limbed oaks of our present English liberties; and the fruitful vines and fig trees under which we now sit happily at peace were sprouting in those early times as tender plants out of a dry ground.

I will concentrate my pictured fancies in a framework of real scenery round characters of strict historic fame; and, further than their ornamental details, and such other circumstantial fillings-in of outline as needs must be thus invented, I will set before your patience rather reality than romance, drawing both landscapes and persons from the truth.

This beautiful neighbourhood of South Surrey (a right dear home from infancy) is full not alone of picturesque features in the present, but of unrecorded interest in the past; is rich especially (as you shall prove anon) in all the stirring incidents of Stephan Langton's earlier life; while yet that future statesman, archprelate, and chief champion of common liberty against our tyrant King was the humble monk of St. Martha's: and thus a lifetime debt of health, country pleasure, and old friendship to many a hill and wood and ancient dwelling-place hereabouts, shall now at length in some sort be repaid.

It is possible—may it soon be actual—to make classic ground of certain sweet retired spots set among the fairest hill and vale country in South England; to invest familiar Surrey scenes (as even railway travellers get glimpses of them) with their due historic interest; and to win the eyes of men this way-wards, not only by our present pastoral beauties, but also by our past chivalrous sublimities; so far at least, and only so, as may regard just one short era of our long unwritten archives, and just one morsel of romantic biography, gathered from the untold heaps that might be diligently compiled anent our many unnoised worthies. How fair and rich a field then remains, and may remain ever still unreaped for other men to harvest!

Hereabouts, in the famous county Surrey, and all over the three kindoms one may say the same, we are continually hunting or shooting or rambling or ploughing or pic-nicing on sites where all sorts of wondrous things have happened: and blessed are the eyes that can see down the vista of past ages, and people every spot with its interests and incidents; happy the hands whose eager diligence hath skill to body forth those picturesque adventures. We do not, as aforesaid, indulge in mere romance; or, where one must in some sort be inventive, truth shall be the ground floor of our airy castle: all whatever else of more imaginative tambour-work shall be sewn on the coarse canvas substratum of downright reality.

For instance: King John did of old time hunt our country, leaving to us still for witnesses thereof, moated old Tangley his whilome hunting-box; and town-quarters at Kingston; and the ruined watch-tower at Woking: he did hold famous festival in 'Gilford at Christmasse' as ancient Hollingshed doth testify—and often oscillated (folks do so still, we see) between Reading and Reygate, both then famous for their castles: the Pilgrim's Way from Winchester towards Canterbury, trodden afterwards by Chaucer's self in his world-famous pilgrimage and made immortal in his 'Tales,' is traceable to this day across our valleys and past our twin chapel-crowned hills, St, Martha's and St. Catherine's; Newark Priory, now an almost extinct ruin, but in its original phase at least a splendid Gothic structure, was in the early days of John then just founded in honour of Thomas à Becket; and the chancel of St. Martha's (then called Martyr's Hill) was added, exactly as our tale relates, in the latter part of the twelfth century to the rude old fane, built of rough iron-stone and with keyless arches,—possibly quite primeval, as over the grave of some martyred Barnabas or Joseph of Arimathæa.

So then, patient reader, accept me as endeavouring to connect for your better entertainment our evident modern scenes (changed belike in such accidental features as culture brings about, yet substantially the same as to geography) with antique but actual incidents; I will do my best to pourtray human character, to attach to place its stirring incidents actual or probable, and to recognize the Divine Government, wise and good both then and now, in the tumultuous birth-time of Magna Charta: and for my central figure, I have fixed upon a man hitherto almost unstoried, though the very-hinge and pivot in his own person of our national greatness; a man too, whom (possibly with overboldness, but Demosthenes advises well) we claim for our native county Surrey, and therein more distinctly for our own near neighbourhood, this fair valley of St. Martha's.

And, if Langton in Lincolnshire and some other suicidal synonyme in Devonshire may claim, or even seem to have, a prior right on the strength of mere nomenclature—well, let local pundits battle out the proof if they can and will, to their own complacence;—and let me tell them it can be to that only; for no biographer has yet, even probably, settled Stephan's birth place, which (see all the Encyclopædias) to this day rests as conjectural as Homer's or Melchisedec's: whereas it is quite certain that the great and good Archbishop Langton was frequently both at Reygate and at Reading, still oftener at Gilford, and finally *died* at his manor of Slinfold, just beyond the hundred of Wodetone and within a crow's flight ten miles of us; and all know that practically most men hare-like return, if they have the chance, to their native birth-forms when hard run down by death.

Furthermore, and still with that wise Demosthenean boldness, I claim as still extant in St. Martha's chapel (one on each side of the restored chancel) Langton's stone-coffin lid, and that of his long-loved Alice.

It may, indeed, be true that there is to be seen at Canterbury Cathedral, fixed under an arch in the Warrior's Chapel a plain and nameless tomb-stone, the very counterpart of ours on the hill-top, which the local cicerone will, if cross-questioned, insist upon pointing out to you as Archbishop Langton's: but it is also true, that when St. Martha's ancient chapel was very recently restored, two and only two stone coffins were found in digging out the chancel, the one rudely carved with a patriarchal crook, the other with the simple cross of an Abbess: the lids were brought to upper light, but all that they had covered remain reverently in undisturbed repose beneath; and any one may see them now at old St. Martha's in the chancel, "to witness if I lie."

That Stephan Langton's true love of a real Alice influenced his whole life, take this strange historical fact in proof: and by all means have the patience to read the extract following (a genuine one, mind, and not invented) as a key to the character of the man.

I quote from Thompson's "Essay on Magna Charta," p. 502.

"In a communication from the Abbé de la Rue, printed in the 'Archæologia,' vol. xiii. p. 231, it is stated that in the Duke of Norfolk's library there is a manuscript containing a sermon and two other pieces written by Langton; and that in the course of the sermon, which is upon the Holy Virgin, there occurs the following stanza:

> "Bele Aliz matin leva,
> Sur cors vesti et para,
> Enz un verger s'en entra
> Cink fleurettes y'truva
> Un chapelet fit en a
> De rose flurie.
> Pur Deu trahez vous en a la
> Vus ki ne amez mie."

Thus to be Englished from that Chaucer-like old French:

> "Fair Alice arose in the morning,
> And put on her vest and made her ready;

Then she went into her bower
And found there five flowerets,
Which she made into a chaplet
With the blooming rose:
For God's sake come to her,
You who love not."

"The orator then," continues this account, "enforces each particular verse, and applies it mystically to the Holy Virgin. The allegorical turn which he gives the whole of the above stanza is very happily handled, and the preacher in speaking of his subject cries out at frequent intervals with enthusiasm,

"Ceste est la Bele Aliz,
Cest est la flur, ceste est la liz."

"This, this is Alice, fair to see,
The flower, the lily, this is she."

That Stephan's "Bele Aliz," (thus pervading even the public sermons of this poor love-martyred monk, this great enlightened prelate, but ignorantly supposed to symbolize the Virgin Mary), sleeps at St. Martha's with Stephan himself beside her, no one who reads the following tale can doubt.

CHAPTER II.

MAY-DAY AND THE LOVERS: THE PRINCE AND THE CHURL.

It was sunset of May-day, in the year of salvation 1186

There had been unusual merrymakings every where throughout broad England, for the good King Henry had now at last been reconciled to his undutiful sons, whom his indiscretion as a sort of Lear had too much pampered with honour and power, to the impoverishment of himself; but now for a little while there was a truce: and after his penance done as last Midsummer for Becket's death, (a martyrdom that had grieved him sorely, and whereof the King was an absolute innocent) he stood again in full communion with Holy Church.

And nowhere had the national jousts and gambols been rarer than in the snug little hamlet of Aldeburie, where the good old Knight Sir Tristrem de Braiose gave open hospitality to all comers; by his hearty welcome and profuse largesse making his mossy-oaked old park more like the thronged gay fair of Gilford, than the quiet home of an octogenarian.

Yonder is the many-gabled rambling old house, quaintly timbered and high-chimneyed, between a beech-crowned hill to the south, and the little Norman church among its yews to the northward: and yonder too, everywhere dotted about among the beauteous undulations of Aldeburie Park, you may see an irregular camp of booths decorated with green boughs and garlands of spring flowers, with here and there an old heraldic banner lent from the great house.

And there was a merry, chattering crowd, and good store of ballad-singers and itinerant fools and mounte banks, with a bear-leader and monkeys, an antique Pontius and Judas, and a juggler or two, and fortune-telling gipsies with their following of happy true believers; there were crippled old soldiers, and pilgrims with their scallops, full of eastern marvels, strange but true; and there were chapmen and pedlars hawking their wares; and some of the new-fangled and much-mocked sect of begging friars; and a sprinkling of bat-like monks and nuns—good people enough and charitable, wondering at the gladness of a sunshine holiday: and all manner of the county folk, gentle and simple, as happy as could be: there was quoit-flinging, and hatchet-hurling, and leaping, and racing, and the popinjay, and the quintain, and lots of fun and waggery among the assembled hundreds: for, recollect, the Park is traversed throughout its length, (to say nothing of its other paths in all directions) by the famous Pilgrim's Way. Be sure that on so gallant a May-day, the company would stream on it towards Aldeburie Park, as naturally as its brawling little native river, Tillingbourne.

But I was forgetting the chief feature of that May-day junketting—how merrily all danced about the May-pole; and, chiefest of all, how prettily the May-queen Alice footed it with cousin Stevie.

A charming little queen was Alice; lively, lovely, and good-natured; with a sweet Madonna face, lit up by bright blue eyes, and flanked with flaxen ringlets coronalled by a wreath of wild hyacinths: and the swelling white boddice lightly laced across, and the fair bare arms with wristlets of wreathed violets, and the short red petticoat of homespun dyed in alderbark, and the naked little feet, white as snow, just sandalled underneath with otter's skin, and the ringing laugh, and the graceful, sympathetic time-keeping with yon piper's simple music, and innocence and joyfulness and youthfulness and beauty, made Alice verily a natural queen o' the May.

And if young Stevie be less attractive to our masculine eyes, at least he looked as comely in the maiden's. A frank-faced, brave-browed youth was Stephan Langton; more thoughtful than his fairy queen withal, as well became the stronger, sterner nature; with the dark hair upon his lip, and manliness written on every limb and lineament, daring in his eye, and vigorous self-dependence on his forehead. He was dressed in a close-fitting hunter's frock and leggings of tanned leather, had a flat cap with a drooping cock's plume set jauntily on his crisp black curls, and for a trifle of ornament wore his brass-sheathed forester's knife in a girdle of deer-skin: a tall young fellow, and well-favoured.

So the couple footed it merrily, and rest assured they made the gossips cackle. Ay, and all the more so, when queen Alice was persuaded to sing beside the Maypole in the middle of that crowded green, a pretty little song written for her that very morning by good-natured cousin Stevie. She sung it sweetly too, because so simply; but I have after much research been able to rescue from the oblivion of antiquity only one stanza:

The merry May, the happy May,
When all that breathes is blythe and gay,
And neighbours gather with greeting glad,
And even lovers cannot be sad,
But, quite forgetting their deep-heaved sighs,
Laugh in the light of each other's bright eyes,—
All hail to the happy May!

Thus, the gossips had some reason on their side, good sooth.

All this, however, is now some three hours past: the crowd has melted homewards by many a deep fern-fringed lane and tangled footpath: and, just at sunset, we find (strange to say) Queen Alice and that comely cousin Stevie wandering alone,—if with each other be alone,—in the hazel walk just underneath St. Martha's.

How or why they so happened to be there, and in each other's company too, a rational man can hardly guess; let the gossips cackle if they will; but it is surely pleasant enough, and natural to boot, for such a pair to find themselves quite accidentally alone together in that Lover's Walk at the foot of what we now call Collyer's Hanger: no doubt they had plenty to say to each other; besides that the morning's coronal of hyacinths drooped so as to look unbecomingly faded; and then, Collyer's Hanger in May is ever cœrulean blue with the weed, in succession to its earlier spring carpet of pale primroses: another chaplet is manifestly inevitable, and so also must be a kiss or two in trying it on.

"And will my sweet soon consent to be a forester's bride? Make good speed with a yea to me, Alice; ay, and ere this hyacinth season passes; for the blue flowerets in thy flaxen curls become thee bravely, dearest."

"Stay a little longer, Stevie; I am full young yet; and my mother's ailing sadly, as thou knowest; and," she added, coyly, "can't we go on loving each other thus heartily and patiently the while? Here take this posy,—ay and arede this riddle," said she in a graver tone.

It was a pretty little chaplet, artfully fashioned on a twist of floss silk, in six flower stars; each star made of five flowers round a rose: she had worn it in the morning, till cousin Stevie came with his far more welcome coronal of hyacinths; and then she gladly doffed the other, crumpling it into her boddice.

Dearest Stevie's choice was as usual so much simpler and so much prettier; but her chaplet, nevertheless, spake the language of flowers; and it was destined afterwards (as we have seen from his grace of Norfolk's manuscript) to live immortal in a great man's oddly-allegorical sermon still extant after seven centuries.

There was set in every one of those six stars its central rose of Love; atop the spring anemone of Patience; next after was the pansy of Remembrance; anon the violet of Faithfulness; then the drooping cowslip of Sorrow; and last the vale-lily of Happiness to Come.

"Need I arede it to thee, Stephan? There be many more of tears than of smiles in life, I trow; and we must expect our troubles, dearest."

"Nay, nay, my pretty love, speak not so sadly; this posy should be full of brighter thoughts, methinks; and I shall wear it round my arm like this, love, some day when I'm thy knight i' the lists, Alice."

"I feel very sad at heart, Stevie, very sad; I know not why, but I dread some coming evil. Hark! Hist! wasn't that a hunter's horn?'

Unmistakeably it was, though at such a distance. And the lovers, knit as one with twined arms, loitering affectionately together beneath the catkined hazels, listen with startled sidelong eyes;—a pretty picture enough, if any limner had been nigh to sketch them.

"Hark, Stevie! that was another, and a nearer; and look, look!"

A hunted roebuck looms larger than life over the south shoulder of St. Martha's, soon flying past them like an arrow; and here streaming along after a space come the swift deer-hounds wiry and brindled, and anon the staunch and heavily-flewed sleugh-hounds,—and over the ridge men on horseback hie this way down into the glen-like wooded hollow rapidly,—and the roe and the hounds have rushed by, with an eager mudded huntsman or two, and sundry fleet runners, leaping along with poles like kangaroos; but now comes hitherward a statelier company gaily plumed and parti-vested; and with one a little ahead of the rest, as if for rank's sake.

So the habitually thoughtful Stephan bids Alice to get safely out of the horses' way, and drop into the coppice for more of those hycinths; while he will step forth to speak with the gallants, in case they should enquire of him which way the chase went.

"Hallo, churl,—Gad'steeth! why should yon pretty maid run off so? Hark her back, villein; there isn't a fairer roe i' the forest, I'll swear to it by King Harry's best blood-hound; and so here without more ado I've caught my pretty chase, ha!—Hark her hither, churl."

Stephan Langton crossed his arms, and looked upon the speaker. The pair were intellectually and physically gladiators not ill-matched; and were destined, though they little knew it then, to do battle with each other to life's end, and in their social life-influences far beyond it; Langton, now the simple forester, gazed with quiet and considering courage upon one evidently his royal Liege Lord, the famous wicked Prince: an equal in years, some twenty of them, black-browed, fierce-eyed, "of a soure and angry aspect;" richer in garb and circumstance, of course, with his crimson velvet tunic on that sleek white charger, and more boastful and loud in his manner; but natheless, by no means Stephan's equal as a man of courage and action, and doomed to be subdued by him the churl, albeit a King.

"What, slave, haltest thou in thine obedience? Look to him, Cantelupe."

Attendants had by this time crowded round; and an insolent courtier of the hunt spurring his horse at the word brutally up against young Stephan, with a cruel backhander from his heavy hunting whip smashed him on the face.

In an instant, Alice, with a shriek springing from among the hazels, flung herself upon her cousin Stevie.

"Aha! by our sweet Pope's peacock-crown,—the very white doe o' the forest! Hither, Fawkes, lift that pretty puppet to our knee, and so straight off for Tangley."

The burley knight, leaping from his horse and flinging the reins to a runner, with both arms seized the maiden round the waist;—but not before Stephan with his unsheathed knife had him in a moment at his mercy.

"Hold, sirrah!" shouted Prince John; then in a lower tone, "Quick upon the quarry, runners!"

At the word, six shaggy fellows in tunics of red cow-skin, bare-legged bare-armed and bare-headed but for their unkempt shocks and a universal hide of hair like Caliban's, rushed forward in a circle round the arrested combatants whirling their quarter-staves overhead. And a terrible weapon is your quarter-staff well handled; yon heavy ashen pole, iron-shod at both ends, and equally of use for leaping over that rough hunting wilderness, and for stunning by a confusedly whizzing blow your wolf or your bear, or aught other foe at bay.

For a minute, (but it seemed much longer) there was a dead pause. The fierce eyes of those rough kernes, glaring through their matted locks upon their leader, awaited his signal; Stephan's hunting knife flashed perilously before Fawkes's eyes as he helplessly held the fainting maiden; and—sudden as a thunderbolt, at a look from John—three of those whirling quarter-staves dropping crack upon the brave young lover's cap felled him in a moment!

There was a roar of cruel laughter: for doubt not that the courtiers of a reprobate Prince are intensely of his own base nature: glorying in shames, and cowardly.

"And now up with her, Fawkes de Breauté: we've saved thy knightly blood this bout from soilage with yon churl's weapon, and so be thankful, Sirrah: and now give our Grace more thanks for this, Sir, that we bid thee put thine hand under that pretty white foot, and spring this beauty to our pommel."

The poor girl, who had swooned dead away at the sight of Stephan's blood, was tossed like a doll into that royal brigand's arms; and in another minute the whole band of them, with shouts of hoarse laughter, were galloping away for Tangley.

CHAPTER. III.

DEVON AND LINCOLN ANTECEDENTS.

Now this was the early history of young Stephan.

His father, a demilance or yeoman of an ancient Surrey family, had followed his feudal chief Sir Ralph de Camois the Knight of Wodetone, during the period of desultory adventure between the first and second crusades to the Holy Land, in the honourable capacity of that good Knight's head-esquire; and bravely did he bear the Wodetone banner (a griffon passant or) beside his liege lord in many a fierce onslaught of the Paynim.

However, what might have been the exploits either of master or man none could truly tell; for the palmers had popularly, and not without some reason, the credit of beating even the troubadours and trouvères in their poetical versions of prose facts. The only thing quite certain is, that now for some fifteen or sixteen years neither have been heard of; and this would reasonably seem to argue a crusader's death, and his duteous esquire's as of course; with the usual feats of gallantry and hardihood before they deceased severally.

And poor Dame Langton with her brace of pretty baby-boys, so much alike you could barely tell them apart, was thus left a widow-bewitched in the fourth year of a somewhat comfortless specimen of holy matrimony; for, to say truth, her scapegrace husband had been a very rolling stone from boyhood; and so the truant child, the reckless roystering youth, the roving man (to whom adventure of any sort from forestry to crusading had ever more attractions than a loving wife with her curly-headed bairns and the cozy nest of home in that old Saxon hamlet of Friga-Street) this vagrant sort of husband, I say, dropped characteristically enough into the condition of an exile never heard of: and the broken-hearted affectionate wife wept and pined and prayed for him through five more years; and then the light that long had blazed too brightly from her eyes and seemed to be burning more than skin deep beneath her thin flushed cheeks—went out, went out gradually and utterly; and one cold March day they buried her in Abinger churchyard, nigh to the high mound and the archery butts; and so her pretty twin-like boys of eight and nine were straightway orphans.

With respect to the younger, the then little curly-pated Simon, we have small historic help to do more than guess at his career; which natheless, when it comes in our course, may be sketched hereafter: all we know is that (as in the strangely coincident case of the three brothers Abbott, other chief old Surrey worthies, an archbishop a bishop and a knight, though born no other than as the orphan sons of a James-time Gilford clothier) this Simon Langton turns up long afterwards as about to be consecrated Archbishop of York, while his brother Stephan was then Cardinal Prelate of Canterbury: but it is with this same elder brother Stephan that now we have to do; he forms our present thesis, and we are yet-awhile only called upon to follow in detail the theme of his extraordinary fortunes.

From the Friga-Street Farm (folks have since corrupted the old name of the hamlet into Friday Street, as in the case of its London namesake; but the goddess Friga was its true sponsor, even as King Thor primevally stood name-giver to Dorking)—from that snug old grange with its outbuildings, and arables, and pastures, in a lovely dell to the north of Leith Hill laced by trout-streams and clumped with timber, the poor little nine-year old Stephan was taken all in tears to the home of the good parson-secular of Wodetone; who kindly kept and taught the child awhile in a little room over the church porch; till he should find means of transporting him to far-distant Devonshire; where the boy's mother's sister had somewhile intermarried with a Foyle, living near to Tamar-Monachorum.

Within a year, the rare chance happened of a safer escort for the child than was usual in England's then evil condition of universal peril and brigandage; for a posse of monks were to pass through Wodetone on their way from well-pilgrimaged Canterbury to the far west: and so, the charitable parish priest confided to those holy brethren this his orphan parishioner.

It was a travel of many weary days; and one of no small danger and adventure: but not to be as tedious as the journey itself, what chiefly concerns us to know thereof for the fortunes of our hero is, that the good monks soon discovered the pretty child to have an exquisite taste for music and the gift of a thrilling alto voice: for often to beguile the way had they chaunted their Gregorians (and not a few Anacreontics to boot) and ever they noted that the boy cut in with the sweetest of seconds in a treble, a very nightingale among those bass-throated rooks.

So then it naturally enough came to pass, that Uncle Foyle, a hard man and a covetous, was easily persuaded to let the brotherhood of Tamar have the pretty orphan for their quire; where for six years and more his piercing upper notes made High Mass at Monachorum especially popular: those six years having little else of incident to record, beyond that the boy got well set up in all manner of monastic literature the while, reading and writing, rare accomplishments both, and not a few insights into deeper lores; and that he ever and anon managed to make out a pleasant holiday at Uncle Foyle's, in spite of his habitual grumpishness: for the aunt with her cakes and possets made amends for him; and, if aught was lacking on her part too, for she could scold pretty sharply at times, be sure that blue-eyed Alice, Stephan's younger cousin by a couple of years or so, did without protest more than a compensatory service for her.

The bright boy and the pretty little girl would at such times often get out secretly together, rambling and scrambling among those happy Devon tors and glens and gullies,—wondering what magic it was that could make them like each other so much better than all the world beside: and many a time returning at nightfall (albeit with the presentable excuse of a basketfull of nuts or blackberries or mushrooms, very pacifying to the female powers) that churlish Uncle Foyle was wont to be right sharp upon the stripling chorister, and more than once had made his pretty daughter cry her eyes out because he rated him so: "The lad should to his booking," he said, "and the lass to her wheel; he liked not so much caterwauling at sundown, and couldn't see for his part what the cousins could have to talk about with one another so much;" so he scolded roundly the pair of them, "as an ill truant and an idle baggage."

How much longer this sort of thing might have lasted, and whither it would have led, it boots not now to guess; for unluckily just about this time the famous young chorister's F in alt, in the middle of a more than usually crowded state of Monachorum, broke down right ludicrously: and the irascible precentor with his chauntry monks worried the poor lad grievously for a week or two, in striving by divers emollient messes, and sundry corporeal pains and penalties beside, to mend a cracked voice; a perfectly hopeless matter, when the upper lip begins to grow downy.

What was now to be done with the youth? The holy fathers of Tamar Monachorum wanted nothing of him but his alto voice; and that was coming down the ladder of musical notation every day: and old Farmer Foyle wouldn't be after keeping the hearty gluttonous young fellow at home, not he, (albeit Alice pleaded for this most affectionately) and he must go somewhither,—far away if possible,—to seek his fortunes.

Now it happened that the prior of Tamar Monachorum was younger brother to the good knight of Lincoln, Sir Guy de Marez, whose blazon was three couped mermaids on a shield azure; and the prior wotted not unwisely that a handsome page might propitiate the great Sir Guy and his stately lady: besides that he wanted a cast or two of summed gyrfalcons from the fens, at that time quite the rage among all clerical lovers of hawking, a sport in the zenith of its popularity. So the prior, having indited with some difficulty certain commendatory hieroglyphics on a fragment of parchment, duly tied with floss silk, and sealed with the Monachorum crozier-boss in rosin and beeswax, sent young Stephan on another far-off journey; giving him for escort two stout lay-brothers; for aid and companionship by the way,—and to bring the hawks back.

How well for five gay years young Langton sped in Lincolnshire, how handsome he looked in my lady's green and gold, how greatly he excelled in all the cardinal virtues of that age—horsemanship, tilting, forest-craft, and the dulcet luting of the troubadour—no chronicle exists to assure us: except, indeed, the present writing, which dares to assert authoritatively that not alone all the knightly excellences implied in the above were Stephan Langton's appanage, but that another special point of gallantry is fairly to be added to the list: to wit, that in spite of continual lustrous glances from bright eyes at banquet or in bower, in spite of many a lively Christmas dance with many a merry maiden, and sundry other and more perilous Mayings and Lady-dayings and free-hearted Michaelmasses with the comely lasses of Lincoln—all willing enough to catch a trifle more of favour from his eyes than their constant mere cheerfulness and brotherly good-humour—still he was perpetually vexing himself to wonder whether little cousin Alice thought of him as he never could help to be thinking of her? O, if he might but touch once more that precious little hand, and exchange a loving look with that pretty blue eye—were it only for an instant!

Alice, the 'bele Aliz' of his life, in her blush-rose fleurie of maidenly bashfulness, was evermore in his mind's eye and on his heart's pulse, at board and afield, awake and asleep; inspiring alike his much-praised troubadouring, his strong fling in the wrestling match, his manly daring in the chase, and his well-bred courtesy at all times to dame or demoiselle, high-born or lowly.

Is it any wonder now, that love found out a way to touch once more that precious little hand, and look on the aforesaid pretty eye?

For surely I need not vex your patience by explaining how obviously the conscientious young man "felt it a duty" to fly to the help of poor Aunt Foyle in her now recent widowhood; more especially as, at the instance of the good priest of Wodetone (his own foster-father. we may remember) widow Foyle had come recently with Alice to spend the rest of her days in the neighbouring hamlet of Gomershal.

As for her avaricious husband, he had some while since been rightly served out for a whole lifetime of meanness, by being all at once robbed of his golden hoard; losing, through a rash effort at reprisal, his worthless life itself into the bargain: the freebooting burglars of those times looked out habitually for such money-grubbing churls, and, after literally breaking their bank (a hedgerow) for its hidden crock of gold, made nothing of breaking their heads to boot, in revenge (if the case were so) for impertinent enquiries. There were no inquests in those days, though coroners appear to have had historic existence since the earliest of our Saxon Edwards; but then, as sometimes afterwards, there was small connection between officers and duties, and so it habitually came to pass that men went out of life, honestly or otherwise, as little noticed as babies came into it.

Thus, widow Foyle, fallen into poverty and weak health was, of course, all the more legitimately her duteous nephew's care; at all events she believed this,—and so perhaps did he: for his missive, sent beforehand (by grace of heavy pre-payment and the promise of as much more on safe return through a wayfaring palmer known to Sir Guy) said almost nothing about Alice; he only "hoped his fair cousin had held him in remembrance."

And hadn't she,—didn't she? O those long dark dreary years of utter absence and silence and despairing uncertainty! hope itself was almost dead within her heart,—and she never never ought to have wasted a thought about him!

So, many times by daybreak, after a night of weeping, did she resolve to banish his remembrance for ever: and, with the brisk works of daylight all around her, and neighbours dropping in with news, and the multitude of matters to attend to (for even in the father's lifetime her mother drooped in health, and Alice had to see to everything) she did manage to get on with a cheerful seeming through the day, and her crabbed old father fancied that worthless young chorister forgotten: but, with the quiet and the loneliness of night, there he came again, frank-faced, loving-hearted, and as dear as—O dearer far than ever! awake or asleep, in her very orison at Vespers or Matins, there he was and is still, O how heartily indeed "held in remembrance."

That all these things have happened as I now record them, not a soul dare doubt: and least of all your blundering antiquarian biographer.

How is it—except as elucidated clearly by the present writer—that Stephan Langton (they cannot even spell his name aright, for Stephanos is the Greek for crown and for the first-crowned martyr, neither durst any dialectitian have ever written it Stephenos) how is it, I demand, that our Stephan, so famous in England's annals as the father of the Great Charter, is claimed by such impossible counties as Lincolnshire plus Devonshire for a native born? Does not the one such impudent assertion answer the other? and have not I lucidly cleared up the respective pretensions of north and south, giving to each a portion of our hero's early training, but to neither the honour of his birth—claiming the oyster but liberal with the shells? And is not in chief your present annalist entirely justified in deciding the county Surrey as his native soil, with an unimpeachable right to the glories of a son so long withheld from her affections?

The month or so of interval between Stephan's arrival out of Lincolnshire and the present Mayday, I must leave to be filled up in the young lovers' story as your own sympathetic shrewdness pleases; no doubt this was not the first time by a score, that the twain of late had walked and talked together; it is evident they both well knew the way to yonder hazel coppice under St. Martha's, and they had managed to get to the old trysting-place cleverly unseen as usual.

CHAPTER IV

A SHORT CUT THROUGH THE MARSHES.

WAS it all a dreadful dream?

For the whole scene had flown by like a hurricane—where life was as the garden of Eden before it, but is a howling wilderness behind. And when Stephan, slowly waking from that bloody swoon, felt some kind hand bathing his battered temples with reviving water, he was sure it was the dream still; some softer phase of it perhaps.

"Cheerily, man,—cheerily; and be it speedily too, or worse will follow."

And another copious dash upon his forehead from that cold Lud-spring woke Langton in a moment to the sense of where he was, and still more terribly to "where, where is Alice?"

"Ay, ay—that's it; you must be quick, Stephan, to save her; look you, I've caught yon runaway horse of some thrown rider in the Hangers, and I've tethered him handy; what, Stevie, don't you know your old aunt's friendly neighbour, Hal the woodman?"

"Thank God and all His holy angels!" and with Hal's sturdy help he struggled into the saddle.

"I seen it all from the coppice where I was a-wooding, neighbour: and I heard them shout for old Tangley, after you were down upon your face; but there's no time now for talk: I couldn't rouse you for an hour good: so, away after her, quick, and St. Hubert speed you."

"But which way, friend? I am a total stranger to these parts beyond the Hanger."

"O ay,—take the horse track down the brooks, and you'll strike another anon due south, and that'll bring you to the cross tracks in the morass, and you must take the furdermost, and so straight along Western Lane, and jist beyond the gibbet there, at the fifth turning to the left, you'll sight old Tangley a good mile off."

"Stop, stop, good Hal! I never could find it,—I should miss it and lose her: guide me, guide me, friend, for mercy's sake and Alice's!"

And thus the kindly woodman leading on that intricate way, (it was no slight point of country life in those days to be well up in woodcraft,) they went along slowly; though Stephan was in terrible suspense and urged better speed: but, truth to tell, Hal had taken "a short cut," despising the regular horse route where the hunt itself went lengthily round the morass; and of course they had got bogged and lost their way, and light failed, and altogether (as generally is the case somehow with short cuts) they made at least a treble distance of it. And so, while they are floundering in the fen and getting extricated if possible from a wilderness of brambles, tussocks, and fallen timber, we have space for a little contemplation as to some social circumstances of a time when there were no way-wardens, no police, no order, no security. Norman misrule had substituted anarchy and misery for the old Alfredian or Saxon good government, a change for the worse that we may have to touch more at length anon; hereabouts it is sufficient to suggest that the very face of the country had been altered from a garden to a forest, and that the realm seemed relapsing into a pristine barbarism. The selfishness of Royal Nimrods desolated cultivation for hunting purposes, and even good King Henry the Second was fonder of his hounds than of his people.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOOD OLD TIMES.

For it is by no means easy for us now to realize the hard conditions of existence in those evil days of Richard and John, nearly seven hundred years ago. All the modern luxuries and conveniences of life, nay, not a few of what we have long come to consider absolute necessaries, were then entirely lacking: for our meanest beggars nowadays are clad, fed, and housed far better than then were all, except the richest gentry and the nobles.

Think of a day when, except in some few churches, windows had no glass—floors no carpeting—walls neither paper, paint, nor pictures—hearths no chimney, beyond a hole in the black-raftered roof—and rooms no chairs—nor, indeed, any furniture at all but a bin and a bench-like table. Imagine a total absence of "tea, coffee, tobacco, and snuff," of cloths and cotton goods and cutlery, of sugar and potatoes, oranges and lemons and rice and tapioca, and all the thousand-and-one articles of food or finery so easily now accessible to the humblest among us from the very ends of the earth. Conceive the state of country life without roads, and by consequence, wheel-carriages: everywhere nothing but rough horse-tracks, girth-deep in mud, intersecting each other in all directions through the marshy jungles; such marshy jungles themselves being due to what may be now some pretty trout-stream sparkling through its well-drained meadows; but in that day the pestilential cause of inundated valleys and swamp-covered plains, wherever fallen forest trees rotted as they fell, and dammed those flowing waters: and, instead of counties mapped and fielded out as now with exquisite cultivation, covered with houses and gardens and flocks and herds, all around was to be seen nothing but a desolate and tangled wilderness inhabited by swarms of savage animals, wolves and foxes, venison and bear, wild cattle, wild hogs, bitterns and bustards and waterfowl innumerable.

Fancy an existence without a printed book, or a post letter, or a newspaper; deprived of every object in life beyond providing food for the body, and with nothing on earth to do when the meal has been secured but to digest it! No arts, no sciences, no ornaments, no nicnacs, no hobbies, no professional gains or interests, no home comforts, no indoor pleasures, no outdoor security; the sole interest consisting in constant peril of life, and the only stimulant to industry a fear of starvation.

Verily, we ought to be right grateful that we live in a day so very much better than "the good old times."

It is true the magnate then had some coarse luxuries, and lived in a barbaric splendour; but he paid heavily for it all. Many a baron wore the market value of his castle on his back; and if he quaffed of a foreign vintage from his ivory horn on high days and state occasions, Cleopatra's pearl-drink was not costlier to her than his posset of Chian or Cyprus was to him. The crowd of rude retainers, lustily quaffing sour mead, and voraciously devouring deer's flesh or the sodden boar (hacking their junks from the carcase by the selfsame dirks that had stuck the beasts achase, and haply had assisted at more serious murders) that feudal rabble consumed not in a month more money's-worth than their liege-lord the baron in his single draught of wine, which he ostentatiously "drank to Hamlet," on some high festival; or, more unusually, when he thought proper to indulge in the private extravagance of drinking to himself. If gentlemen would wear Flemish silks or velvets, or a suit of Florentine armour, they must mortgage their estates to Isaac for them; and in a day before stockings were invented they had to pay gold-digger's prices for the needful convenience of boots.

And look aside at the poor man's lot. Probably a theow or slave to some tyrant of the neighbouring castle, and therefore one of his marauders, he had a very Caffrarian filth-reeking kraal for his home, and utter idleness for his occupation: unless, indeed, his business might legitimately be regarded to quarrel with men, and his pleasure to make the coarsest kind of love to women; and so he had to eke out the dullnesses of savage life by dark foreshadows of more civilized existence.

Still—for Providence is good to every state and age, and abounds in compensations—there may well be a brighter side to this black picture. Not a few of those old barons were right good and shrewd fellows at heart, though a trifle rough in hand and rude of speech; and their princely hospitality fed half the neighbourhood, finding sport for them, too, by way of minstrelsy and venerie; and the many religious houses in particular sent none empty away; and the poor kerne had at all events his hovel to himself, an Englishman's castle even then, with its patch of oats or peas, and fowls, and fish, and the smaller game without stint, for far more savoury meals than Hodge can unpoachingly muster at present: and of wild honey was a plenty in the woods for mead and metheglin and hydromel and dilligrout and cakes and puddings and possets; and there was good stunning barley-brew enow too, though hops as yet were not; and oats yielded an indifferent whiskey; and the foaming frummerty was there, and the querned meal in abundance: and if no Chinese tea nor Arabian coffee smoked in the horns, there was no end of fragrant British substitutes at hand, for health or luxury, as vervains and mallows, centaury and tansy and tormentil, and a score more, as every good wife skilled in herbary well knew; and milk and butter and cheese and eggs, and the coarse but satisfying hard and soft manchets (rude forefathers of the biscuit and crumpet) and, above all, plenty of wild beef and mutton—these the meanest serf might have for the trouble of taking it, and the King's venison also, if he dared—and the otter and the beaver and the fox made comfortable fur-jacketing against hard winter; and bulls and sheep, and sometimes the shaggy bear too contributed their warm hides as a substitute for blankets: and so altogether things were physically tolerable.

Nay, intellectually also and spiritually; consider justly with what gentleness a merciful providence could temper even that roughest phase of English society to both poor and rich alike. Though there were no newspapers nor any to read them, at all events the narrow ways were thronged with cheerful chatterers who forwarded "the news of the world" with strange swiftness and amusing variations: if no postmen scattered broadcast o'er the land the seeds of joy and sorrow, at least one's nearest and dearest stayed very much at home—and where is no travelling there can be little need of correspondence; ay, and better far than as nowadays, local attachments had both time and place to grow tap-rooted. If there were no books—well, Sir Topas, the parish priest, was a rare library in his own loquacious person, and taught folks finely all he knew or didn't know. And the troubadours and harpers and palmers and friars talked famously too.

And so life flowed and ebbed by days and months and years pleasantly enough and profitably. One almost hankers after all for those plenty-fed, neighbourly, gossiping, and true-believing "good old times."

As for the Baron of the realm, a little king, proud and happy in his feudal following, with his ceremonious court holdings, his daily hunt and banquet, his innumerable guests, and the wayfaring minstrel or pilgrim astonishing the board with rare adventures, all this was a very pleasant sort of life; and much more so would it be where the great man, not content alone with making his old hall the cynosure of half a county's beauty, rank, and fashion, was also a good man enough to gladden all the poor around; as did that silver-haired old nobleman Sir Tristrem of Aldeburie: different, O how different (for one continually verged Heavenward, and the other towards its dread Antipodes) from such a tyrannical old profligate as the bad Baron of Tangley; a baser anticipation of fat Falstaff, an abettor of the wicked Prince, and corruptor of the young courtiers round him, whose moated house was the riotous hunting home of John and his following of titled banditti.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD TANGLEY MANOR.

PAINFULLY, and perilously too (for the bog as we said was treacherous and night had somewhile darkened, and the way even when found again was rough and tangled and jungly,) Stephan and his good guide Hal stood at length before the gate of old Tangley Manor-House at some three hours after sundown; O terrible three hours of suspense and danger! for how had gentle Alice meanwhile fared in that rough company?

A clatter of rude revelry and a blaze of light from every casement, and shouted oaths, and snatches of song and chorussing and ribaldry startling the silent night, made Langton's heart sink within him as they neared the Grange: his innocent, delicate Alice, pretty moth, alas! for her wings were like to be too surely singed in all that blinding torchlight; woe, woe, what might not happen?

Langton, with prompt generalship and decision, saw at once what was the only thing to be done at such a crisis; and when, knocking at the wicket (for the old house of Tangley Manor is deeply moated and highly walled round, and entrance is none but by the great gate, or its child the wicket) he thought he heard amid the boisterous revelry of the chorussed—

"Drink, drink, till the brain is on fire,
Drink, till it blazes fiercer and higher——,"

a feeble—"Stevie, save me, help, help!" be sure a quick hot heart within him well seconded the cool wise head above it.

"No entrance, Measters, none I say; my Lord is at his revels; back, I say,"—and the brawny kerne, pine torch in hand, and not without a vigorous oath or two, slid home again the wicket's window.

"Nay but, man, you must let in this horse to the court-yard,—you must, I tell you; it's one of your master's by the trappings: we found him loose in the forest, and have brought him home to you."

The red shock head glanced suspiciously through the pannel, and with an—"Ay, ay,—by St. Anthony and all his imps, Black Christopher, sure enow,"—he drew back the wooden bars, unhooked the chain, and flung the great gate open.

On the instant, Stephan, of course afoot, with Hal and the horse in the gateway to keep it open, dashed in and seized the torch, knocking over that astounded porter, ran into the open porch of the Grange, hurriedly set fire to some sheaves of dry rushes piled in a side room (a substitute for carpeting just then invented) and lighting swiftly as he flew up the like rushes strewed upon the stairs,—burst into the great upper room of the revels.

At a glance he saw what we must be made to comprehend less immediately by description; for with him action had wellnigh to outrun his apprehension.

Those cow-skinned kernes standing round the room held each a blazing pine torch showing in strong lights and flickering shadows the bad young Prince and all his followers,—the riotous hunting troop and their wenches, full of wine and meat, and loud with boisterous revelry. Next beside the Prince under his canopy, shrinking back and pale with terror, was our poor little hyacinthed May-queen Alice, with John eagerly trying to coax her to drink the treacherous hot wine out of his golden tankard; while the vivid concentration of all eyes upon the twain, proved that her time of uttermost peril was come.

There was a quick glad scream,—"Ha! Stevie, Stevie!"

And she has leapt into his arms, while with his blazing torch he sweeps a clear circle round him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRE.

Flushed with wine, and emboldened as so many against one, the revellers rush upon young Stephan, who pale and weak from his bruised brow and with Alice clinging to him for safety, desperately but hardly fights his way clear to the door with that sweeping fire-brand through all the riot.

But see! there's a smouldering cloud of smoke streaming everywhere through the chinked floor, and a fierce tongue of flame licking up the rushes flares all over the room, and a very furnace of fire blazes in at the doorway, and Stephan with Alice in his arms (poor, poor singed moth, for her garments are in a blaze) has leapt down the crackling stairs, and through the oven-like hall, and out into the cold quiet night and through the gate, and swiftly in the dark adown the lane, damping out with scorched hands as he runs this cruelly clinging "martyr's shirt of fire" that enwraps his moaning Alice!

And now, thank Heaven for the friendly marsh; for he has laid her, poor burnt child, tenderly and gratefully in that merciful water.

There is a moment for reflection: and fortunately no one pursues; because all hands in the burning Grange are confusedly striving to save themselves half-sobered, and then to extinguish the fierce flames by buckets, and the convenient moat. In vain; high up into the dark sky flared the avenging fire, and when the roof fell heavily in, there rushed forth a column of sparks and red hot smoke as if from a volcano. And by next morning nothing but a shell of smouldering hard oak timbers, filled in with ancient brick-work, stood there,—the bad old Baron's sepulchre; for Richard de Bradestone of Tangley, heavy with drink and helpless from age, had perished, hoary sinner, unsoilzied, unannealed, in that living tomb of fire!

All else are thought to have escaped,—save some poor good horses in the stable that would not move,—and a stolid kerne or two (but their money value was less, poor slaves, so it mattered little) who dared not: those human candlesticks had nothing in life to do but by day to run with the hounds, and by night to hold torches; and thus, with dull dutiful serfishness they stood unmoved round the room till the very floor gave way, and so two or three of them perished.

As for Woodman Hal, he gave out when he got back to Aldeburie, how that Stevie and Alice (and he told the gossips all the long sad story in words enough, I promise you), he gave out surely that they had both been burnt alive with old Tangley; and that tale was believed for many a day, making sorrowful hearts for friends and neighbours in the valley.

What became of Prince John and his Comus crew of male and female revellers, I neither know nor care: they all turned up again somewhere; and doubtless, after seeing the last of Tangley Manor,—that's to say the last till its rebuilding, for it still exists, an old curiously timbered and moated Grange,—the Prince and his courtiers, most of them unhorsed, found their way to Gilford Castle, and treated the night's adventure as a glorious joke.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SINGED MOTH.

But what must Stephan Langton do? Is Alice dead? his charming little May-queen, still crowned with a scorched and drooping coronal, and all her garments burnt and charred,—and alas, alas—her tender body too! there she lies in the kind cold water, white, silent, motionless: is she quite dead? O what a May-day's eve and night!

He prayed to Our Father earnestly in his great trouble, as every wise and good and strong man does; and ever then is wiser, better, stronger: and helped on the instant by some ministering angel he considered calmly what was wisest to be done,—and what he resolved reasonably he did determinately.

Old St. Martha's, of long years a sacred spot from some traditionary martyrdom upon that hill-top, had recently been made a special sanctuary, by the Prior of Newark, in honour of St. Thomas; the new chancel had been built barely a year; and the dead—woe! for it seems too surely his dead, dead Alice—should lie there in safe peace beside the altar.

For how could he take her homeward again, dead, to a dying mother? or how bear all the terrible blame and shame of having—so the gossips would declare—been the root and cause of it all by his moonlight tryste and folly? for as usual with lovers they had met clandestinely; and, almost equally as of course, that old mother was against the match. And then the sleugh hounds would be set upon his track long ere morning: Holy Church alone was his nearest and easiest refuge: he could see the hill-top chapel, not so very far off, outlined on the midnight sky.

So then, carried in his loving arms, however unsteadily, —for he stumbled oft and well-nigh fainted many times, —and kissed through blinding tears for half the way, he struggled through the morass hour after hour with his precious burden, and at last crept weakly up the steep hill-side,—and just at morning's cold grey dawn fell down exhausted on the chapel's threshold.

Poor Alice! she must alas, alas! be dead; she had not spoken, nor moved, nor seemingly breathed for hours: so he lifted the latch and laid her tenderly down upon the matting of the altar steps. And there he prayed, kneeling beside her; and vowed irrevocable vows; and sternly resolved; and, according to his character, acted on them promptly.

Reverently, as before the altar of the Most High, he kissed her affianced forehead still coronalled with May-day hyacinths; and he crossed those cold white hands upon her bosom so cruelly scorched; and decently and orderly he arranged the burnt wet remnants of her clothing round the poor insensate body of what once—not five hours ago—was his own dear, loving, rescued Alice!

Imagine his bitter, bitter tears, his passion of deep grief; and thereafter the strong man's calm after the storm, his tranquil resolution: he will leave her there alone with Death and God, love's consecrated martyr: he will live henceforth not for himself, but for her and for his country, an avenger: he, he, Stephan Langton, will stand that wicked Prince's cross and hindrance now, and if he comes to be a King, his stout antagonist hereafter.

How to compass this? How can a poor man wrestle with a Prince? There is but one way: the Cross is the great co-equal with, nay conqueror of, the Crown: the Church, the Church is the sole power that dares be an opponent of the King. He will take the cowl,—he will improve his Tamar lessons and be a scholar,—he will add to that his Lincoln courtesies and be a prelate, he will wear Alice's chaplet on his arm, and be her true knight still, though in no lists but a Cathedral pulpit,—he will make Alice and her wrongs famous to the ends of the earth, to the end of time itself; he will free England for ever from the tyranny of Kings, and recover for the people their ancient liberties.

All this did he vow, earnestly, solemnly, and sternly; as in the heavenly Presence, and before the hovering spirit of his Alice; whose fair cold corpse, scarce veiled by those scraps of tinder clothing, was laid out straight before the shrine, and served as the seal to his vows. He kissed that brow reverently after each strong sentence: but the vow of eternal celibacy for Alice's sweet sake was the sternest and most passionate in its kiss-seal; and he half imagined that she moved, as he pressed despairingly those pallid lips: no, no; it was all a reeling fancy; the mere delusion of despairing love.

CHAPTER IX.

NEWARK PRIORY.

Before day had well broken, our sworn but calm avenger Stephan had taken his last leave of that dear body, left before the altar on that hill-top: why should he stay, and meet the dreaded curious comers? She was safe in heaven, and the poor cold corpse here is safe too in sanctuary: let him away, away speedily, and act at once upon his vows. It is clear whither to go: Newark Priory, only some nine miles off, will take him in, and, as a new foundation, glad of converts, will make small questioning: so by morning's earliest sunlight, he had left St. Martha's a mile behind him and was so far on his way to Woking.

In the deep-worn track as he journeyed, he met with several wayfarers, coming hitherward or passed by rapidly, exchanging with them each a bare good day; but the only notable greeting was when he had to stand aside, and make lowly obeisance before a cavalcade of monks, Black Augustines, defiling singly by him in the gutter-like roadway upon their sleek mules, headed by some dignitary in a litter, and preceded by his cross-bearer. These he half guessed might be bound for St. Martha's, possibly to see about its newly-built chancel, as recently added to the more ancient Saxon chapel; and if so, certainly to find already consecrated there to Death and God his own most precious martyred Alice!

But he hurried on without a word, after due obeisance.

And thus, across by the old druidical yew-circles, and along their connecting avenue, and over the broad low flat—a jungly marsh, difficult to thread—by many a devious foot-way through the quagmire, and often stopped by fallen trees, he won his way at last to Newark Priory; a smaller sort of Tintern Abbey, facing a green well-rivuletted plain (monks naturally like fish, as cats do) and the whole batch of buildings on three sides bounded by the dense high forest.

He has entered by the outer porch, and is parleying with a fat old monk—or, truer to say, a lay brother—the porter.

"May I have speech with the Prior, good brother?"

"Anon, perchance thou mayest, Sir Traveller, an his Reverence be up: but he's sore ailing—and what's thine errand friend?—thou lookest white and way-worn."

"Let me say it to the Superior, good brother; I am weak, and may not waste my breath; so take my name in as a wayfarer, if it please thee—a sore heart is chary of its speech."

"As thou wilt, friend, as thou wilt. I'll go for thee and seek his holy Reverence's acolyte."

And with a curious but compassionate long look at the applicant, the porter went his way, bidding Stephan rest on a settle the while.

After a space, Stephan had his audience: he was in his forester's dress, remember, muddy, and with his head bound up; and the gout makes a man irascible, at least it did the Prior—but only for a minute or two.

"Well, young man, thine errand: any message in haste from a knightly neighbour? But what's that!—a bloody wrapper round thy brows? Speak up quick, man."

"Prior," he answered faintly, "I pray to be one of thy monks; I will be dutiful and diligent, and will do thy Reverence and the Priory good service."

"Thou a monk, young man?—thou a monk? Can'st read, or write, or sing? And—and consider well what thou askest: the vow is irrevocable—and think again—think again, youth," said the old man, kindly.

"Prior, I can read and write, and was once a chorister at Tamar-Monachorum in Devonshire, so I am trained to singing; and I have vowed my life to Heaven, and that irrevocably."

"Nonsense, Sirrah! Well, well!—but thou can'st compass even transcribing? And what's the cause?—what's the cause? A young fellow, beaten and bemudded in a brawl, would be of our order, forsooth!—natheless, he hath rare parts and gifts to bring us too; but what's the cause—quick!"

"My love is dead, Sir Prior, and I would devote my soul and body to Heaven if I may."

"Bah, fool!—time will cure thy love-wound. But thou can'st read ey, and write, and sing? Well, well,—young man, the saints forbid that I should hinder good resolutions: but it is a choice for ever, recollect."

"I do, holy Prior, and am well resolved: will thy fatherly kindness take poor Stephan Langton as a monk of Newark?"

"Yea, friend, if this be St. Thomas's will, and thine own; but thou mayest go sleep upon it, my young brother, if thou wilt, and not hurry so; thy wound's curable otherwise, I wot it well."

"No, father, no: my vows are already recorded before Heaven's throne at the shrine of St. Martha's."

"Pheew!"—it was probably a twinge of gout that drew that irreverent and untimely whistle out of the Prior, but he immediately recovered himself, and the gravity of his position, by adding solemnly, "It is not becoming in God's servant to loose those bonds which his Master may have ratified: so be it, young man: but stay,—first tell me thy story."

Stephan Langton, in some ten minutes, had given his history in outline to the Prior of Newark. Now he, like most other Church dignitaries of the period, had his own private reasons for hating or fearing Prince John; so this outrage and its probable avenger were grist to his mill: therefore after a moment of reflection he made answer.

"Good: I like frankness: and thou shalt be with all fair speed one of our brotherhood: ay, and to compensate thy sorrows on the spot, thou shalt be the first monk of St. Martha's immediately after the chancel has been consecrated."

It was a true boon, that, to our heart-broken Stephan; and affectionately did he thank the good Prior for his thoughtful kindness: but it is fair also to suggest, that the prospect of having to serve that cold hilltop, was anything but popular at Newark: the monks didn't half like the intended lot-drawing for that office: so the Prior was probably glad enough of his new recruit.

"Yet one word more, my father: I have told to thee and thee alone all my grief; may this sad tale be a sacred secret between thee and me?"

Human nature loves to be trusted, and confidence ever breeds sympathy; so very sincerely that good Prior answered,

"Yea, my son, and Amen upon it; thou and I alone, with God and St. Thomas and all saints and angels (here he crossed himself over and over again) shall know of thy dead lover left at yonder shrine: but thou must keep the secret for thyself among the brotherhood, my son."

"Father, a sorrowful heart will hide itself away in silent solitude, like a wounded bird; and I must heal it as I can, with prayer, and study, and meditation. By Heaven's good help, I will prepare me for my mission."

CHAPTER X.

DAME MARGERY'S DISCOVERY.

That cavalcade of Black Augustines was bound for Tything, the rude little ironstone lodge dwelt in by the secular brother attached to the old Saxon chapel of St. Martha's. Down in the dinted glen north-westward, you may still see at the back of the modern thriving farm there, a few original remnants of that old priest's dwelling; to wit, a stone Gothic triplet window in an ancient wall, a crypt beneath, now used for cellarage, and a deep little square walled garden, dug out of the hillside, where the good pastor grew his choicer herbs and simples. For he was a cunning man in herbcraft, was Father Peter, and he knew well the nature of each herb and flower, and their several virtues curative, sedative, stimulative—said virtues very possibly all being quite the reverse: and the neighbours flocked to him in sickness for his physics and restoratives; though, it must be confessed that his spiritual ministrations were not half so well attended as his physical: he could help a body in ailment, all were agreed, but somehow his unmusical intoning, and dullish sermonizing, were not entirely so popular with the commons, as his peppermint and wormwood.

Well, but the good priest Peter did his duty in his day, notwithstanding; and serving the unknown martyr on the hilltop (folks, learned ones too, doubted whether or not it could be the Arimathæan Joseph) he served the martyr's Master too, faithfully and sedulously: and now, right early in the morning, we find him leaning on old Margery his housekeeper, and making the best of his slow way to the chapel for matins. There possibly might be, or might not be, a stray pilgrim or wayfarer there to serve for congregation; but anyhow, the good old priest says his mass regularly, with Margery for clerk.

And so, the painful uphill creep has got them to the chapel door, and the latch is lifted, and the spare old minister totters to the transept for his canonicals hanging on a nail there, and he reverently makes ready to say his orisons at the martyr's side altar.

But, why in the world is old Margery peering so curiously into the new chancel? Can any one be lying there asleep before the altar under the new stained window? or is it a corpse left there for sanctuary?

She hobbled up, and at her cry of wonder the good priest follows in all haste; for Margery has found "a poor dead child,—burnt sorely,—look at her tinder petticoats! Ey, what was that?—a sob? Master, she moves, she moves?"

And there was another deep and stifled sob.

The ancient couple stoop over her with eager and compassionate curiosity. And a writhing shudder quivers through those close-clinging wet scorched clothes, and she opens her eyes for a moment vacantly,—and then drops off again.

It had all been a trance!

The double, treble, quadruple shock of the seizure, the rescue, the fierce flame, and chilling water, had, blow by blow, paralysed her nerves like death; she could not speak, nor move, nor breathe; the life-blood froze at her heart, her pulses stopped, and her ear was dull and her eye glassy; but still, throughout that terrible night, until a dimmer confusion came over her in the morning, she had been conscious, helplessly, hopelessly conscious of everything that had passed; and had longed and striven to speak and comfort him; and then had believed herself verily dead, or a living spirit in a dead body: it had been horror to her, all that bitter night; in especial, Stephan's agony and desperation, and worst his irrevocable vow. And then she must have utterly lost consciousness: for whither, O whither had he fled? And how could he have left her so alone? Was he dead? This was the first unuttered thought of returning consciousness.

Another gurgling sob,—and her eyelids tremble, and she sees, and strives to speak: and Margery and the good old priest are chafing those marble hands and temples and touching tenderly the poor scorched feet; and they come at once to a sudden wise resolve—as Christians loving mercy before sacrifice—to put off mass this morning for a double one to-morrow, and to carry the sweet stranger for very life's sake instantly to Tything.

CHAPTER XI.

VISITORS AT TYTHING.

By help of a cassock from the vestry, that spare old priest and stout Margery, his housekeeper, convey their burden gently and carefully down the hill, one at the head and the other at the feet: speculating all the way as to "who it could be, and how did she come there?"

Well, it might easily be guessed, they thought: for be certain they had seen overnight the lurid glare upon the southern sky from the burning of old Tangley,—and this poor burnt flutterer, with her pretty face and wreaths of scorched flowers, what could she be but one of the bad old Baron's dancing queans, poor lass?—Yet was there consecration in her end; Heaven bless her!—How strangely wet she is too, half drowned as well as half burnt; and see, her smock and boddice are singed black and tindery everywhere,—and look at the poor scorched skin beneath: many a weary and difficult mile through the morass must she have toiled (sweet child, the Blessed Virgin show all grace to thee!) to die thus before the martyr's altar.

It was fair enough and true enough in chief that guess. And now at the Lodge they have laid her on Dame Margery's couch, and dressed her fiery wounds with soothing unguents; and by help of divers simple stimulants and herbs, and inward and outward cordials are rejoicing (good old souls) to see a little more gleam of life in the glassy eye, to feel at last a little warmth about the fluttering heart.

Startlingly all of a sudden, she wakes and sits up straight; and then with a faint scream as suddenly falls dead again!

But the good Samaritans continue still their care,—and that for a long hour; is she quite gone, quite?

"No: the steel mirror dims yet, Margery; and I'm sure there's a little fluttering of the heart under this blistered skin: softly, Margery, softly,—for to rub it must be agony."

Aha! that touch of sudden torture has waked her up once more.

And so the strong spell was broken: from the deathlike yet conscious and merciful trance the poor girl entered into life again, with her first breath blessing and praising "some kind angels," as she dreamingly whispered, "who were helping her:" for the good priest's ointments and restoratives had lulled away all pain, and for the time the hideousness of earth was clean forgotten; she felt as if in Heaven.

"Listen, Margery; yon fair dove can be none of the Tangley rookery."

"Nay, surely none but a true saint:—but listen you too, my Master, and look!—why, here be the holy fathers all acome from Newark: it must be ten by the dial, surely."

The very cavalcade, met hours ago by Stephan, is now in the little court-yard before the Lodge: some half dozen black-stoled monks on mule-back with their Subprior in his easy litter, (a sort of hammock between two mules), and his cross-bearer on a palfrey preceding. The deputation has come, as Stephan guessed rightly, to see about the new chancel, and fix a day for its consecration: intending, after due halt and provender, to go onward for a brotherly visit to the Abbess of St. Catherine's; and thence, after like due halt and provender with the sisterhood there, to repose for the night at the hostelrie in Gilford.

While some rough country kernes (who, as their wont was, had followed that procession; for no monk ever travelled without plenty of creature comforts in his wallet as a viaticum, and there might well be some rich droppings by the way,) while these held the mules and rubbed them down, and brought pulled-grass and pease-haulm for them, the weary fathers crowded into Peter's little ground-floor parlour; and their friend, the parish priest of St. Martha's, hastening down the crazy stair, proceeds to act host to so many, as well as the poor man could at a push.

His hospitality, however, was not taxed; Heaven had sent meat with the mouths, as usual; the good monks produced so many venison pasties and barley-bannocks, and such store of sack and ale, that their host clearly couldn't do better than himself help off the cheer heartily with them: and that all the welcomer, seeing he had to tell them the great local news of Old Tangley's fire, last night; and in chief all about the mysterious stranger, that brand plucked from the burning, miraculously found by himself and Margery this very morn before St. Becket's shrine.

Then must every one of the holy fathers kind-heartedly creep up the stairs and peep in, singly and on tiptoe, just to have ocular assurance of the marvel, and to commend Margery for being so tender of the poor burnt sister; and altogether so much absorbing talk and interest were there about this interesting case (such a sweetly pretty face too, and so softly sleeping)—that the business as to the approaching consecration, for which alone they had come so far, appeared to be wholly forgotten.

"Brother Peter," said the Subprior with a paternal glance at Alice, "take my help and counsel,—brother:—we are on our way—to St. Catherine's—you know,—and this fair young girl were better with the sisterhood—you see; to tend and cure her—if haply she may recover, and"—the Subprior had a troublesome chronic cough.

"Yes, your Reverence," chimed in the good-natured cross-bearer, "and mightn't she ride thither in the litter? I'll go afoot with the cross, while your Reverence bestrides my palfrey."

"Well thought, Ralph:—what say'st thou to this—my worthy brother Peter?"

"If Dame Margery opines she may be moved, I might say yea to it; but you see, Subprior, this is a case of sore burning and blistering, and my simples—"

"Well, well, Peter:—but we bide with you—some three hours yet—to refresh the mules,—and shall see anon—how your patient fares; meanwhile—"

"Perhaps your Reverence had best come and see the chapel?"

"By St. Becket himself!—but all had well-nigh been forgotten: we'll attend you, Brother Peter—when the beasts have finished their provender;—yon hill-top keeps you spare enow, I see,—but we of Newark are wont to be wider in the waist, brother, and—" the stout Subprior coughed so, that the end of the sentence is lost to literature.

CHAPTER XII.

ST. MARTHA'S.

Faintly awaking from sleep,—for she had slept—poor Alice with an almost first conscious word of wond naturally enough asked old Margery—"Where am I?"

She was answered gently and truly.

"And where," she gasped, "where is—"

A sudden thought stopped her; she would not, she could not just then, so nigh the fainting point of death, ask this strange but kind old nurse about dear, dear Stephan: so the second question failed upon her lip. Moreover she dreaded hearing that he was dead: she suspected it,—and in her terror half gasped again, "Where is—"

"Hush, darling; don't vex thee: let me touch thy sores with this green ointment again—so; I wot well the pounded water-betony and groundsel and ground ivy treated with lard is sovereign for a fresh burn or a scald,—so: and taste this sleep draught once more, pretty dear,—so: Holy Mary and all good angels bless thee! there now, quietly—so."

And again poor Alice dropped asleep.

Meanwhile the black procession had duly wound its way to the top of St. Martha's; that heaven-kissing hill which centres the most beauteous panorama in all South Britain; now so rich with cultivation, and dotted with seats and villages, but in those days a tumbled undulating forest-tract with vast bare heaths between, and our now Arcadian valleys each a wide and glistering morass: and there the deputation inspected with most critical eyes the bricklaying and the carpentering, and in chief that rarest piece of window-work then for the first time seen in Surrey, the quaint and priceless stained glass: and they accorded fainter praise, (as lacking in colour after those azures, ambers, and rubies that so dazzled them), to the plain stone piscina, and sedilia, and reredos; and the altar was not half elaborated enough,—which item should be seen to; but especially had they all taken most curious note of the exact spot where the pretty stranger had been found, so mysteriously laid out before the shrine in a coronal of hyacinths and a shroud of tinder: there were some bits of singed homespun, and a flower or two still on the matting,—and the holy fathers eagerly picked them up as relics: the Becket question was fairly beaten out of the field of everybody's vision.

However, in a fortunate moment of right hallucination the Subprior had presence of mind to cough out,—

"This day month, Brother Peter,—when the most Reverend our Prior may fairly—by the blessing of St. Thomas—be hoped well again—(a grievous burning and swelling of his feet, Brother Peter, and sore tweaks and twinges, he avouches)—this day month, if the sisterhood be willing—to assist at—" again that damaging cough (you will have noticed how staccato was the good man's oratory) deprives a nominative of its verbum subauditum.

And down again in like order, though with more difficulty, (for the way was steep, and it isn't easy for corpulence on mule-back to keep equipoise down-hill) the pious procession wound its way through the glen to Tything: where rest and refection for man and mule were again a positive necessity.

"And how now, Brother Peter, fares our sweet young sister? What saith nurse Margery?"

"The child is better, your Reverence; and please the saints may yet recover; but, poor thing, she is blistered sorely, and maun't stir these three days at earliest: might it please your Reverence to send over the litter anon;—let me see, yestreen was St. Philip and St. James, and to-morrow is Invention day, so be it on Thorsday the fourth, an it please your Reverence."

"The dame says well," urged Brother Peter,—"only, but for it being a Friday, I'd say the fifth; and then the sixth is the feast of Holy John-before-the-Port,—and then comes Sunday; so be it on the fourth, if my simples bring a blessing."

The Subprior and his monks would so gladly have conveyed that most interesting stranger ts St. Catherine's, that they were sadly disappointed to lose such a chance; for the matter approached the miraculous, to say less of the sublime and beautiful: but to move her was manifestly impossible just then, and they must give it up with a good grace.

And so, with just one more paternal creep, silently and individually, up those creaking stairs, and a peep through the open door at our sleeping beauty; and after much praising of Dame Margery, and a cordial leave-taking with Brother Peter; the cavalcade wound away from Tything at two or thereabouts towards St. Catherine's; where, going by the deep lanes through the forest, and crossing the ferry-under-hill, and thus to the Virgin's Well before four, they were all soon after bid glad welcome by the Abbess and sisterhood in the nunnery; and so much the more from having fortunately to recount to them the romantic incident of Brother Peter's charming guest; whose sojourn anon with the sisters was thereby fixed, and looked for with no small excitement in the dullness of their vacant existence.

Thereafter at eventide, those blacked-stoled monks of Newark went solemnly as ravens to roost at the Gilford hostelrie.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR NUNNERY, AND THE MONKS OF OLD.

St. Catherine's nunnery was then, as its present Tudor representative Brabœuf still is, one of the prettiest things in England. Posted on a landslip outlier of the Hog's Back, and running forward as if to greet our other ancient chapel that sentinels the Vale of St. Martha, may still be seen the ruin of its Gothic outer or public chapel; it overlooks Shalford Meadows, so often flooded by their sinuous water-courses, like silver eels gliding through the grass, and has close at foot the ancient Pilgrim's Ferry with a mineral (once called miraculous) spring hard by.

Some three hundred yards behind this chapel, (not in those ancient days, as now, divorced from it by a deep cut turnpike-road), lay nestled in a green dinted valley, backed with elms, the Nunnery, many gabled, long and straggling; built most picturesquely of chalk in panels of quaintly carved oak-timbers, with perforated verge-boards, and colossal acorn finials: behind it right and left, two higher gabled roofs with belfries atop serving to designate the great hall or refectory, and the private or inner chapel; the public one, whereof alone the ruin as I said still survives, being too far off for any than ascetics, or as in Alice's case a lover, in rainy weather.

Within doors, some forty nuns, old and young, lowly and well conditioned, lived on equal sisterly terms in little separate chambers on the ground-floor,—the whole batch of building being single storied,—much as pensioners in our alms-houses do now; they only met together at meals and prayers; received visitors behind a sort of wild-beast cage; lived a charitable meditative life; and obeyed implicitly the Superior of their own section, a motherly good soul enough.

And hereabout, as in charity bound and justice, is the place to drop a few true words of apology on behalf of those mediæval monks and nuns.

In contradiction to popular prejudice, and despite of numerous exceptional cases in a dissolute and barbarous age, when morals and religion throughout society were at their lowest, the monastery and still less the nunnery, as a rule, was not at first as of any necessity, nor even probability, the sink of lazy luxury we suppose it.

Afterwards indeed, and possibly too in pretty early times, corruption and degeneracy crept in; and, as we all know, such evils came to their head in the age just anterior to Martin Luther's Reformation; but, in the ages long before it, things were relatively much better, if not to be regarded in the positive as very good.

A nunnery or a monastery primæval was rather to be regarded as a peaceful refuge for the oppressed, a green oasis in the wide waste social desert, a lamp of learning to cheer the night of ignorance around, a happy home where childhood in a troublous time might sing its sweet psalms, or learn crafts, or more rarely pore over its hornbook securely; and where old age, having battled through the stern vicissitudes of life, might at length find its hour of quiet to make ready for the world to come. There, around the great Religious House, the wretched multitude of kernes and theows and serfs, our common poor ascripti glebæ, were liberally fed in their many seasons of scarcity, and at all times consoled in affliction, medicined and nursed in sickness, taught and helped and blest; the student found there his only literature, the pious his best chance both for closet-prayer and for cathedral services, the outraged innocent a safe and sure retreat; and if even crime for awhile found sanctuary within the same hallowed precincts, it could only do so in its character of assumed, or let us hope sometimes real, penitence.

We do wrong to our shrewd ancestors and injuriously misjudge them, if we regard old Tintern or Fountains,—or nearer home our own Surrey's Waverley or Chertsey or Newark in their best and earliest days, as other than splendid Gothic lanterns in the darkness of a desolate wilderness, on which in silver streams they shed liberally the rays of civilization and religion.

Who but those much calumniated monks, in an age devoted to bloodshed and barbarism, taught the dull boors all round them not alone monastic legends, and at all events amusing fables about saints, but also something at least of true religion, and besides, husbandry and medicine, music and painting and sculpture? Nay, if haply higher students came within their sphere, the profundities of science and the elegancies of literature? Let us be just,—nay more, be gratefully generous to a now obsolete class of men and women, however in their latter day corrupted, and for that cause in their earlier maligned, who (in the Ages haply misnamed Dark, only because we ourselves know little about them) were yet undeniably the foster-nurses of learning, the gentle but not weak antagonists to tyranny, the then only real working philosophers and philanthropists doing good practically everywhere in the world.

Without those useless "monks of old" we should have now next to nothing of our rich store of classical and ecclesiastical literature, seeing that to their patient idlesse, say rather diligence, in copying, we are indebted for well nigh every manuscript in our libraries; nay, but for the labours in transcription of those often wise and good old monks, the very text of Holy Writ might have been to us an uncertain oral tradition, and, without such a special providence, perhaps had now been barely extant.

Verily in the bad old times when the world was overrun by rapine, it was the mercy, as the wisdom of God, that sowed our land so thickly with Religious Houses, which in their earlier purity shone like stars on the firmament of dark around them. And if in a later age, when no longer needed as a scaffolding by the great Designer and Architect of human progress, they fell into a luxurious degeneracy,—well, let them thus have died out after they had lived out their duties, and, as quite unsuited to our times and manners, never let them hope to rise and live again on English soil. We are too independent, too individual, for the gregarious thraldom of the cœnobitic and conventual system: neither can we nationally tolerate any resuscitation thereof, however masqued by pious pretext, or excused by the rage for ecclesiastical antiquities. However, while we deprecate as injurious, nay impossible and contrary to the spirit of the age any such monastic retrogression, let us acknowledge the past utilities of such a state; and in common honesty and justice, when we think of those old nunneries and monasteries, (haply spending a pleasant holiday with summer friends among the ruinous picturesqueness of their whilome sacred precincts), let us reverently vindicate the beneficence of Heaven for the good they did in their day, for the good still extant up to our day even from a single monk, such as erst was our Johntime patriot, Stephan Langton.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW BROTHER OF NEWARK.

A FULL week sped by before the Subprior and his company got back to Newark; for they extemporized a brotherly visit to Waverley, and by a wide and unnecessary roundabout took Chertsey also on their way home.

So, Alice had all the longer chance for convalescence before the promised litter: and she could not meanwhile have been left to a more skilful leech than Peter, or a gentler nurse than the motherly old Margery.

And with Stephan likewise this was a week of deep and curative calm. She—he had not a doubt of it—was in Mary's bosom, a free and blessed spirit rescued from all earth's troubles, and to be envied if not worshipped as a saint, his own special guardian saint, in Heaven; while her poor burnt body would have been buried, as of course, in the sacred precincts at St. Martha's, where it was his sweetest consolation to anticipate a long sojourn of prayer, and study, and pious meditation. Day and night in his quiet cell he only thought of her as having entered, happily for her if not for him, into everlasting rest; and in ecstatic reveries upon her blessedness he could almost, though with brimming eyes and a breaking heart, thank God for having taken so soon from the evil to come his own most precious Alice. His love-wound was healing up indeed speedily and surely; though not in the coarse and common way the Prior guessed it would, by some new love extinguishing the old;—no,—rather by those calming influences of religion that alone have potency to charm away sorrow, and to consecrate affliction.

The old Prior had been kind, very kind; had enjoined upon his monks no curiosity about their new brother;—and albeit this no doubt made them doubly curious within, the injunction, at all events, operated usefully in restraining perpetual questions from without.

Stephan had his own separate cell with its pallet, was devout at chapel, staidly cheerful at refections, and very diligent over manuscripts in the library. He was anxious not only to prove to the Prior the extent of his unusual knowledge, but also and further to be fitting himself for that higher mission traced dimly, but determinedly, in his vow.

Howbeit, that blessed week of peace has past: for, here are the Subprior and his following,—a noisy arrival enough; who, after other greetings all round the refectory, kindly salute their new brother.

"A good young man, Mr. Subprior; and let me tell you, brethren, a learned; he hath strange skill in reading, nay, but he can write too, and that clearly; ay, and his notes in the De Profundis, and the Dies Illa are deeper than ever I heard: these be rare gifts, Mr. Subprior; a good young man is Brother Stephan."

So they greeted him all the more heartily; and if some envied his acquirements, the rest who marvelled at them were clearly in a majority.

And then came the clatter of talking, every one at once: all the pent-up news of an unprecedented week to be poured out in a Babel gabble from eight eager informers to thirty-two more eager inquirers: it was an avalanche, or rather a hailstorm of words.

Stephan stood aloof at first, and heard but little; afterwards, for he recognized at a glance the monastic party he had met a week agone, he drew near, curious to hear, with however sore a heart, of a certain very possible discovery in the chancel of St. Martha's.

In half a minute he had gathered from the confused clatter of gossip, startling news indeed: one Peter, a priest, had found a dying girl on the hill-top, a dancing-girl, or one who might have been a-maying, for she had flowers in her hair; and he had nursed her into life again, and all the fathers had seen her; so prettily asleep! And they had some flowrets to show in proof, hyacinth bells.

Could this be any other than Alice?—and yet she was dead, stone dead for hours,—he knew it.

He pressed nearer, and gathered more: the young woman had been seemingly half burnt, and was lying on the altar steps!

And they showed him some bits of tinder:—to him, could any relics be more precious?

It was inevitably Alice,—yet how impossibly.

Further of her the monks knew nothing, could tell nothing: for she hadn't spoken, to their knowledge—no nor even moved; they'd only seen her fast asleep; and nobody knew her name: she was very pretty though; and her hair, where it had escaped the fire, seemed to be flaxen.

How sweet, yet how terrible a hope now filled poor Stephan's heart as he rushed away to his solitary cell! If still alive, if by some miracle of resurrection recovering, how intolerable the thought that she should find he had deserted her;—how still more fearful the remembrance of his now quite irrevocable vow.

On the holiest relics of Newark Priory the new Augustine had just sworn celibacy for life, eternal dedication of himself to God and mother church. Never more durst Stephan Langton hope for Alice as a loved and loving wife: never again have one warm human thought about her! The remembrance of her now was agony,—if indeed she could be living: but no, no; it was impossible;—she had died, he knew it, in the cold water that so mercifully had hissed out her blazing clothes; he knew it only too well, for hadn't he striven for long hours of that dark hideous night to find one pulse, one breath, one symptom of life in that dear, dead, cold, waxen figure, wherefrom the spirit of his Alice had most manifestly departed? Those gossiping monks certainly must have added to the very probable—nay sure—fact of Peter's discovery of her poor body, the impossible one of her life; they had all seen her—true,—but it was only as lying fast asleep;—no doubt at all in that sweetest sleep of death.

And calmness came once more to Stephan Langton, as he reasonably thought out all this within himself extinguishing resolutely that earthly hope indeed, but recovering his former heavenly peace.

And he kept his cell for full three days, fasting and praying: thus inevitably escaping the additional evidence that might have been supplied to him on the subject by the loan of that litter, its going and returning, and all the subsequent gossip about its adventures. Stephan was on the sick list, and kept quite close: and when he did emerge, was only more taciturn, and studious, and meditative than ever.

CHAPTER XV

THE NUN OF ST. CATHERINE'S.

MEANWHILE had the Prior's litter, escorted by some of those six sympathizing monks you may be sure, as well as by Peter and Dame Margery, duly conveyed poor Alice to St. Catherine's, where the gentle sisterhood received her with eager kindness.

She was a mystery, a miracle: so pretty withal, and except that sweet face above, everywhere else so terribly burnt and blistered. Greedily the cruel flame had fed upon her tender skin; and it seemed but too evident that in spite of all helps, ointments and fomentations, the poor girl's limbs would be more or less crippled for life.

As for anything special for me to record in the nunnery, beyond the nursing, and the watching of kind sisters beside her often delirious couch, beyond the regular devotions and refections, beyond the alternations of days and nights, there could be little of incident for Alice; but all the more of leisure for her, wherein to lie and muse over the past, and mourn for the future. She lay usually very still, and revealed but scantily of her history to the curious sisters; all her speech amounting to little more than thanks to them, fervent and profuse, for their gentle help, and such passionate outpourings of prayer and praise, and intercession to a Better Helper in all trouble, as well nigh convinced the good Abbess that the mysterious stranger was no other than an uncalendared saint.

But, as I said, she lay there tranquil only outwardly, for she thought and thought and thought; continually reacting that sweet May-day, its terrible eve, and above all its hideous night; when, tranced in stony consciousness, she lay a living statue.

Ah! it was sweet madness to remember how tenderly, and with what veneration in his tenderness, her noble

Stephan had watched over her; how reverently, and with what pure and gentle care, in the midst of his fierce sorrow, had he laid her out dead (as he supposed) before the altar; what a paroxysm of manly grief had wrestled him down to the dust; with what devotional delicacy he had disposed the tinder remnants of her clothing to veil her poor scorched bosom, and how thoughtfully had he covered it with her cold crossed hands.

And then with how strong and sweet a passion had he kissed—as if in some despairing hope of waking them again to life—her dim glazed eyes staring, as she knew they must, sightlessly,—and how sadly for a long dusk hour had the solitary chapel echoed to his sobs and groans and vows and earnest prayers;—and how like a brother or a mother he had knelt beside her; and had sworn to Heaven a threefold and irrevocable vow,—that for her sake he would live on, but only in monastic solitude,—for her sake he would be that evil John's antagonist through life,—for her sake he would free his bleeding country from the galling tyrannies that now enchained it.

And then—up to that moment miserably conscious although immoveable—she must have slept or swooned until Margery awoke her in the chancel that next morning;—for she knew not what had become of Stephan,—he was gone, gone; and could he have left her alone there in the chapel if alive? surely not: some fell chance must have come that way, and caught him: the wicked Prince's followers belike: yes, they had certainly hurried her dear Stephan to that death his own poor Alice now so longed for.

Where else could he be? and, when she remembered his vow, if yet in life—to take the cowl and turn monk! What a sudden crush to young love's longings:—but again,—how could she too, the scorched and shrivelled cripple, ever hope to be his wife, a forester's hale glad buxom wife? O doubly wretched,—O bitter evening to that sweet May morn.

Thus, all these musings,—three weeks of them by night and by day, tended (and with reason) to one only wise conclusion: Alice would implore the good Lady Superior for leave to take the veil as speedily as possible. There was small delay or difficulty in those early times about so common a matter: tyranny was used to force it extemporaneously on inconvenient aunts and daughters, and misery in the shape of persecuted maidens often claimed that refuge as an instant boon. Whatever might have happened afterwards, as ordained for the interests of society, a man or a woman in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries might respectively assume the cowl or the veil with as little previous trouble, as only a century ago stray passengers, along a London street, were able withal to get themselves married out of hand at Fleet Prison: monastic fetters for life, with or without the ten minutes notice alluded to by Sydney Smith, ought not to be entirely incomprehensible to us, when our great grandfathers might, in a moment of intoxication or weakness, have destroyed the family tree in its twenty generations of honour by the folly of an extempore Fleet marriage.

So then did it naturally come about, that just a fortnight after Stephan took the tonsure, Alice had become a nun professed; each believing the other dead! A dreadful mistake,—but so circumstantially corroborated to look like truth, that neither could suppose it any otherwise.

As for Alice's bedridden mother, who could not come to St. Catherine's, just as by no possibility could the crippled nun have called at Gomershal, the constant comers and goers from Aldeburie to Gilford had made known to Alice long since how that the good Sir Tristrem cared kindly for the poor old soul so left alone in the world after the terrible reported death of her only daughter: and, that one anxiety so settled and provided for, there was not a soul in life that Alice cared a straw for in comparison with Stevie; all other friendships or likings were dead in her; for he—he must be dead! caught and carried off by that wicked Prince's followers —how could he have left her otherwise?

Or if, as he had seemed to threaten in that awful prayer and vow, a monk,—he was still equally dead to her:—and yet, and yet, how much more dead to him was she, miraculously still alive though a mere wreck, the scarred victim of that cruel fire! Physically, no less than socially, a predestined nun, nothing remained to her of love's life but to hide up blighted feelings in a seamed body.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONSECRATION.

In due time, it couldn't, as we know, be long, the set day came when the convalescent Prior and his Austin monks of Newark were to consecrate, according to programme made and provided, the new chancel of St. Thomas à Becket at St. Martha's.

We must remember, in all antiquarian and local strictness, that what we now call the nave (or rather its antecedent ruin before restoration) was once the only and original Martyr's Chapel, of a date long antecedent to Becket; and that it was used as a parish church with its independent secular priest (now as we know hight Peter) from the most primitive era of Christianity in this kingdom; a time probably synchronical with Egbert and St. Bertha.

The chancel, however, is of less primæval date: and to its consecration in June, 1186, we are now invited.

There was a goodly gathering on that glorious hill-top from all the country round: barons and their feudal retinue, with my lord's silken dame and her hand-maidens; knights and their esquires; ladies and their pages; many a sturdy yeoman and his pillioned goodwife; and, crowding outside, scores of rude theows and kernes with their squawlike female appendages and hundreds of children.

Then of course there were all the holy fathers in their black cassocks, and Peter and Dame Margery acting on the spot as local hosts and ciceroni; and in chief the lady Abbess of St. Catherine and all her white-veiled nunnery.

These had been especially invited; and for this cause The new mysterious sister, redeemed from very death as she with gratefulness acknowledged, at the altar and by the intercession of St. Thomas, wished, on this solemn occasion, publicly to record her vows there, and so to be consecrate more especially thenceforth to heaven: and, though still a cripple and unhealed of those terrible burnings, she had been painfully brought thither in a litter, in order to be present at the solemn service, and to add by her self-devotion to its imposing character.

Another soul, unknown to her, had also vowed his presence and his whole self-dedication at that same spot and time: and thus all unsuspected by both—they are to meet, that hapless pair—and to recognise each other, the two affianced lovers, now a monk and a nun, irrevocably divorced, at the altar!

For, after the formal consecration was all over, the "Lift up your everlasting doors," and the mass and the procession and all the rest of it—that white sisterhood picturesquely bring before the shrine a veiled form lying on a litter; no slight cause for curiosity to the uncowled brothers of Newark, and in especial (from some fearful intuition) of the last sworn Father Stephan. He dreaded the lifting of the veil, as that bier-like litter lay before the altar.

A sister had come to thank the good God and Saint Thomas for wonderful preservation and seeming convalescence.

The veil was raised; and there, in all her sweetly pretty face's bloom of youth and beauty, was his own loved Alice, not dead,—yet dead indeed to him,—a vowed nun!

With an involuntary groan poor Stephan uncowled as he was, drew her eyes, those precious bright blue eyes, instantly upon him,—and with a similar startled glance she also saw in that blackstoled brother her own dear Stevie,—her own?—for ever put away from her, a professed monk!

If she swooned at sight of him, the kind sisterhood around religiously attributed it all to memory and gratitude and deep ecstatic love of St. Becket, and so were not very wrong in their reckoning except as to the saint; albeit neither they nor, saving the Prior alone, the brotherhood of Newark either, gathered the slightest suspicion that Stephan's presence had anything to do with her swoon; or that it was sister Alice in the litter, who had made the pious young monk groan with such evident devotion at the solemn ceremonial.

The pageants and the holy rites were over; all diverged to their homes like lava streams adown the hill.

Alice and the sisterhood I follow not just now: they had no doubt their thoughts and feelings,—at all events, she had; secret, deep, and at the heart; but I first follow, as of natural right, seeing I am self-constituted his biographer, one of mine own sex, and as then the very master mind of mine own country, Stephan Langton.

He went staidly as the rest of the brethren homeward to fair Newark on his mule; quietly he took his part at Vespers; and quietly retired to his solitary cell.

But there, once there alone with the All-seeing and himself, alone as for judgment with self and God, and no sweet Alice ever, ever, to be with him,—he flung his wretched widowed carcase on the pallet-bed, and wept all night in sheer despair: could he have imagined her alive,—and so have been the fool to vow irrevocable celibacy? Her death might have made all easy to him,—but her life, her fair, sweet, tender, beauteous life,—so near him too, and so tempting,—oh, how hard, how hard!

And he wept upon that wretched straw pallet miserably till the morning.

There was but one great help that came to him in his affliction, and one great thought to bid him live. He was a Religious, and could draw comfort from Heaven; he was an Englishman, and had vowed to free his country.

Let the life,—the holy life of sister Alice,—stimulate him yet more resolutely to the great achievement of liberty for his downtrodden people.

Let him gain power through knowledge, for his nation; let him learn with all diligence; and thereby not alone combat those impossible lovings and longings in himself: but also, by sheer force of intellect and its attainments, be enabled to stand up strong as a churchman against kingly encroachment, and definitely over all be able as a man to curb the utter tyranny of an inevitably soon succeeding bad King John.

CHAPTER XVII.

TYTHING LODGE.

Early next morning, to get away at once from all spies upon his misery, the monk of St. Martha's announced his readiness to go and serve the hill-top altar forthwith, with his Prior's good leave. The brotherhood, one and all, wondered at the zeal that could induce a man to forego their own jovial company, and all the other pleasures of Newark so immediately for that cold and cheerless shrine upon the hill-top: however, as Stephan had never been over communicative, and though noways unpopular, was as certainly not a general favourite, (for the few envied him his parts, and the many were little complimented by his absence from their pastimes), they had not much openly to object in his departure: and the Prior, who knew all, and kept counsel faithfully, gave full permission to take on loan any manuscripts or tomes that Stephan wished, with promise of more in succession if required: and so the solitary monk bade adieu to Newark. Short as his sojourn was, it had prisoned him to celibacy for life.

It was easy to find a lodging with that kind-hearted secular priest, our friend Peter at Tything: for the Augustine monk had enough allowed him by the Priory wherewith to pay liberally, and all he asked was a little quiet room, a prophet's chamber, where he might study in the intervals of service on the hill-top.

But the lodging once found, it was not so easy for him to study there as he had hoped; for in that self-same little chamber, up the creaking stairs, and on that self-same couch, had lain his martyred love, his dead, yet living Alice! Ah! when in casual talk with Peter and Dame Margery he first made that touching discovery, the strong man well nigh fainted: and when, leaving their small but hospitable parlour, he went up to that room to bed, how exquisite an aggravation to the tempting torments of his soul worried him there throughout the long dark night, haunting him and hunting him with fierce despairing thoughts of racked hopes and starved affections. He had calmly attained to resignation at her death, for he himself had died with her, for her!—as his deep love had felt and meant when he extinguished all human desires under the irrevocable cowl: but now that he finds her alive, and that so near him,—not in the celestial peacefulness of disembodied Spirit, but in the earthly distraction of that loved and longed-for beautiful Body wherein she still lives, though dead to him,—now indeed his mind had need to get help from somewhere to wrestle down its agonizing disappointment.

He dared not think: he only prayed intensely, and grew calmer; he reasoned, and went sternly to his books, determined to spend all the energy of a hopeless passion on laborious, on gigantic, study. I am speaking not alone of that first dreadful night, when the strife was most terrible within him; but of many like nights and days, through many long months: wherein he not only began to lay up that extraordinary fund of learning for which afterwards he became world-famous, but also and in chief laid up power within himself, by a stern but wise ascetism: and thus in the order of Providence, he grew to be his country's trained athlete, her tough-thewed champion for good against abounding evil.

How many times on St. Martha's summit, as he gazed yearningly at St. Catherine's, a mere ten minutes' pigeon-flight off, had he rivetted and corroborated his deep vow —not of private vengeance, he had somewhile prayed down that, but—of patriotic help to wretched England. How often, providentially posted as he was upon the Pilgrim's Way, had he with this view spoken with all manner of men, from the baron to the serf, as to their oppressed condition and the miseries brought in by Norman kings: how widely by these his emissaries, for he was eloquent enough, and zealous, and knew shrewdly where and how to scatter seeds of thought about, did this simple hill-top monk sow the whole land with hopes and strivings after freedom!

And yet, all the while, poor love-thralled man, what freedom could there be for him? He felt himself, often, too often, in his weaker hours, a very slave to the strength of his own monastic vow: and he gnawed and gnashed in secret many times (spite of reason, and study, and resolution, and religion, and all) against the galling chains that held him! that held him so cruelly back, there in her very sight, from the love he could not reach,—yet strove for, and strove against, till in his solitary woe he felt half maddened.

But Stephan Langton was destined for greater things than to be a mere heart-starved monk on our Surrey hill-top: it was in his destiny to stir up thrones and dominions, and eliminate from the conflicting antagonisms of France and Rome and England our constitutional treasure of Popular Liberty. So, he was not to be left in peace, he must not settle on his lees, he must up and be doing. Providence would wake him from his calm book-labours even by the sting of craving love: and having tried and found him faithful, having refined him in the furnace of affliction, and hardened his muscles in the Spartan gymnasium of self-conquest, now ordains to give him soon a wider sphere, and to set him forward on his course of greatness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HAL AND HIS FAMILY.

FOR, just as our monk could no longer endure, and the nearness of St. Catherine's had grown to be a tormenting nightmare to him, a most tragic incident that befell about this time in Aldeburie and soon got bruited all over the country, helped not a little to ripen the people's hatred of Prince John, and exercised a life-long influence upon the fortunes of Stephan Langton. In this view, as well as in that of being by itself of a deep and touching interest, it deserves to be drawn in detail.

Hal, the woodman, had a little osier-wattled hut, his Home, at the north entrance of old Westone Wood on the Pilgrim's Way. There the honest fellow, through many a bitter winter and many a summer's pestilence (for the marshes, be sure, bred fevers rarely) had dragged up, rather than brought up, a fine hardy family of sons and daughters; the eldest of whom, Tetbert and Emma, were the comeliest brother and sister in all that country side.

However, we have not time nor patience now to describe the whole home-circle of our humble Hal's belongings; suffice it to say, that there were curly-headed boys and girls of all sizes, and at present no goodwife to look after them, for she had sickened and died two winters agone; so Emma did a mother's part to the young ones at home, while the sturdy Tetbert helped his father in the forest.

Emma, a nut-brown maid, with ruddy cheeks and coal-black eyes and hair, was known for the merriest and handsomest lassie for many a long mile of the Pilgrim's Way; and her father's hovel hid in hazels at the edge of the silver-barked beechwood was often made gay by the song of the wayfaring minstrel, the gossip of the lingering pedlar, and the strings of pack-horses whose human accompaniments somehow found it pleasant and convenient to water their weary beasts at Hal the woodman's well: that sunny-faced little gypsey Emma was so cheerful, so pretty, and so good-natured to all wayfarers.

Rest assured, the rumour of this young wood-nymph's beauty was not long a-reaching the greedy ears of Vipont and De Watteville, Prince John's well-matched pair of parasitical panderers: and more than once had they led the hunt that way, and their precious royal master had pretended to taste a cup of innocent cold water at the hands of the forest Diana. Be certain, also, that the leash of titled caitiffs had deeper and darker thoughts of burglary as regarded the poor woodman's chief domestic treasure.

Now, within a mile of Hal's hovel, there is a still clear lakelet buried in a thick jungle of box, hollies, and other evergreens, overshadowed by old beeches: it appears to be a deep indentation or chasm in the chalk-hill-side, possibly dug out by our troglodytic ancestors, or later, in the Beauclerc's time, when chalk and stone began to be used for building purposes; many an ancient wall hereabouts having been reared of alternate layers of hard chalk and burnt bricks. Whatever then be its origin, there still exists in wonderful calm beauty our "Silent Pool;" where in the deep clear water, a mirror to the speck of blue heaven above, and the spreading trees that almost arch it over, you may even now see the large trout, moving more like lazy tench than any swifter fish among the groves of tall green reeds below; and you may note how suddenly, after shelving sides, the middle becomes some twenty feet deep, like a chalk-pit, however little you may guess that depth for the exquisite clearness of the water: perhaps in those troglodytic times, our mole-like ancestors unexpectedly tapped a strong spring which overwhelmed them and inundated all their little world.

Well,—to this retired spot, hidden deep in the forest, it is small wonder that, in summer time especially, our wood nymph often steals away to bathe; a picturesque fact, as well as the probable time whereof, which was unluckily made known to the curiously enquiring Vipont by a poor unconscious little sister who told him of it; and kissed with all a child's gratitude the nice fine gentleman heartily for his comfits.

And this very ninth of August, 1193, at four after noon by the sun, it is small wonder that three brave gallants well mounted and apparently of high degree have found their way to the woodman's hovel, and are making themselves very popular among the children; ay, and with father Hal too, just home from trimming a thicket,—whom Vipont and De Watteville are disposing most favourably towards themselves by the deep interest they appear to take in divers local matters of forestry and woodcraft; and they actually give themselves the trouble to accompany the good man to see the famous oak of Westone, ten Beauclerc ells in girth; and—meanwhile, the third, a tall dark man in crimson and gold, canters away on his powerful white charger.

Tetbert, a shrewd young fellow enough, and not half so simple-minded as his father, did not at all like this needless condescension of such noble wayfarers; more particularly as on a former occasion he had seen one of them attempting to be somewhat too affectionate with his buxom sister as she handed him a cup of buttermilk; but the attempted kiss issued in nothing but a smart slap on the face. So Tetbert, guessing at human possibilities, secretly betook himself to the Silent Pool, threading the bye-paths; the stranger had cantered that way;—and in fact he saw his sister's peril at a glance.

Meanwhile, with happily no Damon meanly prying in the thicket, our rustic Musidora had doffed her scanty homespun, and holding by a friendly beech-bough was swinging in the clear half-depth shallow at side; for well had she been often warned by Tetbert, and by more than one sad legend of drownings in past days, not to trust the crystal treachery of Shirebourne Pond anywhere out of bough-reach. So then lazily swinging half in the water and half out, a dripping Naiad with her dark tresses all afloat, our wood nymph lay twining them with water-lilies.

There was a sudden rush along the narrow path of evergreens,—a splendidly appareled rider on a white steed,—a quick scream, and a loud laugh.

"Soho, my beauty,—'fore Gad and the saints,—but I've caught you, my pretty swan!"

The startled girl made a rush through the shelving shallow for her homely gear upon the bank,—but that dark rider had leapt from his horse, and stood over them; and she splashed back into the deeper water as far as the beech bough would let her.

"Aha, my blushing gypsey,—what, you foil me thus, do you?"

And that cruel rider leaping to the saddle again, forced his horse after her into the shallow.

Frightened and screaming, poor Emma loosed her hold of that friendly branch and waded as fast as she could chin-deep into the pool, followed now over the very saddle-bow by that prancing white horse and his furious rider.

"Curse her,—the girl escapes me,—"

He made a dash at her head,—but the poor despairing child took a further step or two quickly through the blinding water, and—with another had fallen over that subaqueous precipice, and was struggling in the clear still deep, twenty feet below!

The baffled John, uttering a blasphemous execration against his noble charger for having failed to reach "the chase," with cowardly caution backed to the bank again,—and was coolly wringing his doublet, when, glancing at the fatal pool, he saw two clasped hands leap for a moment above the water;—and was as suddenly made aware of a country kerne, running up the path.

"Where, where is she,—where's Emma?" shouted Tetbert, with a quick glance at the clothes.

"There, churl!" said the Prince,—quietly pointing to the middle of Shirebourne Pond,—and, as he pointed, those poor clenched hands came up again solemnly for the last time!

It looked like the appeal of innocence to Heaven against profligacy.

In a moment the brother had rushed in, and the shallow shelf past, had instantly dived to where he could see his sister, stark and still, lying on a bed of green weed in the bottom of that crystal chalk pit.

He dived plumb-down, and had not stopped to fling away his heavy cow-skin tunic: he dived eager to save, and the water rushed in at his open mouth: he dived with all his strength, and caught and clung to the heavy corpse, and tried and tried in vain to lift the precious burden with one brawny arm, while he strove to battle up again with the other: and his struggles grew fainter, but he would not let her go,—and, one more despairing effort, and then —a conscious calmness (such as those who die by drowning know) came over him; and the brother and sister are locked in each other's arms in the tranquil crystal depth of Shirebourne Pond; and the rippled surface is all smooth once more; and you may see the trout shoaling among the still green weeds around that naked raven-haired Sabrina, and her poor drowned brother in his cow-skin tunic.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SLEEPERS IN THE SILENT POOL.

"WELL, Prince, what cheer? but your Highness has taken a bath as well as the damsel, I see."

"Tush, Vipont," said the dark rider, meeting his well-matched mates in the forest path, close beside Hal's hovel; "Gadsteeth, man, I was like to have been drowned as the girl is; and the boy too by this time—"

"Drowned ?"—it was Hal's voice still dodging the gallants.

"You'll be raising the devil, Vipont; silence,—I say: and let us to Gilford Castle at once, before the country's up: ill news will be sure to travel quickly."

"Drowned?" again asked Hal the woodman, "what said you, my masters, drowned? the girl and the boy,—whose girl and boy?—and there's no deep water to drown in hereabouts, but Shirebourne Pond,—one can't adrown in a trout stream or a marsh."

But the gallants had put spurs to their horses, and had left the woodman wondering.

He didn't wonder long. "Tetbert!" where was Tetbert? "Emma!" and the little ones all knew where Emma was: so off he strode to the Silent Pool.

It was smiling in its usual placid loveliness: great silver beeches stretching as to shake hands across the clear deep water, edged with greenerie all round, but in a pure white shelving basin of chalk: every object was reflected as clearly on the water as it stood above, and the very swallows as they dipped for insects might see themselves there mirrored as in crystal.

Poor Hal saw nothing,—not even the tell-tale garments lying at the root of a beech:—but he did pick up a notable prize,—a red feather with a jewelled coronet clasp,—and he remembered the dark horseman in crimson to have had exactly such a feather in his cap. So he picked it up and stuck it in his own,—just to prove (if he met his lordship) he wasn't agoing to steal it, but intended honestly to give it back to the owner.

And poor father Hal went peering and poking round the pond,—it had then as now, many winding paths with indigenous box, and holly, and beech, and yew, all true chalk-lovers, round it—thinking of and seeking for somebody's drowned girl and boy somewhere: it must be in the water, surely: so he looked, and looked everywhere but in the right place,—for he walked round the pond and examined its edges.

All at once he saw a great crowd of fish steering one way; and there, deep down in the middle, and half-hidden by green weeds, lay—he knew them at a glance,—his Emma and his Tetbert!

Ay,—and he knew the whole horror at a glance,—his naked girl, his noble boy that would have rescued her—this feather-bauble of that dark rider (he had wondered to see the gallant gentleman so wringing wet) those flattering parasites,—his own duped folly, and his darling, only saved from dishonour by death. He knew and saw it all in an instant,—and vowed vengeance!

What vengeance of a churl could reach a noble?—with a sickening sense of impotence,—and yet another thought of an Englishman's habitual self-reliance, he stays his righteous hope of vengeance for awhile, to consider what's to be done now, on the moment, for the best.

Without one outward token of excitement, the woodman first blew a blast upon his cow-horn, in case any forester or other friend might be somewhere within hail to help; and then with his billhook he set to cutting down a tall oak sapling, with a hook near the root; and then, wading carefully to the edge of the deep water, he managed to get a grip of poor Tetbert's cow-hide girdle with the hook, and thus to bring the bodies up,—both bodies, I say,—for the one corpse held the other in death with a grasp like that of life. Hal moved them nigher to him, but could not lift them over the ledge; without help all was useless, so again he plied the cow-horn; and at last help came.

"Hi, neighbour Hal; what is it?" quoth Wulf the cowherd, and with him a theow of good Sir Tristrem's.

"Hither, mates," said the solemn voice of grief.

"Hither! help a father to bring up his dead children from the grave."

The good men got into the water, and gave their sturdy help; and within two minutes Tetbert and Emma, both dead, were laid upon the green sward at the end of the Silent Pool, where those poor garments lay under the beech; with reverent haste they wrapped them round her; and so the two theows carried home upon their shoulders those comely corpses, poor Hal following sorrowfully but sternly.

CHAPTER XX.

LYING IN STATE.

WHEN Stephan Langton, on his solitary hill-top, heard of this fearful tragedy, its details affected him strangely.

This was the ordeal of persecuted innocence by water, even as his own had been by fire. It was another victim of that same bad Prince, who virtually Regent now, anon was to be demonstrated the very King-curse of England. It was a new call for him to be up and doing, and working for his poor down-trodden country, that at some time it haply might be free. It demonstrated again as oftentimes before, how feudal tyrannies had chained down English liberty, and how much need there was of a champion in the Church as the only probable antagonist to the overwhelming and unlimited power of the despotic Crown.

Long had Father Stephan, from his out-spoken counsels to the travelling thousands on the Pilgrim's Way, become personally obnoxious to John; if, indeed, the Prince guessed not that the forester-incendiary of Tangley Manor was now in truth the monk-incendiary of St. Martha's. Long had he been known, even in that comparatively contracted sphere, to be the teacher of thoughts that ran like wildfire through the kingdom, till they culminated years afterward in that volcano for mere Norman feudalism and high kingcraft, the Great Charter.

And now, it seemed his wisdom to be up and stirring; here was another special call,—and everyway the nearer and louder to him, because of all men kind good Hal the woodman, his helper and abettor on that sad May-day, was now the tyrant's victim; and Stephan Langton had herein to pay a debt of gratitude as well as one of patriotism and of justice.

Down from St. Martha's with his cross-bearer and his pair of incense boys came Stephan solemnly to the woodman's hovel: and there, beside the Pilgrim's Way, on a spot marked even to this hour by a large erratic boulder of conglomerate stone, he laid out decently beneath the Cross those two poor dead corpses; the handsome youth and the beautiful girl, who heretofore had made poor Hal the richest and proudest of fathers.

For three full days stood the good monk of St. Martha's at their head, and a chorister swung incense at their feet,—and all the many passers-by clustering round whispered about it;—and especially noted, with many a muttered look of hate and rage, the Prince's jewelled feather still in Hal's cap, set on a staff beside these silent yet eloquent victims.

Be sure, though Stephan said nothing but the requiem, and though these dead were resters rather than actors, a continual sermon was being preached to all that passed by, of human oppression as well as of divine ordinance.

They spoke to each other, those multitudinous wayfarers, not alone of death and judgment to come, and the sorrows of this evil world and the comforts of that better one; but also, nigher home, of poor England and her prospects. O that good King Henry, now three years in the grave, had been more blessed in his children! Woe, that his sons turn out so ill: there was Harry the eldest an open rebel, though his too kind father made him partner of his throne,—and Richard, our present king, where is he after all his undutiful conspiracies? away from his people fighting other folks' battles in the East,—or rather as we think a prisoner somewhere: and he leaves us this wicked brother John to be our tyrant, as a State counterpart to that foreign Churchman the notorious Longchamp.

Then they pointed to the Prince's feather, and without controversy every gossip added something still more dreadful to this hinted tragedy; and the hundreds of pilgrims constantly oscillating between Canterbury and Winchester carried on the exaggerated story and wafted it throughout the length and breadth of the land by means of other pilgrimages: and so it came to pass that our woodman's son and daughter, drowned at Shirebourne Pond, attain to the historic dignity of an aid in the development of English liberties.

For, as I have said above, and as we soon shall set before you in detail—besides and beyond these popular influences,—this whole tragic incident of Tetbert and Emma occasioned a most important change in the career of Stephan Langton; and mightily advanced the cause he lived for. And it came about in this way.

The Prior of Newark received soon after these events, by express command of Prince John, a summons from the sheriff of the county to give up the incendiary monk who was exciting "our good lieges" to rebellion on the highway between Winchester and Canterbury. It was an imperative command, and the Prior must obey it, on pain of probable destruction to his monastery; and therefore, to save his friends from their dilemma, as well as himself for future efforts in the cause of liberty, Stephan must hide away as he best could: he was a shrewd man, and managed it wisely. We shall hear of him anon no doubt.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PRINCE'S FEATHER AT GILFORD.

In another way, however, and a truly momentous one, the tragedy of Shirebourne Pond and its episode of the Prince's feather became incidents inwoven with the history of England: as your patience shall immediately discern.

The funeral of John's last victims, with that tell-tale badge laid upon their bier, duly took place in the old churchyard of Aldeburie; it was followed by wellnigh all the county; and the two comely corpses, covered by one large white pall well sprinkled with flowers, the heads and feet being exposed, were lowered together into a deep wide grave among the groans and cries of an excited multitude; they lie a little northward of the great yew in the south-west corner.

Good old Sir Tristrem lent his venerable presence to the scene, and with his wimpled dame and their daughters comforted by many kindly words poor broken-hearted Hal and his wondering little ones: who were all, father and children, forthwith after the sad ceremony, adopted for one office or another into the service of the good knight's household. Hal put off his cow-skin, combed his elf-locks, and donned with his forester's leathern frock manners more suited to his new position than the rudeness of his former self the kern; while as for the little ones, room enough was found for their pretty faces in the banquetting hall at those happiest hours of the day the meals, while at other times they made themselves severally busy or useful in the dairy, or about the stables, or by the spinning-wheel, or learning the mysteries of laundressing or pagery.

But Hal had a constant sorrow at his heart, and a weight upon his brow: so one convenient day, as soon as might be, he sought out the good old knight, and craved leave to speak with his worship; he brought with him the feather.

"Well, true-man Hal, and what wouldst thou of the master?"

"If it might please thy reverend worship, I made a vow at yon full grave before God and his saints; and I must keep it."

"Justly, true-man, and thou shalt too. What might it be?"

"To give this feather to its owner face to face."

"Hal, I should know that badge, the cluster of five arrows,—it is the Prince's; nay, we may all but say the King's; for Richard the Lion is away among the Saracens, and his Brother John protects the realm meanwhile."

"Protects, Master?—ay, as the kite protects a dovecote."

"Natheless, good Hal, he is both mighty in strength and terrible in the using it; and wouldst thou tax him to his face with—"

"Ay, ay, my Master; with thy good will and Heaven's blessing; for that was in my vow."

"And it shall be kept, Hal: leave me, and I'll speed your errand by the morrow."

The arts of reading and writing were not quite such uncommon accomplishments in the end of the twelfth century, as our modern complacency is willing to suppose; in fact, there were then in existence probably many more waggon-loads of manuscript than could be found now, if we except only the daily avalanche of letters; and so Sir Tristrem wrote, for he could write, though slowly belike and painstakingly enough, a commendation of his faithful theow Hal, the forester, to the Baron Fitz-Walter at the court of Prince John in Gilford Castle, praying his friend and loving cousin, the good lord aforesaid, to speed his servant's errand; to wit a public audience of the Prince.

And so with next day's dawn Hal set off on horseback on his mission to Gilford.

Though the distance was no doubt geographically no further in those days than at present, and actually the same for crows, still the total absence of what we should now consider a practicable road, and the roundabout methods of overcoming swamps and fens, made a few miles a good day's journey; and so it might well be nightfall ere Hal and Gilford town became acquainted.

Gilford Castle is now reduced to little more than the shell of its Keep: a plain square tower, some seventy feet in height, with walls three yards thick; roofless, grey and crumbling; built of chalk ragstone and flints, varied by Roman herring-bone masonry; some of the chalk lumps in the recesses being carved with rude figures of a king and a bishop, a saint and the crucifixion, possibly the work of some ancient prisoner, possibly also of some more modern puzzler of pundits and archæologists. For all else, as we have it now, there is extant little but a ruined porch or two, certain arched and vaulted crypts under houses in the town, some fragments of walls above ground, and much more extended foundations beneath.

But in the day of which I write Gilford Castle was a vast and populous place of strength and habitation, running far over what is now the chief county town of Surrey, and comprising within its wide enclosure of mounds and bastions a labyrinth of single-storied wooden dwellings, guard-rooms and kitchens and dormitories by scores, and in chief the principal hall of audience, lofty and insulated, surrounded by its courtyards, and with a plentiful sprinkling of cabins, honeycombed against the inner walls. Furthermore; for escape to beleaguered friends within, or surprise to besiegers without, there were (and are still, though walled up by our magistracy as perilous) several subterranean gangways cut in the chalk hills whereon the Castle stands, leading to five vast cavernous excavations; one of them fifty feet by twenty and ten high, another a hundred and twenty feet long by thirty broad;—and so on: the passages leading thence by several ways into the open country.

The Castle had its usual history of cruelties and crimes; but the most noted of its bloody records was the massacre, with previous terrible torture worthy of Spanish Inquisitors or our Sepoy mutineers, of Prince Alfred the son of Ethelred and six hundred of his followers, treacherously invited to taste what then was called Gilford hospitality, by Godwin, Earl of Kent.

And now in the days of John,—virtually King, and in a few years hence actually so on the death of his brother Richard the Lion in 1199,—many were the hideous deeds whereof those walls were conversant; principally against unhappy Jews, whose riches tempted extortion, while their then most hated creed provoked extermination everywhere.

Hal the woodman,—now dressed more courtly as an esquire,—soon made himself known to the retainers of Baron Fitz-Walter, then doing suit and service to his suzerain the Prince at Gilford for sundry demesnes, lordships and manors in the neighbourhood. I need not detail our humble friend's audience with that great lord; nor how entirely the whole story the poor man had to tell went to the heart of one, who was his outraged nation's most valiant helper in those evil days.

Let it suffice to say that Hal met with all encouragement, not only from Fitz-Walter, but also from many other Barons and Knights, who (very much by Stephan Langton's influence) had long been ripening fast into rebellion against tyranny, and nearing the lists of deadly contest with the King for the People's rights.

Accordingly, next morning he followed in the throng to the great hall where John was holding his court; and took his station among the well-armed retainers of Fitz-Walter. Rest assured, no Baron trusted himself to John out of his own steel coat, nor ungirt by a few score faithful villanes by way of body guard.

It was a scene of feudal pomp, circumstance and ceremony.

At the further end of the hall sat Prince John, robed in royal splendour; and elated even to usurpation of the sceptre of England from the issue of that recent conference of all the realm's estates at Reading, which had degraded from his office as Protector King Richard's favourite, Longchamp. He wore, as Lord of Ireland, the celebrated present sarcastieally sent to him by Pope Urban III., a coronet of gold fillagree plumed with peacock's feathers: and he was throned in a gilt Gothic chair on a dais, under its gorgeous canopy ablaze with heraldic emblems; but his own black brow and truculent countenance contrasted only the more darkly with the gay colours and dazzling cloth of gold all round him.

Close behind, in a gaily-vested crowd, stood the gallants whom he counted friends—chiefly a loose lot of the courtier extravagants who usually encircle a bad king, but among them some few good barons and gentlemen, such as Hubert de Burgh, Erdington, Ferrers, Lucie, and others, whose high sense of honour and duty ever bound them to the Crown, however worthless might be the head that wore it. Beyond these, ranging right and left in that half-circle, in their accustomed armours and heraldries stood many a neighbouring Baron and Knight, with their liveried esquires and men-at-arms; chief amongst whom for bold front and princely retinue were Hamon Crevecœur, Roger de Loseley, Hugh Poyntz, Ranulph de Vaux, and Robert Fitz-Walter, Baron of Baynard's. The hall itself—long and wide and lofty, rudely arched, and heavily cross-beamed and timbered overhead—was hung with banners and escutcheons; a few files of strangely accoutred halberdiers and foreign mercenaries interposed between the courtly upper end of the hall and the popular lower end, where a multitude of the commons, from the portly merchant to the shaggy serf, watched the proceedings as well as they could, over or between "the blunt monster's own uncounted heads."

Something was going on in the middle—what could it be?

Half-a-dozen wretched men with unmistakeable Hebrew faces, bearded to the waist, and in long brown gaberdines, stood, tied together in a string, like pack-horses, at one side, with a guard of the royal mercenaries jeering them. But what is going on in the middle?

Two figures in red, hooded and hideous with eyeholes, are bending over a wretched Israelite, who groans feebly on the floor as they twist the sticks tighter.

"Again, minions—harder! there's yet another turn to the screw! Ha!—'fore Gad, but this obstinate Jew should be worth a thousand marks to us!"

The Prince's harsh voice grated hatefully on the ear, and there were murmurs of commiseration all over the hall, and a sound as of swords thrust back into their scabbards. For, hateful as the Jews were then to all Christendom, and much as all classes coveted their wealth and were vengeful of their usuries in getting it, still no Englishman in any age ever could endure to see a fellow-creature tortured, and the very Barons, who had the most monied interest in getting rid at once of the Jewish morgagees and their bonds and judgments, could ill brook to gaze upon human agony extorted by rack, faggot, or screw.

So Fitz-Walter took occasion of that ominous rustle in the crowd to step forth with a petition: would his Highness deign to hear a message to be delivered by one of the good villanes of Sir Tristrem de Braiose?

The Prince, perhaps not sorry at the interruption, for he wotted shrewdly how ill he could afford to gain any more unpopularity, waved his hand to those scarlet-hooded myrmidons, and commanded,

"Away with the Jew, and all his cursed brethren; and, look you, Merlebois, and let your Brabant halberdiers too see to it, that three thousand golden marks at the least be screwed out of yonder tribe of Naphthali."

With that the array of insolent mercenaries march with their prisoners out of the hall.

"How, now, fellow!—what would you of our Grace?"

For Hal, the woodman-squire, after that noisy exit of the Prince's guard and those unhappy Jews, had stepped forth, and was walking firmly up to the presence with the composure of a free, frank Englishman.

"How now, again! Speak, churl!—your errand quick, or by—"

"Sir Tristrem de Braiose greets your Highness, and has bade me come and plead before the throne. I claim justice at thy hands, Royal Prince."

It was a key-note that struck upon the universal heart of that dense throng: there was a hum of applause, and then all were hushed and leaning forward.

"How, sirrah? speak out: justice!—are we not just, Gadsteeth?"

And there was another whispered rustle of flattering speech among the courtiers.

But Hal spoke, when it had subsided, solemnly and quietly—

"I am the father of two murdered children, and their murderer is in this hall—before God and all his saints, I claim justice on the culprit of your highness."

It was a golden chance for popularity; so the Prince said aloud, and well the crowd applauded it—

"Justice you shall have, man. Show me the murderer"

The metamorphosed woodman (for none could have recognized rough Hal in the splendid Braiose livery) folding his arms, calmly looked round that great assembly: with steady eye he slowly swept the circle once and again, and then returned his glance upon the gilded dais.

And he said almost in a whisper, but the hall was still as midnight—

"The murderer left his gage upon the fatal scene, and I have vowed to return it to him face to face."

With that the woodman drew from his vest a feather with a golden badge at foot, and, stepping forth, flung it at the Prince!

Pale as death, and trembling with rage and shame and terror, John cowered on his throne, and the whole hall rang with clattering arms and shouts and execrations.

Vipont at his elbow whispered to him earnestly.

"True, Sir Knight!—thou hast counselled us well. Ha! fellow, remember the Jew. Hark back my minions, Chamberlain Hubert!—this is treason, and shall have bloody punishment upon the spot."

There was an uneasy shudder through the hall, and a dead silence.

Then after a whisper with his nearer neighbours right and left, Fitz-Walter strode forth, drew his sword, and lifted it on high, not as if to strike, but in the act of adjuration; in a moment, by an instinctive impulse, every Knight and Baron there had done the same. And thus they stood, protesting against wrong, with drawn uplifted swords, in eloquent silence.

John was thoroughly appalled: haggard and wild with fear, he turned him right and left, like a craven as he was, to those silken flatterers, who felt the crisis come—his very bodyguard, the Brabant mercenaries, were all gone off to torture those vile Jews, and John was at the mercy of his injured people.

But Fitz-Walter broke up the scene—

"Let all who love England follow me!"

There was a mighty moving, for no one seemed to wish to be left behind; yet each man went out orderly and sternly as one marching to duty, and its place of peril. In a few moments that great hall was cleared, saving for the humiliated abject John, and his few partizans and parasites.

"Nunkey," then squealed a parti-coloured dwarf, jumping from the foot-stool of the dais, "why do you send away all your guests so soon? Lackland is Lackfolk too, quoth the fool! Eugh!—it'll be cold quarters here anon for the Gilford Christmassing."

But Cantelupe kicked him down the steps, whence th damaged mannakin looked up ruefully.

CHAPTER XXII.

AS TO OUR AUTHORITIES.

It is not my plan, nor wish, nor will, to be the tedious chronicler of English history year by year in this disastrous time, nor indeed, let me confess it, at any other. Nothing could be easier, nor more wearisome, than to transcribe, with vast appearance of antiquarian research, morsels "inne ye choyceste offe spellynges" out of lusty old Holinshed Rapin and Speed and gossiping Sir William Dugdale; nothing would be more expeditious as to the craft of mere bookmaking, nor of less toil in the way of pains-taking independent authorship than, by such piecemeal plagiarism, to make up a miserable historic patchwork of the troublous times of John, equally complicated with those contending chronicles themselves, and to boot as utterly unreadable.

But all this sort of thing for its easy dishonesty your present historical romancer can afford to despise, and for its dreary but unthankful labour to abjure: his business is to paint up scenes and develope characters, bearing in mind, but without any overt intrusion of such lore, all true dates, incidents, and circumstances; content, and trusting for like contentment in his discriminative reader, with calling up generally true and distinct pictures of that fierce transition era in our social geology; and with touching, sketchily, but according to real facts, the manners and character of our fore-fathers, so vindicatory of their fitness for the work, unto which Providence then ordained them.

If I stay not to dot these pages with asterisks and references, nor make a parade of learning by dull detached notes and ever-skipped appendices, it is not because the toil which they imply has been altogether prætermitted: it were easy to give pictorially an erudite reason for almost every epithet in a scene or a dress; I might quote some obscurest chronicler for each physical incident as it occurs; and might demonstrate to the satisfaction of the deepest metaphysician how truly through circumstances we are gradually exhibiting and accounting for the time-honoured character of Stephan Langton.

He is to be the princely priest, the patriotic baron, the firm controller alike of kingly tyranny and of the counterpoise usurpation of popes; the purifyer of a corrupted clergy, and the restorer of freedom to an oppressed laity: therefore it must be that only through much change and trial, tribulation and self-sacrifice, we can build up so forcible and fine a character.

The boy's early forest-life and love, the Devon abbey's chorister and the Lincoln baron's page, the hero of that frightful catastrophe at Tangley Manor, the despairing monk of Newark, the meditative priest of St. Martha's; and through all a man waging a personal heart-conflict with his own passions and affections and with that evil Prince beside, all these hitherto have fashioned Langton in our view for his life's great future and his country's present good: and we shall yet see throughout and even to the end, that the fashioning of character is providentially accounted for, and runs through the tissue of this tale as a thread of silver in the serge cloth.

Consider, that we are concocting a twelfth-century man's biography; the history, actual as to its telescopic broad facts, and probable as to its now undiscoverable microscopic details, of an old-time great man's almost untold life; and in following his career, we can touch incidentally only the records of the time in which he lived. You shall have all things true, or very like the truth; no known fact of the great Prelate's life omitted, no legend overlooked, and very few contemporary historic incidents unwoven into our story; but nobody's patience need be tormented with elaborate extracts from the chroniclers; though everyone's faith may safely trust our honest diligence for due (even if unquoted) authorities, all along the pictured paths by which as hitherto we hope to lead you.

In one thing, however, it is only fair to suggest, a modern writer must be continually at fault in an attempted reproduction of old times and men and manners. It is impossible altogether to steer clear of petty anachronisms, whereby the merest smatterer in word-criticism may prove me or any other such romancer oftentimes in a trifle wrong; for without the use of new words and new ideas, one cannot convey forcibly to a reader of the present time any just impressions of the past; the old names and archaic thoughts of things gone by have utterly perished with the things themselves, and a man must dig deep indeed into antiquarian obscurities to be able to produce with severe and chronical accuracy those details which involve infinite toil in their discovery, and after all said would be only incomprehensible in themselves, tedious, and misleading.

But enough,—and more than enough; understand me as stringing scenes of history on a thread of biography; and as being tolerably accurate in antiquarianism so far as one can well afford to be without seeming pedantic.

A general idea then of the condition of England at the close of the twelfth and the opening of the thirteenth centuries is in mournful truthfulness much as follows.

The realm, rent miserably by factions and internecine battlings between a vicious king and his contentious nobles, was made yet more intolerable to the bulk of its inhabitants by mercenary freelances and freebooters, ravaging and destroying everywhere. The king himself had imported tens of thousands of those licensed robbers, the Brabançois, Poictevins, Flamands and Gascons; and every baron had in his pay for similar purposes of body and castleguard other like ruffians; and, as usual, the people all over the land were in chief the sufferers (quicquid delirant reges, &c.,) cruelly ground down by enforced contributions; agriculture was then impossible, for none would sow a harvest he little hoped to reap; trade, beyond the rudest barter, was not yet invented, for the idea of credit entered not the mercantile mind; and altogether there was little chance for a man's livelihood in any way, short of poaching in the royal forests or attaching himself as another armed marauder to some fierce baronial chief. King John went about destroying the castles and domains of his rebellious feudatories; and they again took out their revenge against the castles and domains of himself and his parasitical adherents; the whole land was full of ruins, misery, brigandage, and desolation—and its sole history for many years was like the burden of the prophet's scroll, lamentation and mourning and woe: now the barons were in the ascendant, and now the king; but anyhow, and at all times, the people and their wretched homes were only made more wretched; and it mattered little to them whether monarchy or aristocracy was uppermost; in either event they were trodden down.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FITZ-OOTH AND MATILDA.

Now about the day of which we write, there flourished a famous English hero, of noble origin but broken fortunes, who is destined to figure in this tale as a very friend in need to Stephan Langton.

Robert Fitz-Otho, or Fitz-Ooth, Earl of Huntingdon, had been a wild and extravagant young fellow enough, and had easily managed by his prodigal hospitalities to dissipate an ample patrimony; that, castle by castle and knight's fee by knight's fee, had melted in the usurious crucible of the Hebrew moneylender. He, a baron born, had fallen into ignoble poverty; and then, as now, the full coronet must pay penalty for the empty purse; fallen from his high estate, and shunned by his monied meaner-hearted brother knights and barons, Fitz-Ooth in a generous rage abjured his birthright titles and mortgaged estates, and as an outlawed man stood for some forty or fifty years recognised King of the Forests—that is virtually of half England—under the plebeian name of Robin Hood.

Gathering about him a band of kindred spirits, and inspiring into them his own heroic nature, he became in those troublous times quite an Estate of the Realm, a free independent link between an oppressed people and their tyrannical misrulers: always befriending the poor, helping the wronged to his right, and, from the influences of a picturesque true circumstance soon to be recorded, the constant rescuer and refuge of imperilled womanhood, whether maid, wife, or widow; so this best and most gallant of knights-errant did no small good, and filled no unworthy niche in his generation: a pretty long one too, for he died at the respectable age of eighty-seven.

And Robin had for co-workers with him, sundry rough and right-good fellows, whose acquaintance we may slightly make anon; but I will mention first of all, as courteously bound, among them, though not of them, Robin's truest mate and best ally, Maid Marian.

Her story, so far as sundry conflicting annalists and poets have recorded it, may be gathered very nearly to be this.

Matilda, daughter of Fitz-Walter, Baron of Baynard's and Dunmow, was too beautiful not to have attracted early the roving attentions of young Robert Fitz-Ooth, too beautiful also not to have secured a like questionable compliment from the bad Prince John. Our chroniclers have a terrible story (fortunately not quite true) against the latter-named of Maude's admirers: as how, after having made divers rude attempts to steal, forcibly or by fraud, the maiden's favour, the baffled royal profligate graciously condescended to destroy her, out of mere revenge, by the present of a pair of poisoned gloves: poor Maude, if true, that pair of gloves had been cruel payment for a kiss: and they even show you now-a-days her tomb at Little Dunmow, in the church, on the south side of the quire, between the two pillars there: where may be seen a sculptured effigy, painted as pronouncedly as some in the Crystal Palace; but in this case the flesh-coloured fingers are popularly supposed to have reference to the quite impossible tragic circumstance of aforesaid poisoned gloves having compassed her murder.

This, however, is all clear fable, due to the general appreciation of that detested John, who, as in all such cases, though black enough, has very carefully been painted by every limner (the present scribe perhaps included) much blacker than nature's dark original.

The fact seems to be, that to escape John's unpleasant importunity, and with a strong leaning towards the like importunity in its pleasanter phase of noble-hearted, though impoverished Fitz-Ooth, the fair Matilda incontinently eloped with the latter from Dunmow Castle: and, to the consternation of all her courtly circle, became the outlaw's forest wife.

Whether or not Friar Tuck was called in to perform a church ritual on the occasion there is now no chronicler to say; but it is more than a charity—it is a justice both to Robert and Matilda to credit such a respectable probability; for strangely enough we find that this celebrated friar, though popularly believed to be a mere cudgeller and rollicking jovial free-liver, was actually for many years retained about Robin Hood as his daily religious mass-man and confessor; he appears to have lived out a long life as regular chaplain to the band of bold spirits, who, in the article of death at all events, if not in life, needed ghostly consolation. That Friar Tuck could not have been the dissolute or gluttonous professor of monkery we irrationally suppose him, is self-evident; for Robin and his mates always deservedly made scarecrows of such hypocritical cormorants, and could never have tolerated in honour any such specimen among their band.

For my part, I believe well of Friar Tuck: and looking to the good influences of Maid Marian (always honouring and often rescuing young womankind especially), I take it to be an historical fact that Robert Fitz-Ooth and Matilda Fitz-Walter duly became "baron and feme" under the clerical, though most likely "unassisted" efficacy of the very Reverend Friar Tuck.

This mésalliance, however, was doubtless so displeasing to the proud circle aforesaid, that they devised the royal poisoning legend as a finale more creditable to their caste; the destroyer is at all events a king; and the paternal Fitz-Walter was easily persuaded, for the glory of his race, to forge a family tombstone confirmatory. Moreover, in aid of the compromised honour of two aristocratic houses, it seems to have been tacitly agreed by all parties concerned, that there should be a change of name and station forthwith: and the plebeian Robin Hood mated with a simple Marian as his forest-queen was thus destined to outfame the noble but obscure Fitz-Ooth, and the Lady Maude Fitz-Walter.

It is a mistake also to suppose that Robin Hood and his merry men were permanently attached to Barnsdale in Yorkshire, Sherwood in Nottinghamshire, or indeed to any other one fixt place. Wherever was a royal demesne, thither the noble outlaw went and conquered; he was the Nimrod of the whole realm, commanding justice to the poor, and taking largesse of the rich wherever he went: fat abbeys dreaded him, for heavy contributions levied he continually upon their stores of old sack and good canary, to say less of needful gold and garments, and all the other helps and comforts of life, whereof these drone's homes were to Robin and his men full hives; ay, and even strong castles, if they loved him not, and so were insufficiently hospitable, soon had cause to fear his presence; for Robin had the knack of winning away to him every best man round, and thus enrolled among his merry men the choicest and bravest spirits in England. Major tells us in the most indifferent Latin, that any one of the men of "Robertus Hudus latronum omnium humanissimus," was a match for any other four within the realm.

It is little wonder then, that among that mixed multitude in the audience hall of Gilford Castle stood Robin Hood and Maid Marian, duly disguised: he with a palmer's cloak and cowl on—(some derive the outlaw's alias from the hood he was at such times wont to wear)—she, with her pretty hunting gear (as we shall see her anon), muffled up in the trailing and large sleeved town woman's dress of the period. She might like to have a chance of looking on her father once again, poor girl;—and, for aught I can tell, might have spoken with him too, under the rose; and so have assured him of her happiness with the noble though beclouded Fitz-Ooth: at all events, when Fitz-Walter led the way to clear that cruel audience hall of England's lovers, and it gradually became as empty of men as an ebbed sea beach is of water, I noticed Maude and Robin early in the throng sidling up to the great baron, and seeming to be right welcome to his lordship's presence, though doubtless he said nothing about this greeting to her ladyship's lofty circle at Dunmow: nor to the churchwardens who so recently had made space, before the chancel, for that lying filial tomb.

Furthermore, of this last (be assured) he whispered nothing to his daughter; and I doubt whether bold Robin too ever heard of the aforesaid royal slanderings; or, depend upon it, his spirit would have spoken out at that Gilford gathering ere this.

That Fitz-Walter didn't credit it himself, is evident from his feudal following of John to Gilford, as Master of Baynard's by Vachery in the neighbourhood, an offset of the other Baynard's Castle in Essex.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FOREST KING AND QUEEN.

We left Stephan Langton hiding away for safety as best he could from the myrmidons and mercenaries of John; and by an author's privileged omniscience, combined with confidence in his reader's discretion (for you will not untimely divulge matters) I can tell you both the secret of his whereabouts, and all that followed.

The helpless old prior and good brotherhood of Newark (all pretty well personal friends of Stephan, and at all events foes of John) were in no small fear and peril for not giving him up at once to the vindictive Prince; but it is due to Stephan's wisdom as well as to their own after-sincerity to assure the public that, the first hour of warning past, they could not give him up, had they wished it, seeing they didn't know where to find him.

Right sure was Langton that by no common path or well-used highway (as highways then were, narrow deep channels of mud and stones and tree-logs) could he, a lone and persecuted priest, escape safely from St. Martha's and get to the coast: horsemen of the Prince's Brabançois infested every route and kept sentinel upon him by every recognized footway. But with characteristic prudence and secrecy he made his own shrewd plan and acted on it instantly.

First,—to give him time to turn round and save his friends of Newark the vexation of knowing where to find him if obliged, having duly consigned to Peter for safe custody to the Prior his invaluable manuscripts, Stephan secretly re-assumed his forester's dress, and, with his clerical garb and other matters in a bundle, sped across country straight over to the hundred of Blachefelde,—now Blackheath; where there existed a primæval Saxon settlement called Farlee.

This largish hamlet and clearing on the Ikenild or Icenian way had possibly been an Attrebate village in oldest times: thereafter the Romans had certainly possessed it, for your present confessor and his friends have found Imperial money there of some forty-five Cæsars and others, several hundreds in number, ranging from Nero to Honorius: and when the Romans were obliged to go home to save their central city from the Goths and Huns, the earliest Saxons mingled with the Britons (we speak certainly, for of all these have coins been found there, and pottery, and ancient weapons and even gems, inlaid brooches, and fibulæ, as the British Museum and ourself will testify) these Saxons plus Britons, I say, lived there in intermarrying harmony; and to this day we have relics of both races in the characters and names of our local rustics.

Stephan then, as a wandering stranger capable of a song and good at woodcraft, found himself welcome among the villanes of Farlee (on due payment) for a week or so: we must remember that five miles off in those days amounted to as good as fifty now: and so for distance he was well out of reach.

However, he must think and scheme quickly as possible for some refuge further: and, upon reflection, he hit upon this.

More than once, during those few sad years of his service at the shrine of St. Martha's, Langton had fallen in with sundry of Fitz-Ooth's followers, no doubt looking out for the spoil of wealthy travellers on the Pilgrim's Way: and very lately one of them had told him that "King Robin himself would be at Gilford before the other king made Christmassing there," and the man cheerily and fearlessly had said to Stephan—"Come to us anon among the Druids' yews, and I'll give thee good thanks there for thy prayers, good priest." For the man, in some sudden fit of conscientiousness not very uncommon with runagates of his kidney, had (I should have told you before) come to Stephan to confess many a wretched piece of wickedness and wantonness, and with tears and sobs had got what he came for, absolution rom them at the good priest's hand ω

Stephan therefore, by one of the deep lanes hereabouts which may well have been covert-ways of old for British or Roman strategies, passed hastily from Blachefelde down into the well-remembered vale of Aldeburie; and thence by the wild woods (infested, as was known, by wolves, and so fortunately free from those worse than wolves, common brigands or the bloody soldiers of John) carefully and quietly sped the three or four miles northward of the Farlee settlements, and duly found himself, after long struggling through the tangled forest of the Downs, in its nucleus the Druid's Grove.

Down in a hollow between the two great waves of the Downs,—then in every direction, for miles and miles away covered thick with trees and underwood—appeared a partial clearance of the surrounding jungle, due to the weed-killing presence of hundreds of gigantic yews: they seemed to be set as a serpentine avenue uniting circles: but withal so many wild ones had sprung up spontaneously, and so many hollow old ones had died away, and gapped out, that it nowhere was absolutely clear which might be the avenue and which the circle. All round about and like a wall of verdure, impenetrable to men not skilled in woodcraft and the sturdy use of the bill, stood a thicket a mile deep of hawthorn and holly, tangled up with wild-briar and high furze, and overrun by the most luxuriant ivy. To this sequestered spot, by following first a water-course and then a bear's track, had Langton gradually come.

And, as expected, he found company enough to greet him.

From the Down's hill-top, now Newland's Corner, mounting a tree to take his bearings as often needs must in threading such a jungle, he had noted a column of blue smoke in one of those old yew circles,—and he made for it warily,—so as not to expose himself to robbers or marauding gypsies, if probably enough encamping there. Warily too, he continued to creep on; until, just before emerging from the thicket, he saw—what you shall see if I can show it you.

Lying in all attitudes under a black old yew, or dotted about upon the middle sward as amusing themselves with one device or another, were some two or three score of stout looking fellows in a uniform livery of buckskin with green appointments; several of them were stripping boughs of yew, for the bowyer, sundry more splitting up ashen staves, for the fletcher; a few, idling round a huge bon-fire, seemed to be anticipating a right savoury feast, as some lumps of rich venison hung by chains from iron tripods set around, were twisting and hissing in the clear fat-fed flames: some other of the men were shooting at a mark—a dead leveret tied to a bending wand as in a moletrap, and already made a hedgehog of arrows; and divers others were listening and laughing round a good-humoured friar who appeared to be the intellectual life of the party. There were also plenty of women and children, and a kraal-like encampment of skin huts. Not a doubt of it, this was Robin's band, and here was Friar Tuck.

Stephan was just springing from his covert, when three distant scarce-heard notes of a bugle acted like a charm upon the scene and stopped him, so as still to be his own and our spectator.

The merrymen all, evidently in their holiday trim and expecting some such summons, fell at once into a wide circle, whereof the friar and the fire served nearabout for centre: a very tall franked-faced fellow standing a little in advance answered the distant bugle by three sharp blasts; there was a nearer blaring,—and another answer,—and a louder, and then another, and another,—and two yeomen prickers on wild rough ponies are galloping up the avenue; and after a space, more slowly advancing in a canter, is seen a splendid Flemish black stallion, proudly prancing and curvetting under the double burden of the Forest King and Queen.

Look at this comely pair,—before she leaps from the pillion, and he springing from the saddle after her salutes her on the willing rosy cheek, and then on one knee kisses her hand for homage. Look at them both, —he in Lincoln green with golden baldric bugle and hunting knife, and a bunch of flowering heath by way of tassel feather to his cap; she, kilted to the knee, in Coventry blue with pale yellow Greek trews of undyed silk, a mottled deer skin over her shoulder, bow and arrows at her back, highlaced fur sandals on her feet, and the fanciful garniture of a pair of roebuck's horns upon her head.

Look at his bold, happy, healthy face, with its curly black beard, and activity and masculine vigour stamped on every muscle of his body,—and look once and again at that bright-eyed, sunny-cheeked, merry-hearted, graceful and cheerful and happy and delighted Queen of the Forest.

What a shout of welcome,—and another, and another! till those grave old yews waved again as in a storm; and the startled black stallion almost reared away from the grasp of that herculean henchman who now held him.

"Good den to thee, John,—good den, merrymen all." It was Marian's silver greeting that,—and how lustily they cheered her again and again.

"Messmates, a hearty welcome to you all; how goes it in the forest, Little John? And how fares my curtall friar too?"

"Cheerily, Robin, and thank ye," sang out Tuck rotundo ore, for no one ever dared to say your lordship, nor show him more of awsome reverence than of rough forest love; it was against the rules of Grené-shaw.

"Ay, and here's a plenty of good cheer too, ready roasted for our 'Pollos and Dina,"—gruffly added henchman John; it was Friar Tuck's latest lesson that in classical mythology, though so nearly lost upon our honest John-a-Naylor. And to say but truth, the good friar habitually did his best to wile away the tedium of nights and bad weather, by a wholesome infusion of ingenuous literature, "that softens manners" (we may remember) "and forbids men to become wild beasts."

"What, my true cowled friar?—So you've been booking up our stripling lieutenant here to butter us with flattery, ey? Now this shall be a full bowl of salt and water to you, Master Tuck, unless you've loyally taught meanwhile our merrymen a new stave to greet Maid Marian withal."

In a minute, the friar's hand giving the time, the following greenwood jingle from the throats of fifty foresters rang for a good mile circle through the bush:

A welcome, a welcome! huzzah for the Queen!
Huzzah for the King in his surcoat of green!
Huzzah for Maid Marian, so gay and so good!
Huzzah for the forester's friend—Robin Hood!
A welcome! a welcome!—up, up with the shout,
Let listening hills and the woods ring it out,
Glad welcome!—huzzah!

A welcome to warn all the red-deer around,
And the wolf in his lair, and the foxes aground,
And the bears and the badgers—and barons and priests,
That Robin is come for his sports and his feasts,
That Robin is here with his Queen by his side,
To gladden the poor, and to trample on pride—
Glad welcome!—huzzah!

Meanwhile John-a-Naylor's quick eye had caught sight of a pryer in the thicket;—and if Langton hadn't instantly leapt forth, a feathered arrow had been rustling in his heart by this time.

"How now, sirrah,"—roared Robin Hood,—"a king's forester too! quick, what's your errand, man: mark you, we are out of the law here."

"I claim of Robin Hood protection from King John: no forester am I, though I seem so for disguise sake; I am Stephan Langton, monk of St.——"

"Robin, that is a true man and a good," hastily interposed Maid Marian,—"I mind me now that the abbess of St. Catherine's has given refuge to a poor child whom he saved out of Tangley fire."

"That poor child,—hast thou any tidings of her then, lady?"

"Nay, friend! be not so eager, she is safe and well in the nunnery, I trow."

Stephan's inmost heart groaned within him like a death knell. "And wilt thou, lady, if ever thou hast speech with her, say the poor monk, her own true knight Stephan, wears her chaplet even round his heart. She will know the symbol."

Turning then to Robin Hood, he said,

"May I have safe escort to the coast? all the highways and bye-ways are watched against me, and other way is none save through your forests."

"I'll take you myself," quoth Robin, "I owe a call of grace to the abbot of Canterbury: methinks, merrymen, there be harts of grease awaiting our fleches in his right reverence's park, and some good wine still mellowing for us among the cobwebs of his cellars."

It was a commonish jest that, and an ancient, but it always told; for it went home to that heart of hearts, the stomach; and it would have done the most sneaking casuist some frank open good could he have heard the gruff but boisterous laughter confirmatory of a meditated raid against the archiepiscopal refectory.

Arrangements were soon made; for not to be tedious, I leave to your imagination the savoury feast of venison washed down by good monasterial canary, and the buttered bannocks and honey, and cheese and curds and frummerty, and the after piles of pears and grapes and medlars,—all soon and in their turn discussed by that melodious and voracious company; for in verity they sang as heartily as they feasted.

I leave you also to conceive the journey preparations; and how with a numerous following on shaggy ponies and well armed they took the hill country way, and ever over the heights as closely as they could; and so for four days of weary and perilous wayfaring, till at length they neared Canterbury; where Robin, leaving his men well ambushed and cared-for in the deer-teeming park-forest, went alone with Stephan to the coast.

On the whole journey, no doubt, the heart of Langton (who had previously confided his sorrowful story to Maid Marian, finding she was to remain behind,) was too full of his own and his country's wrongs not to have out-poured them all at length into the sympathizing ears of Robin Hood: for in him Langton's keenness could discern a very useful link between the nobles and the people; if ever (as was likely) they made common cause against the king. Langton was the one superior intelligence to inform and direct all the combined brute forces, baronial, secular, clerical, and popular, that opposed the tyrant John; those forces being destined through the influence of his master mind to issue, after many struggles and with various fortune, in the reasonable liberties of England, subjective only to a constitutional monarch.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TELEGRAM OF ENGLISH HISTORY.

For, one-ideaed as it may seem to own as much, to my thinking the whole history of England is little more than a development of the Great Charter.

Anterior to its actual expression in set words, the principles of Magna Charta are those of our primitive common-law, the unwritten but universally accepted rights of indigenous freemen. That representative constitution, that limited monarchy, that liberty of conscience, speech, and conduct, within due and reasonable bounds, that rational self-government of the people by the people through their own elected officers, was only an improvement and an expansion by our early Saxon kings from the still earlier rights and customs of our so-called savage ancestry, the Britons—a people aboriginally free.

And when the Conqueror, introducing a strict feudalism, trod too heavily on a fierce and oppressed nation, England heaved up under the dynasty of his successor like a living earthquake, and even from the first Henry extorted a bill of rights: Stephen, of Boulogne, renewed it under like compulsion; while Henry the Second confirmed it with equal *duresse* felt and insincerity shown But each king in succession, not unaided by the cotyrannic church when her crowned son was only obedient, strove hard to retain or recover those absolute powers which he dared then to claim over the people as his divine right, his royal prerogative.

It was destined to be a perpetual struggle, though one that came so early to a head under the intolerable yoke of John; for with him occurs the crisis of the Charter; and thenceforth throughout long ages those continuous contentions between king and people, wherein British freedom was perpetually alternating between wounds and healing. Confirmed by the Third Henry, and with now, for the first time, the People in Parliament as an equal estate with King and Nobles, tyranny was checked, rational liberty vindicated, trade and commerce created and protected: and so with various fortune did the wrestling match hold on through many a reign between popular rights and tyranny; till the Wars of the Roses crushing the intermediate power of the Nobles by their own suicidal instrumentality, left alone to contend against each other the almost absolute monarch and his strong though down-trodden people.

Harry the Eighth, and that capricious tyrant our "good Queen Bess," illustrate exactly such an era; courtiers idolatrously fawning on the crown, and the crown by every device doing its utmost to act as an extinguisher to the lamp of popular liberty.

But anon, when the House of Stuart would tyrannize over England, uprose Cromwell and hurled that rough-rider from the saddle; all too rudely and cruelly, it is true, so that by reaction the dissolute Charles, welcomed as a gay and gallant foil to all that puritan hypocrisy, again had the reins well in hand: until James once more too rigorously daring, gave back to us by his expulsion our constitutional limited monarchy, virtually elective as of ancient times.

And from William of Orange's day to this, with various fortune in the detail, but reign after reign ever issuing in the people's triumph, that wrestling match of national freedom against irresponsible authority has gone on as a living Laocoon; until we are well-nigh come to the day not only when kings theoretically can not, but also practically dare not, do illegal wrong; and when the people, now having in them merged the nobles too, have secured by much effort their almost every right.

Happily for us, the most virtuous court ever known in the annals of mankind, and the prevalence of knowledge, good feeling, and good sense amongst our people, make a beautiful balance of Power and Liberty in this our day: but if ever the evil possibility should hereafter arise of a bad king, such as a tyrannical John, a cruel Harry, an obstinate Charles, or a bigoted James, the issue of the next great popular wrestle would be Sampson broken clear away from his bonds, the writhing Laocoon at last emerged a freeman.

But, let no true patriot desire to see that day—a day (let us hope) impossible for sundry generations; seeing that the root of British royalty hath so terrible a fixed foot in the foundations of our insular imperial England, that it could not be torn up to make that empire a republic without more blood and woe and devastation than have cursed any land since the desolation of Jerusalem.

Not all the ravagings of Hun or Goth, not all the waste of life in the Crusades, not all the horrors of the John-time Baronial struggles, or of the after Wars of the Roses, or of Napoleon at Moscow, or of Robespierre in Paris, would amount collectively to a true picture of our now so blest and prosperous land, after it had miserably passed through the furnace of popular insurrection to find itself kingless!

We are freemen each and all, as all our fathers were or strove to be, God strengthening them; but freemen as of old to obey our chosen leader; and we wisely choose that leader to be an hereditary king; but woe to him and to us, if ever vice or folly force this docile giant, the Great People, to hurl him down from a throne he has disgraced, and drive our great Charter of Rights to its extreme interpretation of absolute and therefore tyrannous liberty

CHAPTER XXVI.

CALAIS.

I DID not stop my undesigned historical afflatus to tell of adventures by the way. No doubt, in such a time of peril, a week's travel must have been full of them. When an ever-hungry company have to kill, cook, and eat their venison daily, and are perpetually coming across bears and brigands, be sure their archery is kept in constant practice, and their woodcraft must equal that of the Red Indian. One matter, however, is worthy of some detail, seeing that the same incident (though probably unknown to Robin Hood) is recorded by Hollingshed of that third coequal with Becket and Wolsey the proud archprelate Longchamp; and, that great clerical dignitaries in more modern days have escaped in like vulgar guises, let Farini tell of Pio Nono on his hammercloth in the livery of his own footman.

On leaving Canterbury some special secresy was needful for our fugitive, and Robin hit upon a good disguise enough.

Who could have discerned our priest and the forester-king in yonder fisherwoman and her dirty husband travelling towards Dover with a donkey and panniers, smelling most anciently and fishlike of herrings? Robin was sow-westered, and tarpaulined, and be-buskined with fresh hide by way of boots: Langton's shaven face was haloed with a dingy red kerchief, and his frock enveloped in the blue coarse canvas petticoat and accessories of the genuine fishfag: then the ass and her pair of panniers were equally genuine,—and so the whole get up was indisputably a good one.

Once at the sea-side, all was safe and easy: Robin knew enough of watercraft to haggle out a good bargain with the skipper of a French herring-boat, and to arrange his seeming fishwife's voyage home to Calais as part payment for sundry inshore goods—skins chiefly—brought as for barter in those savoury panniers.

Langton was, of course, well spoken in French: at those times, even more than in these of the *entente cordiale*, let us recollect that France and England were intimately connected, and all but as one nation; our second Henry and some of his successors ruled over a fair third part of France, and (we may add) it is barely "sixty years since" the fleur-de-lis covered a good quarter of our third George's shillings. That the language of our courts, whether royal or legal, was then and thereafter, for many ages, French, we are popularly well aware; for example, to this day our Queen is pleased to say "Yea" in Parliament, by "La Reine le veut;" and even beadles call the lieges to silence with an "Oyez;" but in the era of our tale, the noblest gentry, almost as a rule, disused and scorned their mother tongue, which was left as a vulgarism to the Saxon commonalty: therefore it need be small wonder to us that the high-born Fitz-Ooth, and the deep-read monk of Newark were quite at home with France and Frenchmen.

At Calais, is it necessary to detail how mysteriously an old fish-wife with a bundle went into a chamber of the Couronne d'Or, and came thereout again a young monk with a bundle? no doubt Langton managed the metamorphosis cleverly and unobserved. An hostelrie in those days was so thronged with many comers and goers, and fish-wives and monks were commodities so multitudinous in Calais, that nobody took note of the disappearance of the one or the apparition of the other, while both fish-wife and monk having been discreetly liberal to the host so far as payment went, he at least had no cause to complain of his double customer.

And thus we may leave Stephan awhile, safe, because unknown, as a monastic sojourner at English Calais.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALICE THE NUN.

MEANWHILE, a long meanwhile too, how had it fared with sister Alice? We left her after that swoon of recognition in St. Martha's chancel, the meek convalescent of St. Catherine's nunnery.

Ah! what a difference to her was now the bitter-sweet assurance that Stephan was alive,—still her loving, noble-hearted, frank-faced, affianced Stephan,—but dead, stone-dead to her—a monk; while she was equally dead to him (she felt it)—a nun.

She could have borne anything but this, she thought: and, as in his case, her trial was aggravated by proximity. From St. Catherine's chapel she could see upon St. Martha's, clear against the sky, oftentimes a certain moving speck conjectured too surely for Stephan. He it undoubtedly was, that frequent watcher on yon hill-top; "the last brother of Newark and first monk of St. Martha's," as the sisters tormentingly but innocently told her, "one Father Langton, a handsome man, but a melancholy." Well she knew his eye had seen her there, the nun in her litter: and truly enough did she calculate on his yearning watchfulness continually towards St. Catherine's; even as in a like eager sympathy her eyes and heart were ever yearning on St. Martha's.

And in her case, the strife might well be even less endurable than in his: because a man has to do battle otherwise a thousandfold with the bustling world, and is full of avocations, occupations, incidents and interests; but for a woman,—and that woman a recluse in her lonely cell, what else can she have to wear away her heart upon day and night continually, but the one distracting thought of hopeless, hapless love? Destitute of the masculine heroism, the strong well-balanced mind so conspicuous in Stephan, poor Alice's gentler nature wellnigh sank to death in the struggle.

And the busy curious sisterhood, with their potions and fomentings, would have it that there patient had relapsed; some internal burn their must be—[how truly so!] that determinately resisted all their remedial simples; even though strangely enough for the outside all was healed; and the sister doing well, and getting about, and not like to be a cripple after all.

But for Alice there was one only remedy; and in her sore trial and distress of heart she clung to it devoutly, the Cross. In no superstitious, though a truly human feeling, she set her affections on One above, the only Lover of the Soul, the Virgin born, the true Husband of the heart-Affections, the Saviour who loved her with an everlasting love, and loved Stephan too; and thus suppliantly to Him, (and let our better light excuse the poor lorn maiden if to Holy Mary too, as her heavenly mother,) she poured out incessantly her sorrows, and her prayers, and her intercessions; and was comforted, as other saints and virgins have been comforted before her.

And now, would it not be truly a gain if that pious memory of Mary-Mother, and those admiring meditations on the character of Him who, ever mindful of His Mother through life, remembered her also on the Cross, brought intensely to the conscience and affections of Alice the nun her own parent, half forgotten belike in all this maze of trouble, but still no doubt our heart-martyr's bedridden old mother at Gomershal?

Indeed, the wish had oftentimes come over her to go home once again, if only for a day, and see her there, and comfort her about herself, the daughter lost and found; if haply any comfort could be drawn from the very well of her despair; but that frequent filial wish, a mere wish, not a will, had so usually been overwhelmed by more enthralling because more hopeless yearnings, as not to have reached the energy of action. Until that hour of true self-dedication to Jesus and Mary, our nun had made no definite effort to seek out yet once more in life her haply dying mother.

Now, however, in the calm of other earthly feelings through the still small voice of religion, the speedy fulfilment of this new longing occupied her whole heart, and became an impulse not to be resisted. As soon as ever her now wellnigh valid state of health might admit, not without the Abbess's kind leave and the loan of her litter, Alice's one great present hope was to show her mother that she still had a child who lived, and could love her.

It was probably all unknown to the duteous daughter's own seared heart, unsuspected by that love-stricken conscience, but there might well have been also many other reasons, in which thoughts of Stephan mingled, to urge her to that filial expedition. She must go by the Pilgrim's Way, must pass within sight of his dwelling place, might even see him ministering at St. Martha's, if she stopped awhile to pray there; how sweet, how sad, how perilous, how blest an interview!

And then again the natural longing for old scenes; she might manage to pass adown the very Lover's Walk under those fatal hazels, and so on to Aldeburie, and through the beautiful Park where she had been Queen o' the May, and thence by the dearly-remembered avenue of sycamores at Shire, where Stevie first had whispered marriage to her, and close along by the dear old church where her bridal was to have been, and so on to the well remembered Tower of Gomershal: whereby in a cottage up the lane was the widow's humble home.

How far any or all of these superfluous reasons influenced the poor nun, now recovered of her burns, to visit her mother, it might be small charity to calculate: but at all events she herself knew nothing of such possible influences; and, to her thinking, in all that happy mournful journey she had but to do the duty long-delayed of an affectionate daughter.

Now it is only justice to bear in mind that Widow Foyle was (to any apprehension but that of the newly awakened Alice) by no means an interesting person. The fussy housewife for a large cantle of married misery, the querulous invalid of many later years, had degenerated utterly at last into the phase of bedridden selfishness and peevish imbecility. Merely because such matters interfered with her wretched little comforts, she had set her face rigidly against the entrance of Love into her domicile: the visits of Nephew Stephan, though tolerated at first for the sake of his many liberal presents, became hateful to the old woman because it took away her daughter for awhile,—"and she'd stay away, the hussey, for a good hour at a time, that she would, to chatter with Master Langton:" ay, and more than once, when she had been dozing for weariness, or had been sung asleep by Alice, had that unnatural daughter left her to walk with him under the sycamores; and, as to May-day, Alice's presence at Aldeburie, and her Queendom and all, had been wormwood to old Widow Foyle, whose last words to her enduring daughter that morning had been poured out in a torrent of the meanest ill-nature.

Whether or not a casuistical moralist can discern aught of a discriminative judgment on our loving couple for their disobedience to that inconvenient old mother, I need not stop to enquire: at all events, her own utter want of consideration and amiability earned for itself the fitting punishment of a long unavoidable desertion. For months and months did the old woman have no one whereupon to vent her grumblings but a hired nurse, who, a vixen like herself, gave as much as she took, and so kept Mrs. Foyle well under. This was no more than justice anyhow: although the other punishments of our martyred pair, the burning and the misery, and their mutual despair in nunship and monkhood, may well be thought greatly in excess of the case's equity. Let us consider that when Providence raises up a man for great events, the same Providence has to train him in the school of adversity: and if Langton must "suffer to be strong," the sentence must needs go forth somehow against his Alice also.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PILGRIMAGE TO GOMERSHAL.

On a certain set day then, long looked for and thought of anxiously, sister Alice and a bevy of nuns, littered and palfreyed, and in a great flutter of excitement, set out on their Aldeburie pilgrimage; to them a long one and a delightsome.

The first halt of interest (to Alice indeed superlatively so, but she kept her soul's secret by word and deed most sacredly) was Tything Lodge; where all the sisters were eager to see Father Peter and the kind Dame Margery, and the little room where Alice lay so long, and all about it; that same little room being everything to her for a far better and a present cause, *his* usual abiding there: she had heard often how that the zealous good monk of St. Martha's lodged with Father Peter; and there was no other guest-chamber she well knew. Many times had she been told of his kindness in almsgiving (the pilgrims said he was quite a saint, that monk) of his wonderful book-learning, and enthusiastic piety; many times had she yearned to send him, by a wayfarer, some message of kindness: but in exquisite generosity she would not selfishly disturb his peace of mind: how could the poor girl guess he was not, as she thought him, peaceful, pious, and content?

And often (you be equally sure) he too had asked of many a like pilgrim how the poor burnt sister fared, to whom Peter and Margery had been so kind, and the Lady Abbess of St. Catherine's had so liberally given refuge; and he had heard of her devotional ecstacies with the same sort of hopeless consolation: only so, could Alice be at peace—

only by religion be comforted—should he venture to disturb her by a selfish word of kindness? No,—no! And therefore it was wise and kind in him too to send no messages. Both lived on sadly and sternly in a silent heart-martyrdom, the chill and the gloom of checked affections; a gloom hopeless indeed for both, and rayless except for the living light of religion.

But—alas for Alice's eager disappointed glance!—that well remembered room was empty; even bookless, robeless—without one trace of *him* there: what a blank!

No doubt he is on the hill-top serving by the altar; it's certain he must be there.

So Alice, of course, anxious to pay her vows on the matting again, as she did at the consecration, longs to be going.

But the sisters have brought quantities of needlework as gifts to Margery, and stores of confectionery for Peter (all at the instigation of the grateful Alice, rest assured, but just now she was strangely forgetting such matters) and everything has to be opened and tasted, praised and wondered at. So Alice is obliged to hurry them; and, promising a call some other day (O precious hope repeated!) the cavalcade ascend to the chapel.

All silent,—bare,—empty! neither can *he* have been there within some hours, for there was not even the sweet smell of incense. Where then could he be?

Alas, for thee, dear Alice, and for thy blighted yearning heart! Weep, yea weep and pray as thou dost at that most holy shrine,—not Beckett's shrine, but *his*—weep on, and let thy pent affections loose there like a flood-gate!

How wonderingly the other sisters praised her piety; no virgin in the calendar could have felt intenser fervours.

Yet let the disappointing truth be simply told: Stephan had left early this morning for his hiding-place at Farlee; and so she missed him by half a day:—is it to be for ever?

After this heart-blow she seemed to care little by which path they went on their journey to Aldeburie and Gomershal: all was blank, dark, full of sad thoughts, dreadful memories, dead hopes; and the kind sisters thought her religious ecstacies had been too much for her, and so they tried to cheer her:—to cheer her?

Well, they travelled by the Bloudic Hedges, and past Hal's deserted hut at Westone, and then they skirt the Silent Pool, and the Silverwode, and thereafter painfully through the tangled jungle wherein Shire is lapped (she was to have been married there, under that now flamboyant east window!) and, at last, late in the summer's evening, they have come to Gomershal.

The sisters and their palfreys are cared for at the Tower, where a good esquire of Sir Tristrem's is glad enough to enact host to such a bevy of fair guests.

And again is love doomed to be disappointed; the poor nun's filial love too, that purest of all, now just alight again, when the other is blown out. Her hand is on the cottage latch.

Listening outside with tremulous fear, there is a sound of altercation: some cruel hireling seems to be scolding her mother; who answers, it is not pleasant this,—pretty sharply too, but how feeble in her rage,—can she be dying?

The veiled white nun softly stole in like a ghost, forgetful of the seeming terror of her presence in the twilight,—and silently stood beside the bed.

On the opposite side, that vixen nurse, with a scream of fright, rushed away to alarm the neighbours; but her mother (too near death to fear a disembodied spirit probably, or, as often happens, supernaturally enlightened to see truths, and yet shocked in her then weak state by this sudden apparition), intuitively recognising Alice, had only time to gasp out "God bless you—bless you—both!" when she fell back on the bed and expired!

So the nurse and her posse of neighbours returned just in time to take the fainting nun to her sisters at the Tower, and to pay the last rites to Widow Foyle.

On the return journey, after a sad day of scenes and friends revisited, and another equally sad, and another, —for the sisters had nearly a week's leave of absence, and would not be mulcted of an hour in their pleasant holiday,—Alice learnt the truth of Stephan's absence, and the whole story of Shirebourne Pond; and then she bowed her head in patience to the will of Providence, and knew it had been best they should not meet.

And since he was no longer on St. Martha's, watching her within sight as she felt (and that more than answeringly too, for how had she not yearned towards him day and night from St. Catherine's?) she could breathe more freely, went about her daily life of prayer and good-doing more cheerfully; and when, some while after his escape, Alice received Stephan's parting message from some emissary of the Forest Queen, her spirit felt, indeed, consoled, if not rejoiced: and for many days and nights did she reverie about that symbol chaplet, mutually their lifelong allegory; Love and Patience, Remembrance and Faithfulness, Sorrow and Happiness to come—all bound up as in one, though with the five-fold repetition of life's unsabbattic days, on that single circle of imperishable silk, Eternity.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LETTERS AND A LOCK OF HAIR.

Now it was in this way that Alice heard of Stephan.

Hal, hovering as his wont was about Silverwode and the Silent Pool, happened to catch sight of that white pilgrimage on its return from Gomershal: and, following for curiosity or perchance in courteous hope of usefulness, caught sight also of Alice's sweet face set in fair white linen, like a Greek Madonna in its silver frame.

He was utterly astounded; and at first imagined the vision all a fancy: some other pretty nun it must be surely, just like her so long dead; but when she also recognised him, though elevated into a gentleman from a cow-herd, and spoke to him and called him "Hal," doubt was at an end; and their greeting was as glad as mutual griefs admitted.

From him then she learnt in quiet parley by the way all that he could tell her about Stephan; but that was only to the effect that he had escaped the myrmidons of John sent to seize him at St. Martha's; though whither he had fled he knew not: and this naturally induced Alice to ask the good man to be so charitable as to let her know of his safety, if and when he should hear of it. Moreover, as he alone thus from circumstances, both past and present, had discovered this poor nun's love for Stephan, as well as of old had known that poor monk's love for Alice, she prayed to him to be secret and faithful,—confiding to him how little any at St. Catherine's suspected it; and the honest-hearted Hal was worthy of her confidence, doing good service to both of those divorced-affianced ones, as we shall forthwith see.

Hal, from his occupation and sympathies, had of course more than one friend among the roving bands of Robin Hood; and Langton had no sooner got away with them on his route towards the sea (which journey might have commenced much about the same day that Alice left Gomershal) than Hal received confidential intelligence of his safe whereabout; which glad piece of news he forthwith resolved to convey himself, for safety's sake and delicacy, to the nun of St. Catherine's. So, craving leave of absence as before (and Hal as a favoured supernumerary in the Braiose family had pretty much his own way) he set off one fine morning, and taking the line of hills for better speed, duly found himself at the nunnery.

Curiously enough for coincidence there was just then waiting before the wicket a reverend man asking permission to speak with the holy sister Alice at the visitor's grating, seeing he had a special message to deliver to her from a certain great personage, the Lady Maude.

Hal at the first thought he knew that voice, and after a second, detected the man's disguise, but shrewdly said nothing; the palmer also discerned him, and they exchanged a meaning glance; it was one of Robin's prickers and his own good friend, Will Fern, just come to give the Forest Queen's letter to Alice. Matilda Fitz-Walter could write, be sure; and she even better knew what love was;—and so her note to the poor sad sister was as full of Stephan's praises and his affectionate solicitude and kind messages as even Alice could desire: it was a woman's amplification of the self-denying monk's stern vow of faithfulness; and, therefore, all the more delightful in its sympathy, all the truer because in terms more tender.

How Alice loved that letter,—and if she put restraint upon her feelings before the palmer at the grating,—how tearfully and passionately did she kiss it afterwards. Meanwhile, "sister Alice returns her best gratitude to the Lady Maude for a true charity:" and so the palmer is dismissed to the traveller's buttery-hatch near the gate, there to refresh himself, and wait for Hal.

His message, as we see, had been anticipated by a minute; but not the less was he acceptable. Here was an angel's visit indeed, just the right messenger at the right time. For now that she knew certainly how *he* still loved her and thought of her, and was her own true knight still, (Marian had deeply guaged poor Stephan's heart in talking with him about Alice, and had told her of his love in that letter,) now also that he was far enough away from her, and likely to be expatriated for years,—she felt free to comfort him also in exile—and to relieve thereby her own pent heart by telling him how she too loved him, and would love him to the end as faithfully and hopelessly as he. And here was her old-time honest neighbour and humble friend ready at hand to be love's messenger,—ay, and perhaps to watch over dearest Stevie's safety, and wait upon his wants, and be his English friend among that wilderness of foreign faces: what a blessed Providence it seemed, and was.

By a few cautious whispers through the grating Alice easily made shrewd Hal comprehend her wishes; and how grateful she felt and ever would feel for his zealous help, especially in taking to poor Stephan the expression of her love. Could not Hal leave Surrey for awhile, and follow him to France? And that clever palmer below (for Maid Marian in her note spoke of her messenger as a "trusty forester") waits ready to work out the plan. So then Hal is sent down to get something for himself at the buttery-hatch with the palmer; while Alice writes a few heart-uttered words of "love, patience, remembrance, and faithfulness," for Stevie's comfort.

What those words were, like the cunning augur in the ballad of the Lake Regillus, "I know, but may not tell:" it would be every way a breach of confidence, a desecration of things holy to reveal them. Let it suffice for your sympathy to remember that, though hopelessly separated for ever in body, two of the truest lovers Nature ever meant to be a pair were hopefully and even happily one evermore in spirit: happily, I say, and hopefully, through the calm and cheering influences of religion on their twin-born souls. Hand in hand as brother and sister, these divorced love-martyrs were henceforward to walk together towards Heaven through "Sorrow for the Happiness to come."

If in that sweetest letter, that record of deep feelings and high thoughts, Alice hid one golden lock of hair, as a little keepsake for Stevie,—sure I am we shall love her all the dearer for it;—as he did, ay, and his Good Master too.

CHAPTER XXX.

MAID MARIAN.

That precious missive safely confided to Hal, the palmer-pricker and he, well refreshed at the buttery and staidly thanked by our holy sister "for their trusty services," depart together for Aldeburie; concerting as they go a tryste at the Combe (where Robin's half-band now lie) by to-morrow forenoon.

For Hal must needs get leave of the worshipful my Lady de Braiose, before going on such a travel; though he cares not to reveal—as truly in honour he ought not—the love part of his errand: his especial commission is to convey with his own hands a sealed packet to the Monk of St. Martha's, now abroad; the packet has the effigy of St. Catherine and her racking-wheel on its rosin, and was consigned to the bearer as "most important." So Hal makes a few preparations, kisses his children, thanks Sir Tristrem heartily for much largesse, and with a full heart and brimming eyes takes one last look at that rosemaried grave by the south-west yew. And then by next morning at an hour before noon we find him at the Combe.

Here, in a beautiful deep and dimpled hollow of velvetty turf, a very nest of Arcady among the tumbled downs, (then a roadless wilderness of junipers and hollies, box and beech and fir, tangled with briars and high with fern), lay the Forest-Queen, encamped, with all her court; hight Little John being her Great Chamberlain and Friar Tuck installed Lord Chancellor.

Robin is away, we know, with Stephan; and some three score of the Shirewood merrymen are winning venison-flitches at Canterbury to be smoked for winter-store, with a canary butt or two out of the Abbott's cellars: and so we find Maid Marian, circled by her bodyguard of some sixty strapping fellows; the weakest arm amongst whom could speed a beauclerc's-ell shaft through an inch board stripping its feathers, the slowest marksman kill a flying woodpigeon or overtake a jack-hare with his postscript fleche.

And in the midst of the encampment, Maid Marian, though Robin's absence always washed her pretty eyes with tear-dew, looked verily the Queen there, and had her forest luxuries.

Her deerskin tent or pavilion, carrying a coloured streamer atop, was pitched in the bottom of the Combe, with some grand old beeches near it, and all around steep wooded hills. For sentinels, a dozen booted and bowed foresters paced backward and forward each his twenty yards; and beyond their wide circle were dotted about in the surrounding bush the withy-wattled extemporaneous huts of the merrymen, populous with wives and little ones. The tent's front opened with an awning of striped canvas set on a pair of slanting poles, fancifully ribboned with colour: a multitude of dogs were lazily lying about, and some tethered ponies here and there stood at ease under the beeches with fodder beside them, and a cow-skinned lad or two tending them. The usual number of independent gypsey-hearths sent each its wire of sweet grey smoke straight up; and one enormous bonfire, with its circuit of roasting venison and attendant messmen, flared at the end of the valley, far to leeward of the royal tent.

As Hal, with his friend, Will Fern, gazed on this enchanted hunter's home from the junipered hill-side, he dreamily said half out loud, "What witchery's here, man,—magic music?"

"It's our lasses singing Maid Marian to sleep, Hal: she's had her morning forest-chase afoot, and will now be anooning in the tent."

"Let's listen to the music, Will; and haste to get nearer."

Hal's hard life of mere rude wooding and coarse forestry had no idea of woodland joys like these; he was like a man bewitched.

They got near,—for all the dogs and men knew Will, and they stood by the circle of the sentinels listening to the music; it was sung as a slow glee or chaunt, in parts, but in a subdued key, by softest female voices, and died off charmingly in the lullaby; here is one of the stanzas, as well as Hal could catch it—

O sweet be the sleep of the Forest Queen,
As she lies on her ferny couch of green—
Lullaby!
All soothing thoughts of beautiful things
Hover around her on ring-dove's wings—
Lullaby!
Gently, gently, sisters all—
And cease the song with a dying fall,—
Lullaby!

As the music ceased, some half-dozen buxom lasses, looking like Diana's nymphs, bowed and buskined and kirtled, quietly came out of the tent one after another and dropped the awning; and while they chatted with the young foresters outside, Maid Marian slept like Titania, dreaming of her Robin Goodfellow.

Will Fern soon joined those pretty huntresses, one of them his own coy lover Bertha: and, as Hal must have especial audience of Queen Marian for leave of escort on his way, the hour of siesta was consumed by these three beside a savoury pasty with its salletting; yes, and with plenty of your sparkling looks and laughs, Bertha, to season it.

And now by high noon the whole camp is astir and feasting. Marian's pretty Amazons have found her awake again, and raise the awning. Then Hal and his friend Will Fern, no longer the palmer, but one of Robin's select yeomen-prickers, crave speech of Marian. Bertha takes in the message acceptably; and Hal, suitably introduced by yeoman Will as an honest man and a true, was left alone to speed his errand with the Queen.

He exercised the shrewd discretion of making her the confidante of all he knew: in fact, as he had gathered, she knew very much already, for St ephan's self had confessed to her,—and she had sent to Alice words of comfort.

But Hal could interest her further by the detail of that cruel Prince's seizure of the poor girl in the Hangers, and all about Old Tangley; and then by the romantic story of St. Martha's, with its monk of Newark and nun of St. Catherine's—so hopelessly joined in spirit, though in body sundered;—until the sun-tanned Maid, champion of her sex's wrongs, hated Prince John and loved Alice and Stephan almost as well as Hal did himself: furthermore, when he told her of his own tragic episode and the Silent Pool (a favourite haunt and bath of Marian's) with him too and his sorrows she felt the strongest sympathy, indignant and determined.

All this confidence was wise and well; for it ensured another link between those severed lovers; and meanwhile it promoted generous good feeling and right help one of another. So, all the readier Hal was speeded on his way. For, next morning, after the good curtall Friar's matin prayer, (a custom absolute with Robin and his followers, therefore let us be just to the respectable outlaws), a detachment of four sturdy archers on ponies, with Hal also roughly mounted, make their obeisance to Queen Marian, and are off for the coast.

King Robin and his troop, well met at Canterbury, of course can give tidings of Stephan: and honest hearted Hal, who had won golden opinions from everybody on the way by his woodcraft, his Johnian wrongs, his mysterious embassy, and his general independent Red Indian—say rather English—bearing, was helped by one or another to Calais; where, though an indifferent linguist, a certain polyglot countryman helped him at length to discover Stephan Langton at Rouen.

CHAPTER XXXI.

STEPHAN'S VALET.

Who can guage the depth and strength of Stephan's manly joy, when he read that precious letter? More than a wife to him, dearer than a merely mortal lover was the noble gracious Alice now, etherialized by distance and sublimed by heroic disinterestedness both in what she had concealed and what she now revealed; and deep indeed was this new well-spring of joy opened to them both by these avowals, mutual yet so generous and self-denying.

Then that blessed little lock of golden hair, shorter than a ringlet, as became a nun, but O, how rich a relic, so suggestive, so affectionate in the very curl clinging to his finger, so truly her's and part of her; night and day would he wear it next his heart, beating there against it always; even as that withered chaplet was her badge upon his naked arm, under the black monastic sleeve.

How gladly too did Stephan welcome Hal. When we are alone among strange faces, living the constrained life of silent self-imprisonment, with no one near to speak of the past, to sympathize with any present feeling, or to join in hope about the future, how sweet it is to come upon a sudden friend, the friend of old days, who is verily a part of your past, and is come so opportunely to take his share with you side by side in the battle of the present and the victory of the future! Yes, that dear familiar face, though rough and wrinkled as honest Hal's, ever shines on your darkness like a sunbeam; that pleasant voice, however little rhythmic or melodious, brings back in a flood all those heart-associations; that squeeze of the horny hand, that starting tear in the glad grey eye, that frank and cordial greeting,—these indeed out-value all common gold and gems ; and make the solitary exile feel, in the presence of his ancient hearty friend, once more a rich because a happy man.

Hal was everything to him : catering for the close student, who seldom joined his brother monks in the refectory, caring for all his simple wants, and acting as the needful link between this sternly diligent recluse and the noisy world of Rouen round him.

A general commendatory letter from the Prior of Newark, consigning "our good brother, the bearer," to all faithful Augustines, had easily gained Stephan admission to the college; for in the first outbreak of John's wrath against him after the Silent Pool tragedy, Langton had prudently bethought himself of this, to wit, a testimonial wisely nameless ; in English Calais and Boulogne, and in still more English Normandy he could not hope to escape or exist under a name which John's emissaries would hunt down to the uttermost. So he dropt it for a while, and thus his pursuers lost the scent: to every one but Hal, since Robin left the fish-wife at Dover (or rather since that notable change into a monk at the Couronne) Stephan Langton was now Le Frère Antoine.

And his diligence, his parts, his gifts, his universal character outvied the Newark testimonial. The whole college was proud of him : yes, and the whole city too : for in addition to deep studies and learned disputations with the great and wise, Antoine was loved among the poor for his unceasing charities. Seldom a death bed but he was there to comfort, never an applicant for help of any kind, but our good monk did for him his brotherly utmost. He was nobly doing his daily duty, and thereb being built up surely as a tower of strength for h country and his kind.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LEARNING, LOVE, AND PATRIOTISM.

It would be small wisdom in a tale like this to follow, year by year, the life of a hero who lived to be sixty-two; a writer must eschew tediousness by all means, and make jumps discreetly from one picturesque incident to another. Stephan's life at Rouen was simply one of study, devotion, and good-doing; but the profound Aristotelian (for even to this excellence our learned monk had gradually come) the eloquent divine, the enlightened practical philanthropist, was still throughout (let human sympathies rejoice thereat!) the hearty, affectionate, spiritually-minded lover.

Twelve times within six years did that honest Hal oscillate between the Austin college at Rouen and the nunnery of St. Catherine's, and each time he was each way the faithful Mercury of precious missives and messages.

Alice, a wonder to all the nuns for piety and secresy, and a remaining spice of mystery, and their further admiration for her sweet temper (perhaps a scarcity in nunneries) and her universal charity, had come to be the most-loved sister of their little common-wealth; and the very abbess had expressed a hope that her youngest daughter might succeed her; but Alice's heart seemed to be set on better things,—as (let us hope) Heaven itself, or its step thereto, St. Becket's shrine on the hill-top,—or, well, well, we know it all—cousin Stevie; displaying as to any wish for honour or high place a disinterestedness and want of ambition marvellous indeed to the admiring sisterhood.

Meanwhile those precious occasional messages were just everything to her, balm-drops of elixir vitæ shed from season to season, and I leave you to judge whether or not the answering notes to her happy though unwedded lover equalled his in fervour and in faithfulness. A nobler Abelaird and Heloise, they truly lived together yet apart, and their one pure hope was to be bodily united in the grave on the top of dear St. Martha's—spiritually united for ever in the better Happiness to Come.

But, not alone for love, not as a chief end for learning only was Stephan Langton determinately living; neither was the shrewd and faithful Hal merely Cupid's postman. The characteristic of our great mediæval Englishman, who, quite as truly as Luther, and nearly half a millenary before him stood

"The solitary monk who shook the world,"

was Patriotism; his grand errand in life and all its providential preparings, the downfall of tyranny and the setting up of freedom.

Therefore, did he toil mentally over his midnight lamp, and live laborious days, that he might make himself a champion sure of victory; therefore did he spread his nets of influence, and scatter abroad his baits to catch men: therefore was Hal's wallet perpetually crammed with missives to Fitz-Walter, Crevecœur, De Toupart, Hugh Bigod, Pembroke, De Vis, De Ros, and other patriots; of course addressed under feigned styles and titles, as needful security in case such tell-tale letters should be by misfortune intercepted.

Our humble woodman squire therefore may still legitimately appear as a link in this true story, not merely as between the severed lovers for their mutual consolation, but more importantly to the universe as between the now celebrated monastic scholar and the Barons disaffected to King John: King John, not Prince John; for the years have crept by, and just as the twelfth century was at its last gasp, Richard had succumbed to De Gourdon's arrow.

Until this same period, the biographer of Stephan Langton has had small excuse for mixing up his hero in public affairs; the gay young forester, the lovelorn monk, the hunted exile, demanded of us no historic notice, but merely a domestic interest; now, however, that his character has matured, his aims become more vigorous, and has influences have increased with his attainments, he must emerge into broader daylight and become to our ken, as he was in verity, interwoven with the history of his times.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE OLD ESQUIRE HEARS A SERMON.

AND it was a very remarkable incident of the domestic sort which first gave Stephan the long-wished-for opportunity of winning a high position, and so finding a fulcrum for his patriotic zeal,

One day, when Hal was loitering in the market-place of Rouen (who can imagine Rouen a century before its cathedral existed, and nearly three before Joan of Arc?) —when, I say, our friend Hal was cheapening a melon there, and some kidneys, in an English woodman's unmistakable French, he was nodded to by a poor old cripple, who had somewhile been watching him narrowly.

Of course, Hal thought, as you do, that the man would be asking alms of him, as he certainly had of sundry others, and he prepared himself, therefore, to resist an attack of mendicity. Not but that, when he inspected further, the unfortunate seemed worthy of his minutest coin, if not even of a slice of his melon that hot noontide, for he seemed some tattered old soldier, from the remnants of a coloured livery under his pilgrim's cloak—and his weatherbeaten face, shaded above by a scalloped felt, was hidden, over cheeks and mouth and chin, by a white beard descending to the waist—he was maimed, too, in almost every limb, hobbling upon crutches, and with one arm bandaged; but he did not whine for charity, like your common beggar, and his manners were those of the well-known applicant "who has seen better days."

He sidled up to Hal, looked keenly into his face from under those bushy white eyebrows, and then, somewhat to our woodman's astonishment, uttered simply the startling monosyllable—

"Hal!"

Some maniac, perhaps, who had heard his name somewhere, for Hal had not his master's good reason for an alias, and everywhere answered to the name, Hal o' the wood—or Harry Wood, as some would say.

The strange and battered palmer, evidently by his scallop, a wanderer from the East, laid his only practicable hand on Hal's arm, just as he was turning heel upon him, and arrested his escape by two magical words of very local geography:

"Westone and Wodetone! How now, neighbour Hal?"

Those wondrous words! His curiosity thoroughly aroused, Hal, too, made in turn a keen inspection, but the face entirely baffled him; perhaps not only from its redundant hair, but also from a great red scar carved by somebody's scimetar right across it. He was just giving the case up, and humbling himself to ask solution of the mystery, when his eye caught on the bandaged arm the remains of a badge, a considerably "couped" Griffon.

"What!—old Hugh Langton turned up at last?"

"Yes, whilome young neighbour mine—what little remains of him is creeping like a caterpillar towards Friga Street again, and has been at it for these five years past. The world is pretty broad, I can tell you, and a cripple like me can't beg his way across the breadth of it faster than a mile a day. But Hal, Hal, tell me—is there any one alive?"

"One: only one, so far as I know; and you needn't go as far away as Friga Street for him."

"And Janet's dead then, my poor dear Janet, so cruelly left;—ah well, but she's gone to a better home than ever I made her. How said you, neighbour, one left? Which of my rosy curly ones?"

"It's thirty years agone, Hugh; and you'd be puzzled now to find either of 'em by the token of roses or curls; as to Simon, I wot nothing of the lad or man these score years. But Stephan's here!"

The poor old palmer trembled as he stood, at Hal's simple 'here;' and eagerly clutching his hand asked rapidly as if half insane, "Where? where? if I die first, he'll never get it, ha! and it's as good as salvation."

"I'll take you to him," said Hal quietly.

Out of the clattering market, and at snail's pace along three or four winding narrow streets overhung with nodding gables, and so the cripple hobbled under Hal's guidance to a great sombre quadrangle of low stone cloisters. Hal tapped at an iron-bound wicket: Hal was seemingly well known there, and they entered.

"Ye'll not find brother Antoine in his cell, good servitor: they've chosen him public Prælector; ay and for his parts and booklore couldn't ha' found a worthier. All the college is gone to hear his first oration: Chapel's open; go you in if you will: yes—and the palmer's welcome too, an he'll keep his crutch quieter. It's all in the nave,—and ye'll find a crowd there, I'll warrant ye: he's a wonder sure."

To the chapel they crept, and squeezed in at the thronged portal, and worked themselves as near to the pulpit as they could; for Hal was proud of his master, and an earnest longing seized the poor maimed esquire to see his son in what he guessed to be his glory.

And there then stood his son, his long-remembered little Stevie, the admired of all beholders for learned eloquence; and that all the more because that none but pundits understood him; for the oration was in Latin, a wholesome hard-headed commixture of Aristotle and Augustine, not entirely to be understanded of the Norman vulgar.

But there he stood, a tall, dark, commanding figure, with fire in his eye, fluency on his lip, and native dignity in every gesture; around, an upturned sea of faces, wondering; and overhead, the lofty arches and the fretted roof; rare stained windows on every side; and up the centre, installed or humbler seated, all the dignitaries of Rouen, besides every member of its famous Augustine College.

It was no doubt a day of triumph, of Stephan Langton's first great public triumph: and here, by a miracle unknown to him, was his long lost father come to witness it. What a contrast too; and how just is Providence in the law of cause and effect! That runagate old wanderer, a wrecked hulk everyway; this diligent, devout and noble master-mind, a golden galley on its festal way to victory and glory; what a contrast,—and these are father and son!

But Hugh Langton never felt it. Battered about as he had been throughout life and half over the world, brimful of hardship and adventure these thirty years, he counted lightly of any outer accidents of this world, and had even less sympathy with its sentimentalities. One strangely morbid feeling alone seemed to possess him; for often in the midst of all that florid Latinity, the old man would pluck Hal's sleeve, and whisper hoarsely—"He shall have it, I tell you; he shall have it all; except the least bit for myself no bigger than a needle. He shall have it, I say."

Hal thought the poor fellow deranged; so drawing himself and the old man out of the throng before the oration was over, he got into Antoine's, that is Stephan's cell; and in a dark recess of it quietly awaited the master's coming.

Anon, the master came in hurriedly; as anxious to escape the crowd of flatterers and be alone: and as coming out of the blinding light into that dim cell, and seeing no one (expecting to see none, and being preoccupied in thought) he straightway flung himself on his knees beside his pallet, and poured out a torrent of prayers and tears: then, drawing up the sleeve of his left arm, kissed thrice, crossing himself each time, a yellow band of silk there, with a few dried leaves set in it

CHAPTER XXXIV

A FATHER'S BLESSING.

HAL coughed once and again, for he felt the delicacy of his position; but it was all in vain. Stephan's passion absorbed his every sense; but anon he dropt the sleeve again, rose from his knees; and was suddenly aware of Hal and a stranger.

"—You shall have it, you shall have it! all but a needle bit for my own poor soul."

"Hal, what is all this? Why are you here, and this unfortunate?"

"—'Twas in '91, and we battled stoutly at Tiberias to save it; thousands fell there, and mine own dear knight, Sir Ralph, among them. Ah! but we fought on fiercely, though the arrows flew like hail amongst us, and their scimetars flashed in our eyes as the tropical lightnings. And I caught a cut or two, but I clung and clung upon it to the last; ay, and when the very wreck you see me, hewed and bleeding as I was, I managed to bite off a fragment with my teeth (God forgive me!) before they could tear me away. And I lay for dead there, with the blessed morsel in my mouth, and here it is, here it is, here it is."

The excited old Crusader fumbled at a little sacket of leather tied by a thong round his neck, and worn next the skin.

"Explain, Hal," quietly said Stephan: "is the poor man mad?"

"Mad! O son, thou shalt say so. The holy Empress found it in the rent where earth had quaked beneath that blest tremendous burden, and drew it into her yearning bosom there to be miraculously buried. She set it up, and all men worshipped it—until, for our sins, God gave it to the Paynim awhile, that by the deed of rescue, we might flood it in blood, theirs and ours: and we won it, and made it our standard at the battle of Tiberias; till once again, for sin there, we lost it for ever. But here—here is the only true morsel of it. Hush! and look ye reverently and kneel."

The palmer, on his knees, held above his head, devotionally as a priest would raise the sacrament, a ragged bit of black wood; and, with the venial superstition of the time, Stephan, likewise deeply moved, knelt in mental prayer, and Hal knelt, too, in a most unreasoning veneration.

"Son, this precious treasure, which Kings and Popes might covet, is for thee: not all—not quite all—one little crumb of Heaven's seed, one needle-bit for your poor old father."

"What, Hal—is this—is this—?"

"Yea, my master; he was on his way to Friga Street!"

A strange tumult of feeling filled the great and good son's heart, and yet outwardly he was quite calm.

Stephan's only memory of his father was as of a good-looking, jovial young man, who made his gentle mother sit up for him frequently at nights, and sometimes didn't come back until deep in next day. However, he was always very indulgent; and made for him and Simon (he recollected) a pretty pair of bows and lots of arrows; and used to call them his double little wizards, for he couldn't tell which was which; and let them eat honeycomb to the full; and taught them how to play marbles, and to fly a kite: they knew nothing worse of their runagate father; and, so far, no doubt, all the better.

But here was this aged pilgrim in present fact, the thirty years' exile now at length returned, who could truly claim Stephan for a son, and was almost more to him than even a recovered parent, in being likewise the possessor of a genuine fragment of the Holy Rood: in those days accounted surely for an ounce or two more precious than rubies, of gross Salvation, material Everlasting Life; and I suspect there may still be extant in our nineteenth century a few believers in that foolish falsehood.

Stephan Langton had better tokens in himself and the Grace above him of that blessed Hope of Immortality; but, in the spirit of the times, this morsel of decayed old apple-tree timber was a priceless treasure, a relic worthier than the ransom of kings. His mind's awe, his heart's affection could fall down and worship that bitten mouthful of wood.

And who was the biter? His own long-lost father—this poor and aged broken soldier, the outcast of whom he remembered his mother to have prayed such earnest and terrible things.

Yes—the proofs of it were enough. And Stephan, who when the old man had called him "Son," supposed it a mere expletive of age, which the whitebeard well might use to any man, now spoke reverently, sinking to his knee—

"My father, I have not known the blessing of a father for these thirty years—nearabout all my memory; will it please your venerable presence, even now, to bless me?"

Quite astonished, the old man humbly held back; but Hal said, while Stephan quietly knelt in expectation—

"Hugh Langton, he asks it of thee; if God sends any blessing through a father, give it simply to thy good son Stephan!"

And the old man arose, like a patriarch or one inspired, and giving him the leathern sacket, said—

"The good Lord bless thee, my son, and any that be thine; and send thee to be famous among men, and one of His in blessedness for ever!"

I trow, that blessing found fulfilment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RELIC.

A VERITABLE fragment of the True Cross!

Stephan saw at once the immense advantage of possessing such a treasure: it was nothing more than a simple fact that he held in his hand the means of propitiating kings and popes: the earnest errand of his life for England might wondrously be speeded by that magic sacket.

But its authenticity was everything; and must be set out clearly at all risks; even though on the threshold a difficulty lay in the way of securing this, which nothing but a perilous frankness could overcome. And Stephan acted with that frank wisdom.

He forthwith sought out and secured a notary; and requesting (through Hal) the presence of the worshipful chief-magistrate of Rouen in the Abbot's audience-room, Stephan went straight before his Superior with the palmer and his relic.

First, he explained openly his own true name and story: then that of his father, so strangely after six lustres restored as from the dead; and, by the time the notary and mayor had come, all was clear and ready in the Abbot's mind for attestation.

Then, before those two legal officers and their attendant witnesses, the palmer told his tale; his own antecedents being vouched for by Hal, his ancient neighbour, and Stephan,—then better known as Le Frère Antoine, his excellent son. The cross-examination was sharp, and its result satisfactory: everything asserted found its proofs; and thus the document of authenticity was drawn up in due form: whereof Stephan demanded (and no doubt duly paid for) seven attested counterparts, which those gowned witnessing clerks copied on the spot at the Abbot's table.

Then, in the presence of all producing the holy morsel, Stephan, with a miserere dagger, divided its crumbling antiquity into seven equal portions. One for his father, who reverently received it: one, for the Austin College of Rouen,—to the Abbot's infinite gratitude and wonder: and the remaining five, each sealed in its attesting document with all due legal forms, did the prudent patriot reserve for good uses whereof we may be told hereafter. And so the needful ceremony came to an end.

A great consequence remained: Rouen, English Rouen, King John's frequent haunt, was no longer an asylum for a monk, however famous or learned, whose name judicially avowed was Stephan Langton. He must find some other home;—as the Abbot kindly but firmly told him at once, and in no small fear and trembling; for John's vindictiveness was dreaded, in especial by the monks and friars.

Stephan at night thought it all out on his pallet; and this was the result. The faithful Hal should first escort his poor old father home again: aided on his difficult way, as the experienced rough Mercury well knew how, by Robin's emissaries passim, and an occasional friendly litter or saddle-back when obtainable for the poor crippled squire of Wodetone. With this embassage Stephan sent one of his five precious pacquets,—and, perhaps, a still more precious letter full of earnest love, —to Alice: whereof anon.

For his own safety, a notable opening offered; which another of his magical pacquets might avail to expand still further. Philip the Second of France, better known by the complimentary alias of Philip Augustus, having espoused the cause of Arthur the undoubted heir-legitimate of England, was just now in open antagonism against King John. No man could be more welcome to his most Christian Highness than an English foe of the usurper; and if to boot that foe were a celebrated author, scholar, and divine, all the better; and best of all, if he happened to be one able and willing to bestow on some chief religious house, (or on the King himself if he wished it,) so rare if not unique a relic as a real bit of the true Cross.

After the battle of Tiberias, the Saracens had burnt the whole of the remainder captured in battle and half-buried under the slain: old Hugh Langton's morsel was probably the only genuine bit in existence: he himself believed that it had miraculously saved him; for, lying half dead among that heap of bodies, flung aside by those Paynim who had seized the Holy Rood, he had strangely found succour for life on the spot where he lay like Hagar's Ishmael; for the mangled body of some provident esquire lying close beside him in the heap kindly wore a wallet, and in it was a flask of wine and some bread. Hugh transferred the precious relic he had bitten from his mouth to his pouch, ate and drank as one of John's own starved hostages should have done; and, by such timely food well strengthened, after awhile crept away from those festering bodies, and got help of some literal good Samaritans; and having undergone years of hardship and encountered a world of adventures is—where now we find him. The relic, *valeat quantum*, was undoubtedly genuine and authentic.

Here there was a bribe for a king, if need be: a bribe to help Liberty and England; for Stephan Langton never was selfish. It was clear what he ought to do, and whither to go. Armed with the "testamur" of the Abbot of Rouen and his council, the famous Prælector should straightway make all speed for Paris.

These were his pallet thoughts, and he acted on them, as his wont was, instantly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OLD PARIS, AND THE CONFESSOR OF ST. ETIENNE'S.

THE speediest, easiest, and safest way for Stephan to get from Rouen to Paris was by water. In spite of the swift Seine contrary throughout, and all the perils from its rude bank-dwellers, that silent highway was infinitely more practicable than the land tracks through forests and marshes infested by bestial as well as human wolves. I cannot stop to chronicle our fugitive monk's adventures for that long travel of danger: how well for a disguise his old forester-livery of Sir Guy de Marez bested him; how prudently the monastic habit, with some books and parchments, and especially certain manuscript works of his own (afterwards world-famous) made up the forester's bundle; and how gradually he won his way to Paris in the craft of a sturdy fisherman; surely these dreary details need only such a touch or two as thus to set the facts clearly before you. Suffice it that on the sixth day, having set out on a rainy moonless night and so escaped the river guard, he duly got on shore near the chained logs floating at the water gate, handy to King Philip's new round-tower at the Louvre.

Mediæval Paris at the opening of the thirteenth century was less than a twelfth part of its present greatness. The Isle de la Cité, with a straggling cantle to the north as far as St. Lazare beyond the present Boulevard Montmartre called La Ville, and another like triangle to the south styled L'Université, including the Panthéon, these (from what we now call the Pont des Arts to the Quai des Ormes) encircled by a turreted and gated wall, and bridged clumsily to and from the island by the Great and Little Châtelet, will give us a sufficient idea of Old Paris for our present purpose. Its chief features were the great Roman Palais des Thermes with its aqueducts from Chaillot and Arcueil, Hugh Capet's Palais de Justice, the Louvre even then begun to be unfinished, and Notre Dame in slow process of building; furthermore, and important to us, the Abbeys of Ste. Geneviève and of St. Germain-des-Prés; and in its earlier phase the church of St. Etienne du Mont, with some other palaces, churches, marchés, and religious edifices; and a great population crowding the narrow unpaved and unspeakably filthy streets of wooden hovels nodding to each other. St. Etienne was then by no means the wonder of mixed architecture we admire in it now: three or four centuries after our tale it had its Renaissance resurrection and became the quaint and elegant commixture of Gothic and Italian, with aerial spiral staircases, arches above arches, and elaborate decoration within, and towers and gurgoyles, buttresses, and minarets without, which attract the sightseer at present; but in those most olden days of ours it was a plain stone chapel of the Norman stamp, built over the tomb of Ste. Geneviève; large, religiously dim, and flanked by its celtic round tower.

Stephan's "testamur," from the Abbot and Council of Rouen, was addressed to the Superior of St. Germain-des-Prés: but we need not wonder if in the then state of his mind, as well as that of all the world around him, he preferred to attach himself to a Virgin-Martyr's neighbouring Abbey, and to a church peculiarly his own as dedicated to his namesake St. Etienne.

How little can we calculate, when we take the slightest onward step in life, its possible—its fated consequences: how continually have we need of guidance through the darkness, and therefore of the wise man's merciful aid and help thereto, habitual prayer. Who can tell what an hour may bring forth? We are at the mercy of Circumstance whithersoever we go; and need constantly the whispered admonition, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

I will not, however, seem to hint that this was not the right way to our Abelaird, but it was in some sort a trial way, an ordeal; and well endured, became a good gain also: as we shall see. Listen now. I pass over common matters of the outward man. Stephan had, of course, become a cowled monk from a forester on the untell-tale Seine, duly presented himself and his letters at St. Germain, been welcomed, staid there a few days, and found the place and brethren uncongenial: thence on some pretext of his name (a valid argument in those days as before hinted) passed himself on to Ste. Geneviève's Abbey (for Alice's sake, no doubt,) and thus became attached as a mass-priest to its especial chapel St. Etienne du Mont.

He first entered it for prayer at nightfall: and forthwith prostrated himself (I do not justify this, nor any other idolatries, but needs must be historical) before the Virgin-martyr's shrine. He was alone, and the chapel was in twilight, gradually darkening: and at Geneviève's shrine he prayed till midnight—prayed for the weal of Alice.

The shrine is in a transept; and over the tomb was then (however rebuildings and revolutionary times may have since brought changes) a beautifully carved and painted stone figure of Ste. Geneviève lying as in death upon her bier.

Stephan was praying still in darkness, when the risen moon began to shine through the high altar window: a ray soon travelled towards him; and it fell on the laid out figure of Ste. Geneviève.

Was he dreaming,—ecstatic,—crazed?—No.

He quietly felt his own calm pulse, thought out a mathematical problem, prayed a Christian's prayer. And yet, there undoubtedly lying in the moonlight was his own Alice, her sweet Madonna face, her golden curls, her white hands crossed upon her breasts, precisely as he had seen her at St. Martha's. The exactness of the likeness astonished him. However, it was no more than a coincidence; and that a happy one. How good it was for him to be there! And so, after one more ecstacy of prayer he returned all the more gratefully and devoutly to his solitary cell.

For several days, to the admiration of the inmates of Ste. Geneviève's specially honoured church St. Etienne, our monk increased if possible his devotions at that blessed shrine: he felt as if in the presence of his own sweet Alice; there she lay, exactly as he last remembered her.

He became so wrapt in these habitual reveries and prayers, that he took small notice, none in fact, of a veiled female figure often kneeling near him at the shrine (she was at the feet, while he loved chiefly to be nearest to that sweet calm face;) but one morning as he came to pray there, and the veiled girl was even then thus early at the virgin-martyr's feet, he was utterly astonished to see the image of Ste. Geneviève, that exact sweet likeness, the Madonna face, the golden hair, the soft blue eye,—he almost fainted and disbelieved his fancy as he saw it,—coronalled with hyacinths!

What could it mean?

He only prayed all the more earnestly, as in presence of a manifest miracle: and when he rose, the girl,—at least it was as before a veiled figure, rose with him; and she said in a voice whose tones of strange resemblance thrilled him,

"Good father, thou seemest to be the priest of my saint and patroness; may a poor young daughter confess to thee for her soul's well-being?"

"Yea, sister: here is a confessional. Speak, and I will comfort thee, if in anywise I may. Many days, sister, have we knelt and wept together. Tell me thy grief."

"Father, to Ste. Geneviève I came for help, if God and the saint so willed; not because my name is Geneviève, for it is Angélique; but for the simple reason that my friends have thought me like her and so that haply she might favour me: and I have a sad sorrow."

"Sister, if I can comfort thee, I will. I too have had many sorrows,—have them now, yea now: and I wot they are only to be borne, not healed in this world; but speak, sister, freely, as to God and His priest."

"My father, it may seem to thy wisdom a folly, perhaps a sin; but—I love one whom I never may wed with."

Stephan answered nothing; but on the other side of the confessional lattice fell back, groaning inwardly but inaudibly. The girl proceeded,

"Father, thou canst not, I know, comfort me, as thou mayst not commend me for this; I know it, for thou art silent. But it was not any fault of mine. He loved me too, I am sure he did, he often told me so. But I caught the fever, and they thought me dead, and laid me out for burial—just like sweet Sainte Geneviève here—and, distracted at the sight—"

"Alas! my sister, I guess thy grief—did he go mad?"

"No, father, he is sane as thou art, but at once became a monk! I saw his despair, I heard the rashness of his vow, I pitied him, loved him, and would gladly have died to save him, but the cruel fever bound me like the dead; and I could not speak, nor do anything but lie quietly there, seeming dead but not being so. O, father—that he should have rashly—alas, for me, cruelly—flown to the nearest convent, and vowed himself a monk upon its relics!"

Stephan groaned audibly; and the poor maid took it (she was right enough) for his sympathy. So she continued,

"I loved thee, father, too, because thou art of his same height, and hast his noble open brow, his air, his dark locks, his very speech; at first I thought thee mine own dearest—"

"Child," said Stephan, wisely constraining himself, and in fatherly kindness checking her, "I am here to take confession of thy sin, if haply through repentance my power may absolve thee."

The poor girl, as if rebuked, looked up suddenly without her veil: and, but for the impossibility, there knelt Alice beside him! The same sweet innocent face, the same imploring soft blue eye, the same golden flood of ringlets.

Stephan Langton, strong man and wise as he was, almost reeled in his stall as he sat: a thought came to his help.

"Why didst thou crown the saint with hyacinths today, sister?"

"Father, it is my birthday, this first of May, and I did it to please her, if it might be; the blue bells are comely in that golden hair."

How startling the coincidence in every way! and here was Stephan, hardly victor of himself in the quietest times, with his yearning eyes enchanted by this very type of her he loved so much, his eager ears entranced by her, "I love thee."

He strove to think of Alice far away: and instantly, from that net-worked association of ideas the metaphysician tells us of, all those old perilous thoughts and feelings rising like a flood threatened to overwhelm him tumultuously, and upset the philosophy of years.

He tried to speak to this poor unconscious girl, whose presence so bewitched him,—but his tongue was paralysed; and when in a sweetly pleading tone, so like *her's*, his ear caught—

" Wilt thou not comfort me,—"

Stephan, with a mental prayer breaking the spell, dropped the cowl over his agitated features, and, to that suppliant's sad astonishment, hurried abruptly out of the chapel.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A COURT-DAY AT THE LOUVRE.

In his cell the strife continued; here was, as it were, the real Alice out-charming the ideal:—and then, that she should have found some loved one's likeness in him also!

Ha! clearly this was an artifice to entrap him: yet instinctively he shrank from the idea that such a counterpart of Alice could deceive.

No, no; that would be an imputation on herself, if this sweet resemblance could be so wicked. And he kissed the withered chaplet and the golden curl, and tried to dream in waking reveries of his ideal love; but the real—this other present type in beauteous flesh and blood intruded on his tenderest thoughts and vexed him.

Stephan, as a Prælector of Moral Philosophy, knew that the best cure for this unwholesome state of mind was active energy in some other direction; and ere that night of self-wrestling had died with morning's dawn, had determined to be up and doing for his other love, his country.

On his first arrival at St. Germain-des-Prés, he had taken care to forward through the Prior (who had first perused and approved them) his Rouen and Newark testimonials, to the Louvre, Philip's newly-enlarged suburban palace: together with a letter from himself, soliciting an audience of the King, announcing his status as a churchman and his condition as a persecuted foe to the usurping John; and further how that he was the bearer of a precious present from the East to his most

Christian Highness: (for "Majesty" was not assumed by kings till Charles the Fifth of Spain invented that new name for his imperial greatness.)

Whether or not those credentials and that letter had yet reached Philip, Langton could not guess: Circumlocution and Red-tape were potent bafflers doubtless even then to plebeian merit or access, and monarchy was hedged about with quite as many aristocratic barriers as now; but at all events Stephan resolved to call and see what had become of his papers: and he took with him one of his four remainder morsels, duly sealed in its separate vellum, to be ready for use if he was lucky enough to gain admittance.

The Louvre, then just outside Paris, though attached to it and enclosed in its own battlemented *enceinte* with round towers, was a quadrangular building, chiefly of the Norman type but with extinguisher spires crowning six of the turrets, and a very high-pitched roof, well vaned, as all the spires were, just over the castellated entrance.

Stephan, accompanied for introduction-sake by a well-known brother of his College des Prés, easily got admission as far as an ante-chamber, for the King it seems was holding his court, and, the St. Germain's brother having spoken to a captain of the halberdiers, he found his way still farther advanced. At this point, on giving his name to an officer, duly passed on through a succession of others, Stephan, after waiting awhile, was addressed by a gorgeously arrayed chamberlain, who bade him follow to the hall of the Presence: informing him by the way that the King had been expecting his promised gift for three days, having duly mastered the testamur, and being ready to receive M. le Prélecteur, the so-celebrated Père Langton with all favour.

Of course, the Circumlocution office had not yet found time to expedite the royal message.

Stephan entered, announced by the chamberlain.

At the end of a long low-arched audience-hall, on a floor raised three steps, was marshalled the Royal Court in a semi-circle, the chamber itself being lined with Philip's newly-appointed body-guard of Ribauds, tall young fellows in a parti-coloured uniform, and armed with gilt-iron maces. There were also a multitude of others, courtiers, soldiers, and various household functionaries in fancy costumes; with whom happily we have nothing to do; for Stephan's business, and therefore ours, is more nobly with the royal Court itself.

In the centre sat, of course, the King, enthroned, plainly dressed in that most unbecoming of colours, the St. Esprit light blue; with a red velvet cap and a jewel in it. The countenance of His Highness Philip le Dieudonné was decidedly unprepossessing: a pale, shrewd face, full of mingled cunning and sternness. Just at this moment, early in May, 1202 (his likings and dislikings oscillating in accordance with his ever-shifting politics), he was self-installed the protector of Prince Arthur, and the indignant vindicator of his injured right. And there stood the Prince at Philip's left (for Louis the Dauphin, a feeble-looking young man, kept the royal right-hand as heir-apparent), and next to him the hard-featured Constance of Bretagne, dressed in black and white like a Sister of Charity, but wearing a pearl coronet. Prince Arthur, her son, a well-grown lad, with a bold but open and good-natured expression of countenance, richly dressed in all the heraldic blazon of England, looked the only true scion of royalty there: and round these great personages, in a splendid crowd, were the lords and ladies in attendance.

"Let the learned doctor approach, Sir Chamberlain: we know his merit and his fame, and how well-affected he standeth to King Arthur; demand of him that present he hath brought us from the East."

Stephan, with an obeisance, produced so very small a parcel, that the Court seemed in peril of losing its gravity.

"Well, Professor, this is indeed a mouse out of a mountain; promise and performance should be paired more nearly, methinks."

"Pardon, great King,—and pardon Madam, and my Royal Liege, if I expound this treasure to your Graces."

Evidently their Graces thought the man an enthusiast, some nostrum-doctor, perhaps, for there was an irreverent tittering, which, however, King Philip stopped at once by saying,

"Thou hast our leave, good doctor, but be brief."

Stephan carefully exhibited the yet-unopened seal to the Chamberlain, desiring him to show it to the King before he opened it; the parcel went round the royal circle amid guessings and whisperings,—" a talisman," " some wondrous cat's-eye," " Solomon's ring," &c., and was then handed back to Stephan.

«He broke the seal, and read as follows:

We, François, Abbot of the St. Augustin College, at Rouen, Robert, Mayor of Rouen, and Hugues Carnet, sworn notary public, with our assessors and witnesses legally subscribing below, testify to all men that, attached to this enclosure, sealed with the seal of the college as aforesaid, is a genuine and authentic fragment of the True Cross of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Our unbelieving age will scarce conceive such a result possible: but when, after these simple words, Stephan Langton falling on his knees held up the open scroll with that precious morsel in a silk pocket atop, the whole court also knelt simultaneously and reverently as when the Host is raised, and the gilt-iron maces of those awed Ribauds clattered like grounded arms on the stone floor.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CUNNING OF PHILIP AUGUSTUS.

Stephan afterwards had a private audience of the King, and explained to him in detail the whole story of the wondrous relic, so acceptable even to a mighty potentate; for the blind ignorance of that age regarded such a gift as little less than that of immortality; to say nothing of the miracles that morsel would be sure to work, and the vast money-value thereof, its fortunate possessor might assuredly defy the powers of hell and death. Even the learned Langton, as we have seen, was biassed by this prevalent superstition, and truly believed that he had conferred a priceless boon upon the foreign monarch.

It is small wonder, therefore, that, not with what we should uncharitably call adroitness, but rather actuated by a sense of what royal gratitude might justly be glad to return for such an unspeakable gift, Stephan immediately, as a great benefactor might, pleaded for his injured country. Would the illustrious and august Philip set Arthur on the throne of that usurper? the barons and the people of England writhing under the tyranny of John, were ready to welcome the brotherly aid of France in giving them their lawful king; and he, Stephan, could depose of his own knowledge to a vast majority of the great feudatories of the realm, with whom he was in correspondence, as favouring the movement. Would his most Christian Highness head it openly by force of arms?

But the astute Philip had deeper and darker designs, which history afterwards has developed; his own son, Louis, married to John's niece, Blanche of Castille, might possibly himself come to be King of England, if Arthur were out of the way, and John's family, present or future, deposed for their ill father's sake; so Philip temporized with the powerful monk, and thought to play his own game keenly. At present—it was only for a few months,—he protected the chivalrous young Arthur: but designed, in furtherance o his own ambitious views, to betray him to his uncle shortly.

Meanwhile, it was expedient to conciliate as well as only equitable to reward this useful Englishman, who, (beside being in himself a fund of political capital to the king) had conferred on the man more than a crown-jewel in that relic. And thus, by a letter mandatory from King Philip the second to his dutiful University of Paris, "Stephan Langton, a brother of Newark Priory, and priest of the altar of St. Thomas à Becket, at St. Martha's in the county of Surrey, in the realm of England, afterwards Prælector in divinity to the College of Rouen, in Normandy, and now a brother of St. Germain-des-Prés," is made a Canon of Paris and Dean of Rheims.

It was a sop that cost the king nothing; and so looking on his precious relic, he counted the bargain a good one, besides that in Langton he had a hold on many barons, well inclined, from their hatred of King John, to alter the demission of the crown.

As for Stephan, though he had not gained all he asked or wished, still he could not but feel this unexpected advancement a long step in the right direction. Absolutely out of John's reach, and still corresponding with half England through his emissaries (for it is not necessary now to suppose Hal the only patriotic postman), he could work more widely and influentially for his country's good; and might anon by the church's ladder mount high enough to set his heel upon the head of him who now disgraced the crown.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANGELIQUE: AND NEWS OF A BROTHER.

For four whole days Stephan had not knelt at the shrine of Ste. Geneviève: he dreaded to meet that veiled sweet stranger. But on the fifth, supposing her patience worn out, or the magic power of her presence at an end, and half despising his own weakness in this matter, we find Stephan Langton once more alone beside that blessed image in fervent prayer, and weeping like a child. In common with many other enthusiasts, he mixed up love, christianity, and idolatry in a most human yet injurious compound; and at this period of his life, in spite of study and eloquence, clerical advancement and political patriotism, was in peril of wrecking both mental morals and spiritual religion on the rock of the real and tangible.

Next morning he went early, as of course, to pay his orisons at the shrine; it always must be quite early or quite late, that he might be sure to find himself alone with his idol—at other hours folks went in and out of the chapel—so he went there habitually either at dusk or at dawn.

As he crept in softly and was nearing the saint's side chapel in the dimness, he discerned that mysterious veiled female figure already kneeling at the feet; at first he instinctively shrank back and would have gone out, for fear of what his spirit dreaded like an infection; but the rustle of his robe in that silent chapel caught her ear, and she suddenly turned on him the same sweet face, so eloquent of far-off Alice, so piteous with weeping and entreaty.

It was impossible that poor girl could be an actress, a profligate, a designing despicable hypocrite of love and feeling; all was manifestly real.

She rose to meet him, and he trembled as he stood, leaning against a column.

"Father, why didst thou leave me? I am alone, alone in the world; and the sweet sisters of Ste. Geneviève help me for the saint's sake, but she is unkind, and hath not helped me nor answered."

Stephan could not say a word, something in his throat choked him.

"Father, thou canst not, I am sure, be unkind, for thou art so like him who once was all kindness to me,—have pity on me, for in thy blessed presence——"

"Child, as a priest and confessor, I rebuke thee; yet," he added quickly seeing her emotion, "only in faithfulness, maiden, and not as unkindly, for Stephan Langton——"

"Ha! say that name again, it is as like his as thou art like him!"

"Sister," calmly answered Stephan with a strange light breaking in upon him, "I had a brother once, but have not seen or heard of him these five and twenty years; canst thou possibly know anything of Simon Langton?"

"His name, his very own dear name! and thou his brother?"

"Yea, sister; and be calm, lean on my hand, tell me quietly, where is he?" Stephan was now the strong man again, that enervating mist of evil was dispersed. "Speak freely, dear sister, an thou knowest; where is my long-lost brother?"

"At Rome, a whole world away from me; my mother died soon after he had taken the cowl at St. Germain's, and he said he dared not stay to be so nigh me; so he went away, and left me with the sisterhood." Every word had its tear, and went like an arrow to the heart of Stephan.

How strange and perfect a coincidence, but not unmatched in the experience of some of us, who more than once have known a curiously resembling set of circumstances happen simultaneously to brothers or friends personally much alike. People of the same mould of body have oftentimes the same mould of mind, the same tastes, feelings, principles; and circumstance is swayed and fashioned much by these to every one of us.

So Stephan was unto her henceforth as a brother: and from his own sorrows, for he told her all, he could counsel her, and comfort her, and teach her whence to draw consolation for herself. For, all this strange and touching incident in his life taught our great Englishman a deep heart-lesson of theology that otherwise he never might have learnt; the true soul-peril of image-worship, the material overshadowing the spiritual, as a deadly yew that kills all life beneath it. This was the first gleam on Langton's pure and susceptible but then darkly-seeing mind as to the evil of Rome's prime sin—idolatry.

CHAPTER XL.

HAL'S EMBASSIES.

Hal's return one day after a long postal absence came to our hero as a good help in a great dilemma, for it enabled him to execute a wise and kind resolve that Stephan had somewhile made for Angelique. But first, let us hear how Hal has sped in his several points of embassage.

The old father Hugh, safely stowed away at Wodetone again, had become the most popular gossip ever known in those parts. Endless stories, true ones too, and wonderful as true, chiefly to the honour of that redoubtable knight Sir Ralph, his whilome master, collected such audiences, that the good parish parsonry of Wodetone, Aldeburie and St. Martha's had no small cause to envy old Hugh his eager congregations.

Furthermore, the half dubious heir, Sir Reginald, might now take up his heritage unanxiously; he was a right good man, but—having been in a false position for so many years, as not sure of his crusading uncle's death, nor able to take up his own knighthood, nor the absolute fee of his estates—was unsettled and irritable, until Hugh Langton's evidence made quite an altered man of him. Sir Reginald de Camois of Wodetone appeared now like to rival in county-side love and popularity that dear old nonagenarian lately deceased, Sir Tristrem de Braiose of Aldeburie.

Hugh had brought a spur for his master's heir, by way of evidence of death—one of Sir Ralph's own spurs, which the faithful esquire managed to disengage from the good Knight's mangled corpse, when lying among the dead-heap of Tiberias: it was long kept in the family, and has since, strangely enough, turned up as an exhumed archæological relic, for (how it got there, I know not) it was unearthed in 1849, in digging the foundations of St. Martha, very near the two stone tombs I spoke of in the preface, and on the same day. This is a fact, as the other is—petty ones, perhaps, as merely local—still, truth is truth, and you may as well take the facts for what they are worth.

Hal's next embassage regarded politics and history. He called at many castles, leaving Langton's carefully-cyphered letters everywhere. The realm was exasperated against John, principally for his recent miserable trucklings to France, by way of gaining an ally against his own outraged subjects—whom he had actually obliged to pay twenty thousand marks of tribute to Philip, by a tax on the plough-lands of England: his excuse being dowry-money on the occasion of his neice's recent marriage with the Dauphin of France, an alliance much resented by Englishmen.

Furthermore, the tyrannical king had lately seized several castles of his Barons, because they had demanded of him a Bill of Rights; he had stolen away Isabella, the affianced bride of Count de la Marche, and forcibly made her his own wife, having divorced, for no cause but a new wicked will, his own Queen Avisa of Gloucester; he had starved to death in Corfe Castle, and at Windsor, several whole families of illustrious birth, who had either been his invited guests, or had surrendered themselves as hostages; and had been guilty of divers other acts of forcible criminal wantonness against some high-born demoiselles, which almost nothing but incipient madness could explain or excuse. England was sick of him: so sick as to find in her loathing bosom a party almost base enough to welcome a French King. Arthur, indeed, was there—an obvious and lawful substitute, but he was a mere lad, under the tutelage of an unpopular mother, and always in the power either of his uncle, an open enemy, or of Philip, misnamed Augustus, a false friend. England accounted that poor youth lost, especially as his mother, Constance of Bretagne, was a foolish and violent woman; and somehow the nation never rallied at his name. But we shall hear of him anon, no doubt.

Hal's third embassage was, in the spirit of the times, one of transcendant importance: no less than exporting salvation, in the shape of a piece of rotten wood, to Sister Alice. Happily for her, that good and pure and chastened spirit, full of charity and good works, disinterested, self-sacrificed, and believing, needed no such treacherous stimulant to piety, no such lying test of safety;—but the fragment had its uses nevertheless.

When Hal brought it to the nunnery, the good old Abbess, Ursula de Losely, was lying in the article of death. She had been a first-rate chief, governing her forty females (no easy team to drive) not only creditably but comfortably; everybody loved her, and they respected very obediently her express wish that the holy sister of St. Martha's, the nun Alice, so known for fervency in devotion and activity in good works among the poor and sick, should be her successor as Abbess. Hal's coming, and his priceless gift from Stephan of that testimonied morsel of wood, availed still more powerfully to influence the scale in the feminine election: the owner of such a treasure to the Nunnery as a piece of the True Cross must be undeniably the triumphant candidate. Joan of Chinthurst, however pertinacious and ambitious, and Anne de Worplesdon, however well-dowered, and a knight's daughter, even they gave in their votes to Alice, though chief candidates otherwise themselves, directly they heard of this astonishing rise in her religious fortunes. No Pope could be spiritually richer.

As for Alice herself, she, a simple, true-hearted, loving woman, was not deceived by any such conventional values, nor, indeed, by anything but her own weak heart. She received the relic with all honour—but I must say paid more kissing and crying attention to the letter that accompanied it—and acquiesced duteously, rather than heartily in the unanimous choice of her sister nuns, and the dying recommendation of the good old Abbess Ursula.

As to Hal, the bearer of that precious fragment, he was the most popular person ever known at St. Catherine's; whether or not they kissed the poor old unconscious Mercury all round, I know not—Hal never told upon them if they did—but all I know is they would have thought it quite a privilege to do so: the bearer of such a relic was holy from the contact alone.

And now for Stephan's design. This poor young thing, this orphan Angélique, cannot be left alone in Paris, cannot dwell with him anywhere, cannot go to Rome, or be with Simon; her true home must be St. Catherine's Nunnery, where Alice, her twin spiritual sister, will give that widowed heart a sympathizing widowed heart to rest upon, and, in communion of congenial griefs, both render and receive deep comfort

CHAPTER XLI.

ANGELIQUE'S ADVENTURE BY THE WAY.

In the execution of this wise and brotherly arrangement, Hal—the ever-faithful, ever-shrewd, and ever-useful Hal—was, of course, our Stephan's safe ally. Preliminaries were easily settled: the sisters of Ste. Geneviève had no hold but that of charity on the fair orphan, and when Stephan's blood-relationship to her betrothed, and his desire to place her in an English nunnery, were known (to say less of the girl's own wishes), the thing was obvious; and those kind sisters prepared with alacrity her necessary wardrobe and all other viatica.

As for Hal, he was always ready; and had so organised his means of going and coming, that he now thought little of the way or its perils. Down the Seine to Havre was, at all events, a swift and easy voyage, pleasant withal and safe; for Hal had made scores of friends among the rough but kindly river population, and his boat was as full of wraps and comforts as a self-depending Englishman usually contrives to stow around him. Then they stopped o' nights at Hal's various resting-places on such a voyage (for it was impossible to steer the craft safely through those torrents and shallows in the dark) and Angélique, to whose girlish mind all this was delightful novelty, really in spite of her heart-sorrow never had been so happy in her life. Stephan had, I need hardly say, not only ordered all proceedings with ample liberality and the most thoughtful kindness, nor only parted from his semi-sister with affectionate regret, but also consigned her to Alice in a letter the very quintessence of love, all the warmer and choicer now from something of a compunctious reaction: undoubtedly for a day or two, merely from the magic of a likeness, the sweet stranger had touched his heart-strings more as Alice might herself have done than he could have conjectured possible; but the moment he discovered her relationship, that irritating spell was broken, and Alice, only Alice, was once again to him and more than ever the real love as well as the ideal. In that letter, he even could confess to her frankly, how strangely moved he had felt towards Angélique for having Alice's own hair and eyes and voice; how much more then, when he made that unlooked-for discovery of his long-lost brother's own affianced in her. And then, how touching and extraordinary the whole coincidence of Simon's love and its castastrophe with his own; how absolutely truth was stranger than fiction, in this story of a double pair of love's heart-martyrs. Surely Alice would rejoice in this sweet sister all the more for these many points of sympathy; surely they would comfort one another, bless one another.

Meanwhile good Hal, who knew well how to match his disguises according to his geography (an acolyte in Paris, a fisherman on the Seine, a forester in Surrey, and a religious palmer or soldier-pilgrim whenever his various missions required such a rôle) had got safely to Havre with his precious freight of Angélique and luggage and letters: and thence a sea-faring friend, duly paid, of course, and that handsomely for so perilous a voyage, transported them across channel, and landed them one fine afternoon of early spring at the mean little fishing town of St. Brighthelms.

Here, having taken due refreshment and a night's rest after those two wretched days and nights of sea-sickness (poor Angélique utterly forgot Simon and Stephan and everything else) they left next morning the miserable but welcome hostelrie; and engaging a string of packhorses, with their attendant leaders, pushed on straight over the Devil's Dyke and that perilous marshy track the weald of Sussex, to Horse-ham: a wretched collection of hovels and stabling, so named because at this point even packhorses became, from the state of the tracks, an impossibility. All travellers were wont to change their bearers here, leaving the "horses" at "home," and taking up with surer-footed mules instead: seeing that, in the deep and tenacious clay of the district, the only progress was over prostrate trees, lumps of faggotting laid upon quagmires, and in some places piles driven perpendicularly into the mud-holes, but indifferently regular as to height. No creature but a mule could pick its way for the ten miles between Horse-ham and Fitz-Walter's Surrey offset of his same-named Essex home, Castle-Baynard's: the country was a jungle of magnificent oak forest, undisturbed since Noah's flood, swarming with wild hogs on paunage,—but almost floating too in a mighty sea of mud, where iguanodons and ichthyosauri probably have lingered latest on our drowned earth: and the track through all this mess, winding and "corduroy" as I have described it, may well be believed perilous, when (beside the physical difficulties of the way) we take into account also its moral or rather immoral ones, as robbers and free-lances, and its dangers of a more mixed quality, as wolves, bears, and (though very rarely) an occasional bison bull or urus.

However, through good providence and its normal help thereto—good prudence, our travellers and their motley train of ten bundle-laden mules with cow-skinned theows attending, duly got into the court-yard of old Baynard's, a castellated pile of heavy oaken timbers and rough ragstone masonry that stood like a cliff among the sea of oaks luxuriantly spreading in every direction for miles and miles around it.

Hal's embassy here was a patriotic one and a political: howbeit, let us do his generalship the justice to acknowledge, that Baynard's is directly in the crow's flight between St. Brighthelm's town and our nunnery of St. Catherine's near Gilford. Hal was a man to be trusted, and had a mind for combinations.

Angélique well-cared for by the lady part of the family,—and the theows with their jaded muddy mules made happy after their kind by their congeners the baronial serfs, Hal had, as oftentimes before, his confidential audience with Fitz-Walter: who had retired to this his almost inaccessible castle, the duplicate Baynard's, because John had seized and burnt its namesake near Dunmow, and had spread his mercenary toils in every direction to capture the Baron and his family; and if caught certainly to destroy them, but whether by any less dreadful mode than starvation or flaying or burning alive, depended on the caprice of England's detested tyrant. So then Hal was most welcome; as Stephan had matured a plan for the escape of Fitz-Walter, Saher de Quincey, Earl of Winchester, John de Toupart, and a few other chief patriots, then deprived of their estates and in imminent peril of life, through Normandy into France: and, if unable to leave Normandy, at all events finding safe refuge there in the favouring fortress of Reuil.

But I will not stop my story to enter into its collateral details, which must be suggested by allusion as we from time to time come near them. Our immediate errand now is to get Angélique safely to St. Catherine's: no easy matter, as Hal soon learnt; for beyond the marshy weald the whole country was full of John's marauding Brabançons and Espagnôles; added to which, as Fitz-Walter's people innocently observed, there was the dread of travellers falling into the hands of Robin Hood and his outlaws, known to be in the immediate neighbourhood.

Hal said nothing, but saw at once the flower safety in the midst of the nettle danger: so, ascertaining from a cunning kerne (like enough from his love of sport and peril to attach himself anon to Robin's band) whereabouts the outlaws lay, Hal resolved to steer towards them, assured of being thereby well expedited afterwards to his journey's end.

But first for a fitting disguise: obviously the safest mask would be, as it usually is, religion: a young nun on her mule escorted by an ancient palmer and reputably attended by an armed retinue of kernes and loaded beasts of baggage would be more likely to pass well (not however without toll taken, and perhaps a broken coxcomb or two by the outsiders) through that infested countryside, than any other less respectable party: many a loose marauder and bloody brigand would in those days of simple superstition be turned from his purposed ill by the mere presence of one clad in the livery of Heaven.

Thus then taking leave of their kind hosts, Hal now nearabout in his own country led the way through the wood in single file towards the notable eminence over-looking Horse-block Hollow, as he knew that Robin's out-lying corps lay in the Hurtwood beyond: and the party were just emerging from the Hollow and slowly traversing the rugged heights between Ewhurst and Winterfold Hill, enjoying its magnificent prospect over the best part of three counties, when—all at once to Hal's dismay they came suddenly upon a large mounted patrol of Brabançons; those vile and cruel mercenaries of John who were more to be dreaded than wild beasts.

Hal whispered an order to three or four of the kernes; and immediately they were running forward towards different parts of the extensive wilderness around, known as the Hurtwood: his only hope was Robin,—and temporizing measures meanwhile. He also bade the mule-men, quite contrary to their own suggestions (but Hal had the mind of a general), to run away with the baggage beasts in every direction the moment he and the nun were stopped.

"Halt there! Sir Palmer: and our gentle sister too under the hood must tarry awhile: stop, I say, sirrah!"

Hal, who had been innocently leading his mule past in quick march, stopped meekly at the word, crossing his arms over the long brown hooded garment that concealed his forester dress and its appointments; and the nun also stopped with a surprised but graceful acknowledgment of the rough knight's presence.

"Merlebois, quick! those kernes must be followed and their mule-packs overhauled: quick, or they'll escape us in the bush; let each be followed separately three to one; and keep thou the trail in sight and leave me alone with the palmer."

"Ay, and with the nun too, Sir Fulk de Cantelupe: isn't it so, Knight?"

The men-at-arms, some thirty of them with their lieutenant, were soon plunging with their heavy horses up and down that cliffy escarpment in all directions, but proved no match for mules or kernes among such break-neck places; and were soon lost to sight over the ridge.

"And now, fair sister, with your gracious permission,—a sight of that pretty face would gladden the very eye of morning. Come now, no coyness, I will have a peep at it. Here, old man,—hold my horse: your mule can take care of itself. Nay then—but I will—"

The meek old palmer behind him suddenly blew such a blast close to that false knight's ear as well-nigh cracked the tympanum.

"Devils! what was that?"

Nobody but a meek old palmer stood beside him. And that blast did its duty otherwise too, for Hal heard an echo from the Hurtwood.

"Beware of that holy sister, Sir Knight: she hath ere now been miraculously defended."

"Saints and devils! but I well can trow it true; why I'll swear that's the face of a girl who was burnt at Tangley!"

"Ay, Sir Knight," shrewdly quoth the temporizing Hal, perceiving his superstitious bent, and himself aware (as you are) of all circumstances,—"Ay, and truly so: that miraculous face with the blue eyes and the golden hair, hath blinded men ere now: therefore is the sister always veiled."

"I protest though, she is pretty enough— for I caught a peep—to make one covet blindness:—and then, father, to be safe I can kiss it with my eyes shut: so—nay now no struggling,—one kiss in the dark."

Another horn, but this time a more distant one, again miraculously stopped both word and deed; but, (as that recreant Knight, possibly supposing from this less furious blast that the protecting spell got weaker, continued his unpleasant attentions, and that horn requiring its echo), the Palmer flung off his brown cloak, and openly blared away as loud as before.

"Ha! the traitor-churl!" and Cantelupe with lifted steel was preparing to cut down the forester, who however brandishing his knife seemed right well able to defend himself, when—a low whistle attracting his eye to a thicket, he suddenly was made aware of a bent bow, and a shaft, and a face peering over it: awkward that.

But look! here are Merlebois and his patrol guard hurrying back from all points at the last bugle-blast, and some of those baggage mules with them: only—that archer's transfixing eye still kept Cantelupe in check, and he didn't dare to move a muscle.

"Why, what's come to our Captain? bewitched by a nun into the statue of Achilles? Forward, men, and break the spell—Fulk, I say, what ails thee?"

As Merlebois and his men closed round their leader, whose eye was still fascinated by that rattlesnake archer, they took no notice (but Hal did) of the strange botanical fact that every bush of furze or bramble round appeared to have suddenly and silently fruited: an archer's green-capped head, with a bent bow and arrow, was everywhere cropping out of the thicket.

A tall dark man in Lincoln green sprang forward.

"Yield, Knight! every man of you is at my mercy."

It was true; those insolent Brabançons looked helplessly round at fifty bent bows over the bushes.

"Yield, I say; instantly fling your weapons down where you stand, John's-men! Robin's King here!"

All obeyed but two, who lifted up their spears: in an instant each of them had a quivering arrow unpleasantly skewered through his right arm.

"Honest Hal o' th' Wood, I heard thy note yonder, and the runners told me thou wert in sore peril; if any man have wronged thee, or imagined wrong against this holy demoiselle, speak out, and I'll do justice."

"Then, King Robin, while John-a-Naylor gathers up that sheaf o' spears, let thirty of the merrymen mount these Flemish geldings, and send the marauders home as best they may, disarmed, disgraced, unhorsed. As for this ruffian knight their captain, he deserves worse, and must suffer in his skin; take thou his good steed and its purple velvet trappings for Maid Marian, his Florence suit of inlaid arms and armour for thyself, and give me the cudgelling of him. No, I'm growing too old to do it masterly, let my deputy be delicate John."

"All as Hal has said!"

The sentence was quietly being carried out without a word more. The mercenaries became footmen and the merrymen centaurs by an instant transformation. But all at once the veiled nun said, in very pretty French, to Robin—

[Fitz-Ooth, as I have said, was perfect in his native Norman tongue, which of course was Fulk de Cantelupe's too,—]

"If the Knight will crave my pardon, I plead for him that he be spared the cudgel."

De Cantelupe, not yet out of his armour, with the sincerest expression of gratitude in eye and action, fell to his knee beside her mule, and craved her pardon both heartily and humbly.

"We also bid thee keep that gimcrack armour, holiday knight; but remember that thou owest a whole skin to a woman's mercy, and pay her back this kindness as thou mayst by mercy to women. However, thou goest home unhorsed, with all thy troop, and I keep this knightly sword of thine by way of hostaging thy troth; but thou art not to be envied a twelve mile march to Gilford this warm spring day in yon lobster suit of armour."

Fulk de Cantelupe was undoubtedly being let off too easily, at least so John-a-Naylor thought; he was spitting into his horny hands, twirling a quarter-staff, and longed to be after the business Hal had set him: he and his oaken cudgel were stout enough to have battered the Knight black and blue even as he stood in that dainty suit of plate; but here was a disappointment indeed, and blank was the lengthened visage of Little John. Robin's word was law, however, and the good deed was not now to be done, so that impatient quarter-staff was sullenly flung down.

But, when Robin's back was turned, and the Knight was tripping away delicately as Agag, herculean John-a-Naylor strode up behind him, and, just where joint armour gives place to a soft island of leather for the sake of a firm seat on the saddle, he dealt him one such a strenuous kick as to make the writhing coward roar again. The boot of the period (I need hardly say) was of bull-hide, with a thick ashen sole, tipped and heeled with iron, heavier than a Cornish wrestler's.

And so Robin and his men, with Hal and Angelique, and all their mules and followers streamed away into the Hurtwood, leaving those forlorn John's-men half-raging and half-laughing all alone in the wilderness. How they got to Gilford Castle I know not, but I do know that when they did get there, not one of the men-at-arms escaped corporal punishment for their disgrace; and Merlebois and Fulk, though prime favourites of the King, were counted craven Knights for having given up so tamely both their swords and horses, and were for a long while shunned accordingly by all the court.

As for onr travellers, the rest of their way was plain-sailing enough; a few of Robin's men gave them safe escort to St. Catherine's.

Alice was now the Superior: years had rolled by, and she will be (if I may divulge a lady's age) thirty-four this very next summer of 1203, having danced as our May-day Queen of seventeen, in 1186; she has been exactly seventeen years before us, and Stephan too, besides their sketch of antecedents. And now, just in this doubled year of her career, she is strangely to meet her featured double.

Hal, the privileged humble friend and faithful messenger so oft of hopeless love, was at once admitted to an interview to deliver another of those precious letters; and he brought with him the veiled sister.

The new Abbess sat in an oriel, with a missal beside her and some needlework: there was also a handbell on the table, some blue hyacinths in a garden-pot, a monastic casket with padlocks, and writing materials, beside the nunnery seal. The room was long and lowbrowed, wainscotted in black carved oak nearly up to the ceiling, and with an enormous open hearth and fire-dogs at the side opposite the great oriel window.

Hal approached her, and gave his letter, which Alice hastily and eagerly devoured with her eyes and her heart.

"Let my sweet sister come near me: I know thy story, and (as thou wottest) it is also mine own: lift thy veil, sister, and let us kiss one another."

When Angelique lifted her veil, each of those fair-haired, blue-eyed nuns seemed to be looking on herself, except that Alice, as the elder, was a trifle more matronly; but never sister was so near alike, and never bosom-friends so loved each other. Let us leave them to their sweet and sympathizing communings, while I turn black page in this tale.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MURDERER AND HIS VICTIM.

For Hal on his return journey had witnessed a deed of horror—unwillingly, helplessly, been witness to it—a deed, whereat all Europe then shrunk and quivered in dismay, and that has touched the hearts of men with pity for the victim, and abhorrence of the murderer from that hour to this. With reference to the scene that now my pen must feebly trace, it is wise to give as well as to have authorities, seeing that the view here taken of it is not the common one; and yet it is not only probably true, but likewise actually so, since our honest Hal was witness to the catastrophe.

My details are founded on Tyrrell's History of England, folio, 1700—vol. 2, p. 721; Gulielmi Britonis Philippidos, p. 166—(Brito lived about 1230, and, as a cotemporary, is a first rate witness); the annals of Margan, quoted as Tom II. by Tyrrell and Thomson: and a paper in the twenty-second volume of the Archæologia, by Mr. Hardy—an Itinerary of the movements of King John, from the Tower records.

On the night, then, of April the third, 1203, Hal was leaving Rouen for Paris by his usual safest way, a fisher-boat on the Seine: he must leave by night to escape the river-guard, and as by good fortune it rained (he usually waited for this) there was much less chance of being stopped at the town's water limits. So he had crept on board with his accustomed friend on such occasions, a well-known Rouen pécheur, and, hugging the right bank to avoid currents, their light craft was slowly ascending the river.

Anon, in the desolate darkness, a boat passed them closely, with two rowers, and one person astern; he was in a cloak and slouched cap, but evidently either a youth or a woman, for some long light curls fell over his shoulders. Hal wondered what the gallant could be after on such a dark night, and lately so wet too; but the boat went on, and Hal had his own reasons for hailing nobody.

Soon after, another boat, swift and strongly manned, passed rapidly: somebody in it must have come from a revel, for he swore terribly, but all in the maudlin drunkard's note; there were ten rowers and a steerer, seemingly in the Brabant livery, and the half-tipsy blaspheming passenger wore a plumed hat and rich crimson domino. Hal and his mate wondered as before, and crept along close in shore faster in comparison than those outer boats that had to stem the current.

All at once, at a sharp bend of the river, they came flush upon the two boats, evidently pursued and pursuer, and a loud, terrible oath, "By God's teeth, ha!" startled the midnight, as the galley ran into the skiff, with a crash that clean capsized it. The two rowers swam for shore, nearly coming upon Hal's coracle, and the cloaked stranger with the fair long curls (a rising moon just showed them, and the cap had fallen into the stream) was clinging for dear life to the rudder of the galley.

Instantly, in that tell-tale moonlight, with the same horrible oath, the crimson stranger rushed to the stern, seized those streaming golden locks with one hand, and with the other dealt some cruel dagger-stabs on the poor youth's body. Screams and groans and oaths terrified the silent night—but what could Hal do, with his wallet full of righteous treason against the wicked king? What could he and his mate, both pretty aged, and unarmed to boot, do for rescue against a dozen armed mercenaries?

The horror deepened: for that murderer, mad with drink and crime, jaggedly hewed at the poor struggling neck with his dagger, and, letting the body float down stream, like an exulting red demon, flung the ringletted head into the galley!

That same morning early, a partner of Hal's fisher-friend, found, caught in one of his weirs, the floating body, headless; it was recognized by the under garments, albeit outwardly disguised, as Prince Arthur of Bretagne.

There are yet some details to be added. When John, at the siege of Castle Mirabel, had captured his unhappy nephew, he first imprisoned him at Falaise, the fortress birthplace of our first William. It is said that here John began by "promises of great honours," then by "entreaties as his Lord and Uncle," to do his best to cajole Arthur into peaceable resignation of his heritage; but in vain, for the bold youth "answered him disdainfully, demanding his kingdom of England, and all the dominions King Richard died possessed of, as his right by inheritance." And then, with many threats and reproaches, John sent him prisoner to Rouen, to be kept in close custody by Robert Vipont, one of John's worst tools and parasites—as also were two of our other earliest bad acquaintances in this tale, Fawkes de Breauté and Fulk de Cantelupe.

The familiar name of Hubert de Burgh is popularly too much traduced amongst us, as if he were the weak but would-be torturer, or irresolute executioner of Arthur. In fact, he had many noble points of character: honest, brave, humane; faithful to the crown, though worn so wickedly; and true to England, as was well evidenced by the sturdy stopping of Louis at Dover in his ill-advised invasion. Aubert, thinking to save the Prince's life, did evil that good might come, and has smarted for it ever since. He falsely gave out that Duke Arthur was dead in prison, meaning thereby to secure his escape somehow, and he caused all the church-bells in Brittany to toll for him; but the Bretons were so exasperated, that Hubert was forced to tell them it was all a cheat to save the Prince's life—which coming to the King's ears, he resolved to kill him outright.

First, however—being craven enough not to wish to do the deed himself, though bold and bad enough to instigate its perpetration—John asked a certain good knight, who, upon high-king principles, had always conscientiously stuck to him, one William de Bray, (so Brito testifies) "to murther his nephew; but this personage plainly told ye King, he was a Gentleman and not a Hangman." Whereupon, after even the trustworthy Hubert's defalcation in the premises, and an utter distrust of such scoundrels as Vipont and Cantelupe, John resolved for absolute assurance to kill the youth with his own hand: the plan being, to induce Arthur to escape by a window from Rouen Castle to the Seine, and then to intercept him in his flight, as we have recorded it. The body *was* found by a fisherman headless, and the head itself never: the Annals of Glamorganshire Margan testify to the King's semi-drunkenness on the occasion, as well as to his peculiar and shocking oath: and Mr. Hardy has demonstrated from documents in the Record office that King John was at Rouen on the third day of April, 1203, the very day and year when Arthur disappeared.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CHURL ARRAIGNS THE KING.

OUR own witness, however, honest Hal, was enough for Stephan; who, horrified by the recital, hastened to set out the hideous details of the deed before Philip Augustus. Stephan had rapidly risen into high favour with that calculating King;—and (death vacancies occurring, while his own merits amply justified the choice) was now Chancellor of the University of Paris, and Archbishop of Rheims. For it pleased Philip well to place in posts of honour one whom John did not scruple in a tone of expostulation to call his "declared enemy, Stephan de Langton;" more especially, as for learning, eloquence, and conduct, Europe could not find his parallel: and most especially, because he hoped by Langton's potent influences to play his own game of self-aggrandizement in the humiliation of John.

Attended, therefore, by his faithful Hal, robed in suitable attire as a gentleman's gentleman (in case his evidence for an eye-witness should be thought necessary) the Chancellor-Archbishop of Rheims demanded audience of the King, then holding a court in the Palais de Justice.

I need not lengthily repeat the dreadful story—which, in open conclave of the barons, knights, justiciaries, and other great officers of France assembled before the King in Council, Stephan, Archbishop of Rheims and his faithful servitor detailed to the horror of all present. The keen Philip at once saw and seized his advantage, commanding that "John of England, Duke of Normandy, be forthwith summoned before his suzerain lord, King Philip of France, and the Court of his Great Feudatories in Parliament assembled, to answer before them for the alleged murder within the Seignory of France of the son of his elder brother, a homager of the crown of France and a near kinsman of the King."

"My Lord Archbishop of Rheims is public accuser in this case before the Homage."

Stephan bowed obedience; the Churl—mitred and in full canonicals and invested with the Chancellor's golden collar—was indeed subduing the King.

"Let the heralds duly proclaim a set day for trial of this cause: and let legal notice be given to the aforesaid Duke of Normandy to appear before us his Suzerain Lord and the Homage, on that day to answer the charges against him."

The set day came. In the vast hall of the Palace were again assembled all the Great Feudatories of the kingdom: a magnificent crowd of armour, heraldry, nodding crests, and blazoned banners: with the King in a full suit of gilt-chain armour, and a gemmed circlet of gold around his casque, throned on the centre of the dais. Beside him on his right stood the Dauphin in an engraved suit of Florentine plate, and wearing a blue scarf: on his left Constance of Bretagne, the bereaved and distracted mother, seated—or rather half lying on a couch, sobbing audibly, was clad in the deepest mourning: above the monarch's head waved the Oriflamme of France, red silk with golden flames across it, brought specially for this great occasion, as usual when all the royal vassals are summoned, from the Abbey of St. Denis.

Stephan, robed, mitred, and croziered, stood near a table, covered at one end with the sacred mantle of St Martin, at which were several scribes with ink-horns, quills, and parchments; and Hal, apparelled as a lay acolyte, was stationed behind the Archbishop. The rest of that vast hall was filled, as I said, by a gorgeous and flashing crowd of steel and colour. All stood except the King, and by grace the Duchess Constance; but at a wave of the king's hand, simultaneously with a clatter and a crash all those armoured knights were seated.

The proceedings are too techinal, too verbose, and too uninteresting to occupy any lengthened space in our story. I can but touch a point or two, without affecting to give an exact or verbatim report.

When John was formally summoned, Eustace, Bishop of Ely, and Herbert de Burgh, Earl of Kent, stood forward as his ambassadors, demanding to know "whether their Master, if he appeared in person at that or any other court, would have safe conduct for his coming and going?"

Whereto King Philp answered with his usual severe astuteness, "He may come in peace."

But the Bishop replied, "May he return so?"

The King answered, "Yea, if the sentence of his peers permit him."

Then those ambassadors pressing the point of safe conduct both ways, the King got angry, and "swore by all the saints in France, that it should only be so according to the judgment of the court."

Whereupon the ambassadors withdrew; and on John's summons thrice by the herald, neither he nor any one as his attorney made appearance.

So therefore when Stephan de Langton and our important witness, his lay acolyte, had plainly stated all the facts before that horrified assembly, judgment on the criminal passed by default; and "as a traytor, a felon, and a parricide he was condemned to forfeit all his Seignories and fiefs which he held by homage of the crown of France;" and it was resolved that the re-entry of his Suzerain Lord be made by force of arms.

So it came to pass that Philip and his lords determined on the forcible re-conquest of Normandy, an easy task with no one heartily willing to oppose it. Hugh de Gourney without a blow surrendered Montfort to him, as did Fitzwalter and De Quincey, Castle Reuil; Falaise, Constance, Bayeux were quickly reduced, as also Arches and Verneuil, and only Rouen remained faithful to the hated John.

Meanwhile that recreant King behaved so wantonly for low debaucheries—so weakly, even to being "brisk and merry when he heard of a lost town"—so cruelly by flayings, starvings, and murderings; so slothfully, as often lying a-bed for days together with his young Queen, of whom, nevertheless, he was ceaselessly so jealous that he hung several unfortunate courtiers over her in that genial nuptial couch—so altogether madly, that in the spirit of the times his nearest followers thought him "bewitched"—and some since have, with Dr. Brady, apologetically written him down for "mad;" but it was the madness of a wicked conscience, the witchery of unrepented sin.

I care not to burden my tale with details of this Norman warfare, nor further of the horrors of John's career, except as incidentally: one sickens at his character and crimes, and (to withdraw an expression used earlier in this romance) one really finds this devil on better [or worse] acquaintance blacker than any yet have painted him.

As for the Dukedom of Normandy, and most of the other English fiefs in France, as Maine, Touraine, Poictou, and Anjou, John, the Twelfth and last Duke, lost them speedily; so far as nearly all Normandy proper is concerned, within the very same year in which he murdered Arthur—a manifest judgment of Providence. Within that year in chief, John, once more Sansterre in France saving his original Guienne, the ancient Aquitaine, was deprived of the grand three-century heritage of his ancestors: whereof now remain to England only those virgin islands, unconquered since they rose from Ocean's bosom, Guernsey and Jersey, the hospitable brave and beautiful; impregnable Alderney and romantic Sark; all the old Norman laws and customs are still extant on those free and pleasant shores, and happy are the people who can call them Home, or look back on their inhabitants for Ancestry.

CHAPTER XLIV

AN ACOLYTE AND HIS SISTER

In his many visits to England, we may safely rest assured that the affectionate Hal did not neglect his old master's family at Aldeburie, nor far less his own children there. In fact, he needed scarcely to diverge from a straight course to call at his old haunts, for among his many missives, patriotic or otherwise, be sure he always bore a love-letter for Alice at the Nunnery.

Thus then, the Vale of St. Martha's came naturally in his way, and he kept up a constant communication with those near and dear to him. Time flies fast, and the pretty little children were growing into youths and maidens, not to say men and women: there had been five left to him after that calamity at Shirebourne Pond, the three juniors of whom may remain unknown to us, except as two nameless stable-boys and a female scullery-child, who made themselves generally useful about the Braiose establishment; but with the two senior we must now become better acquainted as not unimportant characters in our tale.

I am not going to describe them; first, because every prudent reader skips with impatient indignation your regular novel catalogue of eyes, lips, and noses; and, secondly, because Edmund Wood was a common-looking lad enough, large and coarse-featured, though kindly in heart, and true of tongue; item, because his sister Millicent, though better favoured than her brother outwardly, had less of grace within: a morbid vanity and self-esteem had from the very cradle made her envious, jealous, and false. She alone (I grieve to report it) had never wept for Emma's death, for with Emma's beauty and cheerfulness died a rival sister's influence over father, friends, and family: to Millicent's selfish nature her drowning was undoubtedly a gain.

But Hal noted little of this evil in his child: he loved her all the more because she was next to Emma, and his own generous nature could not suspect in Millicent such unsisterly meanness and want of feeling. It was "her way" to be tenacious and irritable; it was "her way" to make mischief, and throw out uncharitable hints against any whose merits or amiability excited her jealousy; it was "her way" to be unpleasant and by consequence unpopular; so folks let her have "her way."

In truth this very unpopularity in the Braiose household, coming sharply to Hal's ears, induced him to desire some other home for his daughter; and as Edmund, too, had manifestly outgrown pageship, and was rather a superfluity in-doors, Hal resolved that he should seek his fortune elsewhere. The young man, finding himself not altogether at home as Sir Wilhelm's serving-man (old Tristrem has been dead these four years, and this is his grandson and heir) had long wished to join his father, whose increasing years seemed likely enough to need some such comrade in his wanderings: while as for Millicent, ungracious and ungrateful minx, change of any sort, travel anywhither, a respite from the dulness of that Great House, and an escape from neighbours who had found her out and detested her, these were to her mind everything: she longed to get away.

When Hal, therefore, in his next visit to Aldeburie, ventured humbly to hope that his Master's good Lady would spare to him these his two children (and he offered to find a pair of likely serfs in lieu) the matter was easier than he had dared to think probable, for the Lady de Braiose gave them to him freely; the young man was not fit for knightly servitude, and nobody liked the girl; so they were given up to the father, as he desired, and beyond his hopes.

How he conveyed them away, an unexpected prize (for strong were the cords of serfage to place and person in those feudal times) and how he got them safe to Paris I need not stop to describe; we have had enough of perils by the way. But anon, we find, among the crowd of servitors in the Chancellor's household, Hal's two scions, Edmund and Millicent, welcome to Paris and wondering at its bustle.

The young man, forthwith sent to learn reading and writing among the humbler scholars of the University, soon made progress, for he at all events had the merit of plodding industry: earnest and vigorous in all he undertook, and though far from a genius no fool either, within a few months Edmund had more or less mastered those accomplishments, and could stand (by special favour as Hal's son) before his Master the Archbishop, an acolyte qualified for fair transcribing.

As for the sister, she cared not to accept (as first offered) the duties of nurse's assistant in a hospital, preferring unphilanthropically to help in the College dairy, and look after the fowls and pigs, which, suffered to go loose about the streets of Paris during the day for the offal they might find, came home each night regularly for better fare. But Millicent, according to her nature, was envious of Edmund's new acquirements, and pre-eminently jealous of his access to Monseigneur, and of his probable advancement in the world far beyond herself.

CHAPTER XLV

RELIGION AND ITS PERSECUTORS.

STEPHAN Langton was now deeply engaged in the compositions of those Commentaries on Holy Writ which have made his name so famous as an Ecclesiastical author. There were extant for centuries, and probably are so still, manuscript annotations from his hand of the whole Bible, chapter by chapter; which, indeed, he is said to have divided as we now have it, so far as the New Testament is concerned, for the convenience of public reading; as he found already done for the Old Testament in the Hebrew and the Septuagint.

At that time also, Pope Innocent the Third in the lull of no crusade against the Saracens, was getting up a meritorious persecution to crush those noble remnants of the primitive Christianity of Gaul, the Waldenses and Albigenses: the first named from Peter Waldo their leader, chased with his followers from Lyons in 1172, the others deriving their appellation from Alby, a town in Languedoc where the lamp of true religion still flickered. These men were lovers of their Bible and its Author; protesters against saint-worship, image-worship, Mary-worship, purgatory, transubstantiation, oral confession, and all other errors and corruptions of the Papal scheme; and stood up manfully for a free conscience and religious toleration. It is no wonder that a haughty and ambitious Pope would desire nothing better than to turn the stream of military adventure and superstitious cruelty towards the destruction of so pestilent a race.

Raymond the Sixth, Sovereign Count of Toulouse, stood forth with manly liberality as protector of his poor subjects—the Albigeois; and their fierce scourge for many years was Simon de Montfort, a name that has come down to us detestable through seven centuries: while a very Cromwell for rigour and fanaticism, he was a second Nero for blood-thirstiness; and, wantonly cruel, anticipated every species of crime, lately re-produced by our Sepoy monsters, on the bodies of God's saints in ancient Languedoc: till, under the inspiration of another cotemporary human demon, he burnt alive thousands upon thousands.

This demon was a Spanish monk named Dominic, the severest of ascetics, out of whose tall, thin, pallid frame had been lashed and starved every kindly feeling by self-inflicted torments, and whom the equally stern Pope Innocent chose as his chief tool for the extirpation of heresy. In 1204, to the misery of mankind, was erected the dread Tribunal of the Inquisition: and thenceforward hideous machines, which none but a blessed Saint Dominic could have invented, racked and tore and tortured "the Excellent of the Earth."

And the Pope had another ally in King Philip; who was glad to purchase, by so pleasant a sacrifice as the extirpation of the pure and pious, the recall of an Interdict recently laid upon his people by Innocent, for the cause of their monarch (having flung aside his wife Ingeburga) living in adultery with Agnes de Meran.

Now, in Paris, we may readily suppose, resided several of those good folk, who held the faith of Christ in its primitive purity: and, as like is attracted by like, it is small wonder that Hal was well acquainted with Jacques Vertot and his family; a little nest of genuine, though uncanonized, saints, who lived at a tumble-down abode in the Rue des Fossés: Vertot was a furrier, with a gentle wife and obedient children; but the chief adornment of that happy home was Marie his eldest daughter.

Hal's own mind had been lightened out of darkness and quickened into warmth by the converse of these good people: while his master, Stephan, also had insensibly imbibed from another similar source, the Holy Scriptures, very much of Evangelic truth, albeit, like Fénélon and Pascal afterwards, he lived and died within the pale of Rome.

And the young transcriber, Edmund, had not been copying Scripture for many weeks in vain: his revered master's Notes upon the Psalms, and Exercitations on Our Lord's Passion had strangely touched and interested him: and now another element came in opportunely to refine and elevate his character.

It was quite natural that Hal should find for his son such pleasant and excellent friends as the Vertots; they lived handy to the college, made everybody happier and better who came within their influences, and were everyway desirable: and it was still more natural that the moment Hal's unsophisticated Edmund set eyes on Marie it should be love at first sight. Never had the young man seen such beauty: for beauty is mainly of the mind and heart; and never until he saw Marie had he looked upon a saint. There was a very halo of ecstatic happiness quietly shining round her brow, and rays of joy and peace softly lambent from her eyes: whether she was beautiful of feature or graceful in form I know not, nor did Edmund; but she was apparelled in the beauty of holiness, and her every look and word and act combined the pensiveness of wisdom with the blessedness of love.

That with so sweet a teacher the charmed pupil by her side soon became a convert to her creed was not only likely to happen, but did so soon enough; and it was strange to see how the highest form of human love, because mingled with heart-religion, ennobled, glorified—even beautified that once ungainly youth: he was elevated into the gentleman by being purified into the saint; and, as to his coarse features, the same beauty shone about his brow and was lambent in his eyes as that which made the loveliness of Marie. Whatever else was wanting in that face, love and joy and peace were there to make it beautiful.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN ORTHODOX SISTER: AND AN ORTHODOX SERMON.

But the jealous Millicent could not bear to be a patient witness of all this happiness: she was envious, miserably so, and resolved to tear down the fabric of her brother's peace and of his rising fortunes. It's true the Vertots had been civil to her,—as they were to everybody; and Edmund was her brother,—but how could she help that? Here was a great reward offered by public proclamation to any one who would denounce the enemies of Holy Church,—and she wasn't going to be the fool to refuse five golden marks, if kings and priests were willing to give them to her. Besides, wasn't it her bounden duty (the hypocrite!) as well as her clear interest to obey her ghostly director, who, in the confessional, had charged her strictly to denounce heretics if she knew of any? The same order had been systematically given throughout Paris.

Millicent brooded over the thought morosely and alone: her father had gone to England, and her brother, where was he sure to be, when not at his writing-desk? With his sister, walking on the ramparts, or the quay, or helping her bargains in the marchés? Not he, indeed: but always with that hypocritical heretic Marie Vertot. She hated her: how easy, how pleasant it would be to bring down all her pious pride! So Millicent brooded on it darkly.

Meanwhile, to silence evil rumours as to his orthodoxy due to our hero's Scriptural labours and his blameless life, Monseigneur, the Archbishop of Rheims, preached in the new cathedral of Notre Dame before the

King and his Court a famous sermon; magnificent in style, triumphant in argument, ornately poetical in language; that language, to please and inform both King and people, being not as usual the unintelligible Latin, but honest Norman-French, with a touch of the musical Provencal and Wallon, notes of troubadours and trouvères: and that sermon being adorned by metrical episodes, one morsel whereof I have given you in our opening chapter.

The sermon professed to be in honour of the Virgin Mary; whom Stephan (perhaps to make his praises more sincere) chose to panegyrize under the fancy-name of Alice: this was acute in many ways: first, because Philip's youngest sister, once affianced to Richard of England, and even now one of the congregation near the King of France, was named Alice: secondly, because Philip's own mother, a princess of Champagne, also bore the name of Alice: thirdly, because (according to the punning argumentation of the times) "Allicio" in the Vulgate meaning "I entice,"—to call in a seeming Mariolatry the blessed Virgin Bele Aliz, or fair enticement, would signify her drawings of the soul to holiness and heaven: and fourthly, for a reason living in St. Catherine's nunnery, which our love-martyr, the eloquent Archbishop, did not think it worth his while to specify particularly. And, therefore, did he preach at length and very ingeniously about the "cink fleurettes," and the "rose fleurie:" in fact taking for his text the battered remnant of that identical chaplet which he wore that day upon his arm under the canonicals: he did this on every great occasion, and reverently kissed it afterwards as you have seen him, on his knees.

Millicent's confessor did his duty:—and she, (he praised her for it cordially) did her's: in the course of the day it was tangibly worth five marks of gold to her; a mark a head for old Vertot and his wife, Marie and her eldest brother, and Edmund: it wasn't worth while, she thought, to mention the little ones; their guilt as to heresy couldn't be proved; besides, she could hardly expect a gold mark each for them. Millicent Wood went away, quite elated at her dutiful obedience and zeal for Holy Church; and fingered gladly those five pretty gold pieces,—the price of blood!

That same evening, when the Vertot family and

Edmund with them were at prayers, a royal guard of Ribauds marched up the Rue des Fossés; and halted at the portal where a black bear-skin hung for a sign. Millicent's confessor (he got his fee for this, no doubt), with four black Dominicans hideously cowled and eyeholed, having demanded admittance, entered, went up stairs, and found the family actually on their knees occupied in the capital crime of praying without a priest, caught "flagrante delicto": evidence of their atrocious wickedness was here patent and avowed, if any evidence were needed: and all five were summoned to prison forthwith: the little ones, fortunately for them, having somewhile gone to bed.

The five obeyed without a word, knowing it was for martyrdom: the familiars bound their elbows tightly with cords, and tied them thus trussed in a string together: and so that holy family, the victims of a jealous selfish sister and a persecuting priestdom, were escorted by that orthodox but blaspheming and obscene guard the ribald Ribauds, through the filthy streets by night to the Palais de Justice; where they were flung together into a flooded dungeon below the level of the Seine, by way of watery contrast with their fiery trial to come on next morning.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE AUTO-DA-FE.

I TREMBLE at the thought of describing such a scene, but it must be done somehow, as a true picture of the period, and to illustrate the tender mercies, the paternal gentleness of Rome towards any who presume to dissent from her despotic dictates; and to think for themselves, and pray, and do good; and to live blamelessly in love towards God and man.

The morning dawned, and the rats in that foul cavern slunk away with darkness, ceasing to do battle for a meal. How those innocent five—noble, enviable, happy, spent the night—five holy guardian angels in particular and the whole company of Heaven in general, knew and rejoiced at: in the sure and steadfast hope of immortality; in ecstatic premonitions of the bliss awaiting them just on the other side of that fierce flame, so soon to be blown out, while the reward is everlasting; in fervent prayers for each other, and the little ones at home, and all friends, ay and all enemies too, even to those wanton guards and their familiars: in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, that seemed to charm away darkness, fear, and every form of evil; in the happiest communion of saints, the loving husband sure to die with his loving wife, and children dying not less happily, not less honourably with him, and as for Marie and Edmund, rejoicing at the blessed prospect of entering eternal bliss together in the favouring smile of the Almighty, and with the "Well done, good and faithful"—of the blessed Jesus Himself.

But the morning dawned, and the great sepulchral bell of Notre Dame tolled mournfully. This was the first great seizure of Protesting Heretics after the King's orders had gone forth; the criminals were notoriously blameless, respectable, excellent for character and charities; moreover, one was a copyist in the questionable Archbishop's bookery—and another a very pretty girl—to say less of a venerable father, an invalid mother, and a brother of whom no one knew any harm: never was there such a gang to be made a severe example of, to the glory of Dominic, and Innocent, and Rome, and Philip of France.

Their doom had been fixed the night before—all to be burnt alive together in the open space before the Hotel de Ville. The spectacle would be honoured by the presence of King Philip Augustus in person, and all the magnates of the capital.

An immense crowd had gathered before the Town Hall long before the appointed hour, and thronged all the avenues leading to the place of execution. No sort of trial had taken place: all was assumed, or to the ecclesiastical conscience proved: the criminals had positively been caught in the act of prayer without a priest, and there was an end of the matter; they must be burnt alive for such a crime, as a simple anticipation of hell-fire. Anyhow, the wretches were guilty of holiness, and tens of thousands have died at Rome's command by the most cruel of deaths for no worse crime.

Among that dense crowd, one person had gone thither earliest, and so was in the first row behind the soldiers, and closest to the vast pile of faggotting. It was Millicent Wood; none but her confessor, and herself, and God above—and haply weeping angels and exulting devils—knew that it was by her treachery alone these innocents were now about to die. But she knew it; she was speedily come to be a self-convicted Judas; she abhorred herself, and as for those five gold marks, she had flung them into the Seine with the bitterest remorse, as she crossed the little Chatelet early that morning to get near the pile; she hated herself—and loathed her ghostly director who had wormed it all out of her—and she longed to go and perish anywhere out of the world, like Judas.

And now the time approached: that bell tolled quicker: a mixed procession of loose soldiery and cowled friars came and roused the martyrs from their reveries of bliss, and hurried them to the Grand Square: his Highness the King might possibly get there first; and imagine the treason of keeping him waiting!

Quietly, courageously, nay happily walked on that holy family; and the populace hooted, and the attendant soldiery were lewd and brutal, and earth and hell seemed all let loose against them; but Heaven shone upon them smilingly from above, and there was peace within, and all was well. Who could not, who does not envy those martyrs marching on to Victory and everlasting life?

There was a terrible hooting and howling against them when they appeared in the great square before the Town Hall, for the King and Court had just come, occupying the tapestried balcony over the grand entrance; and it was clearly ill-breeding to have kept his Highness even a moment waiting for the sport—those detestable heretics!

They were marched up to the royal box, just like race-horses at Ascot, then marched round the pyre, to please the people, who criticized their points much as the racing folks are wont to do: "Look at that old fat fellow, how he will burn!"—"here's a comely lass for you; well, her smock won't cover her long, that's one comfort!"—"bless us, they must chain those stout young fellows well to the post, or they'll break away!" and as for poor Madame Vertot, they laughed at her loudly for her limping. Nevertheless, all those names were written in Heaven's Book of Life; and King Philip, luxuriously looking on (he was eating an early melon) might well have thought himself happy to exchange circumstances with Madame Vertot: yes, and many of those gay court ladies too, chatting with their gallants, and eager for the spectacle.

The parade ceased: there was a flourish of trumpets, and the sports were going to begin in earnest.

Five Dominican friars, in long black robes, cowled and eye-holed, came forward, each leading one of those dreadful culprits, and holding a crucifix before him: very gently (such are the tender mercies of the wicked) did those reverend personages lead the detestables to the stakes: there were five set up in a quincunx, a whole stack of faggotting being heaped all round it; and an executioner's man at each stake, not without kicks and oaths, chained those prisoners to the upright posts.

A priest, it was Millicent's confessor (she recognised him) with the jaunty air of one who has done an acceptable service, advanced and bowed before the King, and received from his most Christian Highness a lighted torch, first handed to the King by a familiar: the Dominicans truly call themselves 'Canes Domini, setting the world on fire, for "outside are dogs," and it is "set on fire of hell."

The smirking priest, who felt it his day of triumph indeed, as, basking publicly in royal favour, handed the torch to the captain of the Ribauds, officially chief executioner, who (Circumlocution being manifest even there) handed it to a gilded deputy, who in his dignified turn handed it to the vulgar fellows who really did the business; and these ran from one to another, setting the whole heap in a blaze.

At once—and as if by inspiration, as if Heaven had been opened and the whole angelic quire suddenly heard—from the midst of those fierce flames, consuming indeed the bodies terribly, but unable to consume the souls, arose a sweet melody, calm, musical, ecstatic, for they sang together in parts as they had been wont to do,

"Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might be unto our God for ever and ever!"

Could they be in agonies? Had not God's angels helped them, even as in the case of Azarias, Ananias, and Misael?

And again, snatches of ejaculatory prayer and praise rose ever and anon from the thick black smoke above the crackling of the faggots and the stifled human groans and moans forced from those blest martyrs—and one voice—it was that of Jacques Vertot the father, shouted exultingly from that fiery furnace,

"Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory!"

And then another voice, a youth's, seemed to demand in a paroxysm of pain,

"How long, O Lord, holy and good, wilt Thou not avenge our blood!"

And then another, a woman's, sweet and shrill, as of a soul flying heavenward in agonizing joy, sounded clearly among all the riot,

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Then two of those half-naked executioners, who with busy zeal (seemingly cruel but really humane) had been heaping green wood high about the victims to suffocate them with the smoke and make them senseless—upon this burst into audible sobs. Their chief noticed the weakness, and it will surprise nobody to hear that a year afterwards they also nobly suffered martyrdom as so-called Albigeois. The prayer of Marie was heard for them, as the Protomartyr's was for Paul.

But, O King, Philip Augustus, O profligate Court and nobles, O base people crowding to this holy martyrdom as if it was a bull fight, O priests, friars, and monks, hell's own children all, destined if only by the Nemesis of this day's work to burn there unhelped in everlasting torments, O thou chiefest caitiff, Millicent Wood,—

I thought of her, because I seemed to see her on that instant. A frantic woman apparently disguised, rushed out of the crowd, breaking through the guard, and flung herself on the heap of burning faggots: she ran up them determinately, and clung to one of the chained youths, who, roasting as he was, bent his head to kiss her: she clung to him, and both burned together as they stood, but he only moaned the end of that sweet psalm, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,"—while she, burning as she voluntarily clung there, screamed and howled horribly, like a tortured jackal!

"If I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

The shrieks of Millicent Wood, a suicidal penitent too late like Judas, broke up that pleasant spectacle: for his most Christian Highness began to dislike the stench as over-savoury: and he and his Court had finished all their Fontaine-de-belle-eau grapes and melons: and the best of the show was over, and really that stench of burnt flesh was unbearable any longer; their pouncet-boxes were quite useless. So his most Christian Highness bowed courteously to the chief Dominican, a truculent-looking and dirty friar, tonsured, bare-footed, and black-cassocked; and with a flourish of trumpets, the royal train retired.

The martyrs had all entered into rest! and were now in the heavenly Jerusalem, with an innumerable company of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, and with Jesus their Beloved who had rejoiced over them with joy, as the bridegroom over his bride, owning them as His before the angels of God: so that Heaven rang thrillingly with even more than its supernal choirs of joy as each of those blessed ones from his chariot of fire entered into the world of glory.

As for the ferocious crowd, the greater part had eagerly gloated on that spectacle: but some few, and they could not get away for the crush, overcome by pity or possibly sympathizing in faith, loudly encouraged the martyrs, some praying for them openly : and several of those officious black Dominicans prying about them from the wide circle kept by the Ribauds with their maces and the King's halberdiers, noted them in their tablets, questioning the folks around them of their names and whereabouts: and ensuring for the morrow a similar exhibition of scarlet Rome drinking herself drunken with the blood of saints.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ABOUT ANGELIQUE'S AND SIMON'S ANTECEDENTS.

STEPHAN LANGTON, though armoured in Archiepiscopal dignity, and supposed from his office to be at least an acquiescent in the matter, was more than shocked when he heard of all this horror. Till it was over he had known nothing of it: confessors are secret, Philip was anxious for an instant sacrifice in proof of his zeal for Rome, and the thing was begun and finished off-hand without any intermediate delays: for, after that order given overnight, it was clear that some victim or other would be found next morning at the Hôtel de Ville ready to be offered: stakes and faggotting are soon extemporized: so both court and people made its preparations rapidly.

But this new phase of character in Philip, and his own dangerous position as a suspected prelate, resolved our hero as to his next move in life: he must leave France,—at first, however, only Paris,—just to have time to communicate with the now absent Hal, and to make other arrangements; it was his wisdom to retire to Rheims, as in fact he had often been urged to do by his canons and clergy. Accordingly, with much acknowledgment to the king (whose appreciation of that sermon to the glory of Alice was still intense) he resigned the Chancellorship of Paris, to the great satisfaction of his Highness as a matter of patronage: for the King forthwith gave it to one out of sixty applicants; thereby making fifty-nine mortal enemies and one ungrateful friend.

Just as the Archbishop, with his multitudinous train of acolytes, copyists, cooks, servitors, and other domestics and officials, around some five score packhorses and mules, was entering his litter for Rheims, a halt was suddenly called, so far as Monseigneur and his immediate attendants were concerned: but the cavalcade of luggage beasts and sumpters passed on; it would be easy to overtake them on the route. And the cause was this; a sufficient one; the unexpected arrival of old Hal. Langton instantly had him in for a private audience; but was unpleasantly and beyond measure astounded to find him accompanied by Angélique—he could not be mistaken—in the masculine and only too attractive disguise of a young gentleman of quality! What a dilemma at this crisis.

Now, as poor old Hal has yet heard nothing of his dire domestic calamity, and as the Archbishop has plenty of documents to read (not excepting one from Alice) it may be as well to put you in possession of the facts whereby the unexpected, not to say unwelcome presence of Angélique (in a man's dress too, so scandalous if discovered) at this moment came about.

The first novelty over, our fair Parisienne soon found out that a dull Surrey nunnery was not at all the place for her. Accustomed from birth to the bustle of a crowded city,—her mother had been a court-sempstress in the Rue St. Jacques, and as for her father unknown he was supposed to have been a certain dissolute nobleman,—she could not bear the burden of a quiet country life among grave unsocial women, few of whom could speak one word of bad French, while for her part she could not muster even that amount or that quality of English. Hal, be it remembered, had become a fair linguist, barring the pronunciation; and Alice, from her official dignity as an Abbess mingling with the Norman baronial circle, had necessarily made herself acquainted with the language; but otherwise poor Angélique felt a stranger in a strange land, cut off from the chief solace of existence, conversation. Then again, she was longing night and day to see Simon once more: or if not him, at all events his nearer brother Stephan, so like him, so kind, so sympathizing: she thought of nothing else, even in that pretty gothic chapel with all the nuns intoning round her. Angélique had not taken the veil as an outwar professor of religion; nor, to confess truth, had she inwardly derived much consolation from the pious precepts and gentle self-denials of Alice: unrequited love, absent lovers, choice morsels read to her out of certain letters in that padlocked casket, the mutual excellences of the two monastic brothers so cruelly divorced from these their loving but unmated wives,—those were the only topics that could soothe Angélique's restlessness, or induce her to bear with patience the dreary solitude and perpetual drony services of St. Catherine's. The active duties of a charitable sister among the poor and sick being cut away from her through lack of language, the relaxation of neighbouring intercourse being equally denied her, and the daily excitement of local news nothing and less than nothing to the alien dropped into Surrey as from some other sphere, really there was left to the poor girl only to brood secretly over her sorrows and desires, until they grew morbid and intolerable: nothing but the wish to escape from this dull nunnery possessed her, and the hope of seeing brother Stephan once again in lively Paris—perhaps (even more distracing thought) of getting somehow to Simon at Rome.

Their acquaintance had been of the shortest but the sweetest: and it is time here, by a word or two, to tell you what I know of Simon Langton. This younger brother by one year of our nobler hero Stephan, (the pair so nearly of a size as to have been usually taken for twins, and who grew up more alike than the two Dromios) has been lost to our sight as to Stephan's for well nigh thirty years; since we left him as a little orphan eight years old at the Lonesome-Vale farm in the hamlet of Friga-Street next Leith Hill.

His career I cannot enter upon at any length, as an episode injurious to the continuity of this tale; but its chief outlines are these. When the crusading Knight of Wodetone, stalwarth Sir Ralph, carried off our hero's father Hugh, and half the young blood of the parish to the East with him, there remained to take charge of the old manor house and park a widowed sister of Sir Ralph, the Lady Clare, with her two little children, one the present heir and nephew Sir Reginald, the other a daughter Amalie. Of her charity the Lady Clare took in the hapless little Simon as a playmate for her boy; and for several years (in fact all the while Stephan was at Tamar

Monachorum and for half the time of his sojourn in Lincolnshire) he was brought up with Reginald on equal terms, enjoying as his home the rambling old mansion and all its pleasant belongings. The grave beech woods with their subjungle of ashes and hollies; the deer-leap with its mottled antlered herds; the three convergent vallies meeting at the Great House, and each traversed down the middle of their grassy slopes by what were then rapid rivulets, banked up at intervals for the frequent waterfall, and full of trout; these had plenty of charms for Master Simon and Reginald his bosom friend: they hunted, fished and cross-bowed together, ate from one trencher, slept on one huge old oaken couch: item, though there was somewhat less of this, the good parish parson, after Stephan's speedy departure, was engaged to teach the boys languages and bokelore, and with his truant scholars probably did the best he could.

But there was another (and this time a very charming) tutor, trying in vain to teach the unconscious Simon something else too: for Amalie's eyes spoke the language of love so clearly to him, that I marvel how it was the lad never heard nor saw it: the young Adonis, ever eager for the chase, took no notice of anything beside; he and his friend Reggy thought exactly the same of sister Amy: she luted prettily enough in wet weather —the poor girl's very heart was in those notes; she trimmed his arrows tidily, and was so good-natured as to be always ready to do anything for him,—ay, young Simon, thou mightest have tried her even unto death: she was a beauty too, (and the two friends began to take heed of beauty in every other direction) but she did mope so and seemed so miserable: what can be the matter with Amy, brother Reggy?

Her mother began to see it in her bright eye, quick pulse, fading roses;—she was verily dying for love: and when it was now too late, for the arrow had shot home into her heart, the cautious Lady Clare sent her son with his good-looking friend (a daring, dashing lad, dark open-browed, manly and well-limbed, with whom Reggy was as much a contrast as Robert was with Faulconbridge)—she sent them, I say, discreetly away to some friends in Normandy. Off set the youths gladly enough, and eager for adventure; but they left behind them with a bare 'good-bye, dear sister,' and a cold brotherly kiss,—a broken heart!

She pined, and pined away alone; Simon never knew of it, and if he had, wouldn't have guessed the cause: they did indeed hear that Amalie had caught a chill and ailed sadly; and another messenger to Castle Galliard told them, hurriedly coming one day, that if Master Reginald wished to see his sister alive, he must return with him hotfoot: Simon was coming too of course, but a missive from the Lady of Wodetone bade him stay behind,—for no reason at all that he could see: however, he had his own plans and pleasures and friends where he was, and though he would have liked to have seen poor Amy's face once more, still—if he wasn't wanted! —and the proud islander's, the independent Englishman's feeling prevailed: Reginald should kiss his sister Amy for him. So Reginald departed alone.

Ah! mother,—had that youth so well-beloved been only asked to come back, his presence would have been a sunbeam from Heaven itself upon that languid couch, —nay, might even have brought up again the dying from her death-bed; but, cruel pride prevailed even over motherly love, and rather than see her high-born daughter wed a yeoman's son, the inexorable Lady Clare deliberately closed the lifeless lids over that daughter's glazing eyes: only for a moment had the poor girl sparkled up, with a rush of rose to her cheek, and a note of joy upon her tongue; it was when Reginald kissed her heartily for Simon.

Meanwhile, in far off Normandy, the paternal love of adventure broke out strongly in Master Simon. There was then getting up in France what is called the Child's Crusade; the maddest expedition ever devised by poor exciteable humanity. A lad of Picardy, enthusiastic or fanatical, (for children seldom are impostors) imagined that he had been commissioned from on High to redeem the Holy Sepulchre; and the revelation to him ran that it could only be accomplished by the pure hands of youths and maidens. Really, it seemed as if the vial of God's wrath for the corruptions of Christendom must now be poured out over the mass of its comparative innocence: the manly but dissolute strength of Europe had been drained in those desolating wars,—the sole result of which had been the recovery of two cross-sticks of idolized old timber, since retaken and destroyed (except Hugh's morsel) at the battle of Tiberias: and here now the Christened Children were to be decimated wholesale. Thousands flocked to the banner of this brave boy of Picardy; he paraded the several baronies of France in a gilt car, surmounted by a blood-red cross; everywhere parents gave up their children to him, fascinated by this angel-form of the Moloch of War: and (the ultimate issue may as well be stated shortly at once) many thousands of boys and girls, youths and maidens, the female part in male crusading garb, set sail for Marseilles; and soon after, with some rare exceptions who clung to the wrecked vessels, all perished in the waves of a Mediterranean tornado.

Simon had been one of the wildest promoters of this precious expedition! for, though older and manlier than most of his crusading companions, he still came well under the inspired category of virgin-saints, described in Revelations XIV., 4, "who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." So Simon entered into it with heart and soul. A less guilty sacrifice than that myriad of pure children was never offered by the folly of mankind to the demon of destruction: but Providence saw not fit to prevent it; or if in mercy the Great Ruler interposed to hinder a more cruel slaughter of such innocents by the Saracenic scimitar or the Galilean pestilence, they must still be thus all drowned together, shouting war-cries of deliverance for the Holy Sepulchre.

But Simon, a sturdy swimmer, got to shore on the coast of Morocco: and after three years of terrible slavery there, managed to escape to Ceuta, and thence by boat to Gibraltar: whence, in a weary length of travel through Spain and France, he had gradually wandered and begged and fought his way homewards as far as Paris, two years before our Stephan went there. His adventures, as also those of his father, would be volumes of themselves: but we cannot break away so tediously from our special thesis. To be quick then, and finish this needful episode.

A survivor from that disastrous Child's Crusade, which had brought sorrow to the hearts of so many fathers and mothers, would of course be overwhelmed with the warmest Parisian friendships, directly he made known the story of his life. As home direct was less his errand than a livelihood anywhere (for, by death or absence all dispersed, he had no near relative) we may readily understand that he was glad of the chance of enrolment in the King's guard: and and if he for sundry decorative braidings found out the gay coutumiére of the Rue St. Jacques, it is small wonder; still less that he fell in love with her pretty daughter, Angélique. How the fever came—and the impetuous soldier became all at once as rash a monk, we have heard from herself; as also that he is now at papal head-quarters in Rome.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ESCAPE: DISGUISE: HAL'S MARTYRS.

Angelique, then, felt the nunnery her prison, and was always scheming and dreaming of escape. But how forlorn the hope was: how could a girl and a foreigner thread the long infested wilderness from Gilford to the coast? and how could she get away for even a mile of it from all these prying sisters, who so kindly, so unslumberingly, watched her? Sometimes she resolved openly to ask the gentle abbess; but this wouldn't do; for that Alice was devoted to Stephan's lightest word or wish she knew, and Stephan's self had sent her hither: sometimes she would have taken a wandering beggar or outlaw into her confidence, but (fortunately for her) she found all such caitiffs totally ignorant of French; as to running away alone, it could only be to certain death: her coming hither with Hal proved that; never was there such a pestilential marsh, full of evil beasts evil men and all other evil perils, as John's misrule had made of universal England, even to its garden, Surrey.

Just as she was dropping into a gloomy and silent despair—Alice often tried to comfort her by talking of her own similar sorrows, but she only added fuel to flame—the arrival of old Hal one rainy morning gave her a most obvious hope. So then, while he was closeted with Alice, waiting till she had read and answered her accustomed letter, Angélique quietly took down from a peg in the entrance hall a red cloak belonging to a casual applicant, leaving on the peg her own better grey one in exchange; and ran out into the rain. If anybody in St. Catherine's saw her, it was small wonder that the red-caped woman ran; it poured so: and Angélique well remembered the way by which Hal had brought her; so she went to the ferry, and stopped there, knowing he was sure to come that way. When Hal, returning, first saw and recognised her, he was in a sore strait; for he wished, honest fellow, always to do the right thing (a difficult matter) towards everybody: she came to him, and in a language he could intimately understand, though indifferent as to speaking it, she pathetically told him all her trouble, her longing to get to Paris again, her misery in that nunnery, her wish to return to the Archbishop: manifestly it was needless to confess her other class of feelings to any man.

Hal put on his considering cap and soon resolved: he would take her back to his master, as a poor foreigner, isolated and manifestly wretched. So he said,

"Come then with me to Aldeburie, demoiselle: and I must fit thee with better garments for travel in these dangerous times than a woman's."

They went to the Great House, and saw Hal's three children there. Now, one of Hal's sons had lately become the fortunate possessor of a suit of clothes which the juvenile Braiose had out-grown: a good suit enough, but too small for the owner, who like Otranto was now too long and too broad for his vestures. Into this suit crept our escaping Parisienne: and really, when she emerged from that chamber in close-fitting leggings, with buff boots and a violet-coloured tunic, not without cap and feather too, and a cape to match, Angélique was a very fascinating young fellow.

I pretermit the whole journey.

No wonder then that the retreating Archbishop looked on her as a dangerous visitor. Here was a dilemma: what was to be done?

Well:—the first thing manifestly was to tell poor old Hal of his new calamity. Stephan did it kindly.

"Hal, dear friend, dost thou remember the Siloam Pool?"

"Nay, Master mine, can I forget it? but why speak of it?"

"Hal,—those dear ones are in Heaven: hast thou heard of the good Vertots?"

"Nothing; what of them,—what has happened,—are they gone away?"

"To Heaven, with those dear ones. King Philip and the Inquisitors have had a Moloch sacrifice; thy friends went to glory in chariots of fire."

"And God be praised for the good martyrs! yet I loved them, and—"

"'As gold in the furnace hath He tried them, and received them as a burnt offering;" so saith Wisdom; and good Edmund also is of that holy army: Hal, thy son is happy now with God."

Hal's lip quivered, and his eye moistened,—How sayest thou—my Master?—And Millicent?"

"With Him also!"—Hal fainted on the floor.

It is a mercy to many that Millicent was thought to owe her dreadful death entirely to a sister's deep affection: possibly indeed it might be that she did: but at all events, none among men but her confessor and you and I know of the terrible chief cause, her **close imitation of Judas.**

CHAPTER L.

HOW TO DEAL WITH A DILEMMA, AND HOW TO PLEASE A POPE.

HAL soon recovered, and was comforted: there was hope, nay triumph in their end: and he was a wise, well-tried man; and when a thing is past help, comfort is all the more accessible, especially to an honest man and a Christian.

And now at last Archbishop Stephan turns to that comely youngster Angélique.

"Daughter, I have many cares and some sorrows,—forgive my seeming negligence: and as the mules are waiting, tell me shortly why art thou here, and thus habited?"

He did not dare to trust himself with much parleying; and scarcely to look at her.

"My father, nay it is my brother, I was miserable all alone, and I escaped, and good Hal hath helped me back to thee: do not deny me, Stephan."

A strange conflict was going on in Langton's spirit: here in all outward likeness of loveliness was his own Alice, even as his heart of hearts remembered her a score of years agone; here she was, garbed bewitchingly, and talking to him in her own sweet tones. The poor Archbishop trembled at that beauteous vision: but his calm bearing revealed nothing; and there is an immediate obvious resource, travel.

"Come with us to Rheims then: I am bound thither instantly: Angélique, I give thee brotherly welcome, and thou shalt be of my personal train: but I would gladly have seen thee in thine own attire: just now, as all my people are gone out of the palace, a change is impossible; but I do exhort thee be discreet. Evil tongues might otherwise do discredit to mine office."

"Trust me, brother Stephan, trust me: I will ride among thy scholars."

He looked at those blue eyes, that golden hair, the same sweet sunny face of his dear morning recollections: and there too was the graceful form too visible, no scholarly youth's but a maiden's. As Alice's lover and the Archbishop of Rheims, the dilemma was a trying one: but the true gold of Stephan's character was only the more purified by every trial.

They all went on their journey: duly arrived, refreshed, and made themselves at home like sensible travellers.

On the way, a great thought had come to Stephan's help. Rome was his object now—for sake of England, whom Innocent alone could help, as the bad King's great antagonist; for sake also of his brother Simon, whom he longed to see; for sake of this poor love-stricken Angélique too, (he had conversed with that new scholar several times upon the way, and had become convinced that Rome with Simon was her best refuge); for sake also of his own peace of mind, distracted by her presence, as well as of his own personal safety, Philip's friendship growing manifestly cold, and Dominic's satellites suspecting him of heresy.

And then how best to make himself acceptable to Innocent? It is true, his writings were well known, his university lectures, his pulpit eloquence, his powerful antagonism heading up the People's forces against England's wicked King, his own favour with Philip and consequent advancement, all these were advantages enough to recommend him. But Stephan wisely considered that in approaching a new potentate you must be particular in your merits, as well as general; it is no compliment to come before him, introduced specially, no otherwise than as to the rest of the world. So Stephan bethought him of another of his paternal relics, a fifth morsel of the true Cross: yes, this indeed in its sealed vellum, enclosed within a jewelled crystal casket, was a bribe that well might buy a Pope to help poor England. Further, in the train of this embassage, the distracting presence of Angélique might cleverly be got rid of: if you physically cannot flee from a temptation, the next best thing you can do is to induce it to fly from you. Yet more; to propitiate, and that in a certain way, the most ambitious Pope that ever wore tiara, and to free himself openly from the fetters of Philip and his French archbishopric, Stephan resolved to lay his mitre at Innocent's feet, and crave refuge of his Holiness as a simple monk at Viterbo: he would not go to Rome until Simon had somehow found a home for Angélique. Altogether, the plan had many points of wisdom. Stephan had long been loudly called upon by his oppressed countrymen, to urge their sad case upon some continental ally to help them; and no one had any power in Europe but the Pope.

Perhaps of all the various men of mighty name who have filled St. Peter's chair, no one of them has better attained to the great ideal of the Pontifex Maximus than Innocent the Third. Born of the princely house of Conti—so named from having been Counts of Segna and Sora from time immemorial—of that illustrious house, which has contributed no less than nine Popes and thirteen Cardinals to the Roman Church, Lothario was an hereditary magnate: in morals blameless, in learning profound, gentle in manner, but inflexible of purpose, humble, but firmly believing that the Pope is God on earth, so ascetic in himself as to have written when a mere youth, a treatise on "Contempt of the World, and the Misery of Man's life," yet as magnificent in liberalities and charities as the St. Carlo of later times, with his splendid "Humilitas" and all, he seemed to combine every sort of qualification for his high office. At twenty-nine he was a Cardinal; and on the death of his uncle Clement the Third (whose title as Cardinal had been, I speak it seriously, St. Bacchus!) he was unanimously elected Pope, though only thirty-seven; and (we are told) was hailed 'Innocent' by the conclave, on account of his purity of life and conversation.

But this gentle good man was altogether a different personage when he put on the tiara and the Fisherman's ring. Not his great precursor Gregory the Seventh, nor his arrogant imitator, Boniface the Eighth, did more for the aggrandizement of the Papal See than the third Innocent:

Hildebrand and Benedetto, with all their daring exploits, must bow before the genius of Lothaire. Germany meekly received from him the Emperor of his will, afterwards excommunicated for asserting his own: Philip Augustus quailed and knelt beneath his interdict: the Kings of Portugal, Sicily, and Leon did meekly as he bade them for fear of the Papal curse, and to buy his blessing; and we well know how he set his foot upon the neck of John. He threw down or built up kingdoms just as he pleased; commanded crusades, and the flood of men and treasure flowed as he directed, now to the east, now to the western Albigeois, now to northern England; set up the Inquisition, a horrible watcher at every man's hearth; and invented or encouraged, as armies of militia conquering everywhere for Rome, the begging friars of Francis, and the persecuting monks of Dominic. To such a pontiff we may well believe no homage could be so grateful as the surrender of a foreign archbishopric: to such a man no relic so precious as a morsel of the one True Cross.

Langton, therefore, acted wisely in this that he did with all good speed. By a canon of his cathedral at Rheims, he sent a sealed resignation of the archbishopric, to be reconferred by the Pope on whom he would; by another canon in company he transmitted to his Holiness the inestimable relic in its crystal casket; and among the train of followers, old and young, he easily found a place for the angelical young gentleman (for the nonce one Alphonse Fleury to wit) who bore a letter from the Archbishop to his brother at Rome. Soon after Stephan set off privately for Viterbo.

CHAPTER LI.

REYGATE CAVERN.

But what brought Hal back so much sooner than usual? When a man with sundry helpers has to keep up the correspondence of a great confederacy (for the Barons were confederated patriots, not conspiring traitors) and to leave messages of grave import, often verbally, from castle to castle, over half broad England, he must needs have time allowed him. But here he is returned with magical speed: why so soon? and how could he have managed it so well too? For with such a faithful Mercury as Hal, speed implied a thing well done as sure as quickly.

The answer is strange, but comprehensible: he had accidentally lighted upon all the friends of liberty assembled together in one place for conference.

On his regular way from Dover to St. Catherine's, Hal must always go through Reygate, then a smart little town under the protection of Henry Plantaganet sixth Earl of Warrene and Surrey. The Earl was one of those well-meaning but narrow-minded subjects in whose eyes a king can do no wrong: and thus for years of sadness and constrained but conscientious obedience he and the good Earls of Pembroke and Salisbury and some others of their quality stood with John whatever his madness chose to do, so strengthening him in his wickedness: the only unintended gain being that Reygate and its castle were spared by the fierce mercenary army, when most other baronial residences were demolished. But now the crisis seemed to have come; the mad King must be checked in his career somehow;

everywhere the land was desolate, towns burnt, the poor inhabitants massacred, and a general famine imminent; for none dared till the soil, barter was at an end, everything at a standstill; while John had utterly destroyed the castles and laid waste the demesnes of many refractory barons, who if they managed to escape themselves, suffered terribly in the persons of wives and daughters, openly made victims to the tyrant in his brutal cruelty. Then, as for the poor man's lot, John's last exaggeration of the Forest Laws had made it miserable indeed: the starving serf might of common right hitherto have satisfied his hunger upon ducks or quails or any other birds his bolts could reach; conies also had always been his for the catching, and a wild hog or any other sort of wild cattle not specified as of venery. But now the basely selfish mandate had gone forth that "all wild feathered fowl" were to be accounted game, and that all beasts not domestic were included as of venery: whereby it came to pass that, in a time when the markets were shut for lack of buyers and sellers and produce, and when the only safe places where merchants might meet for their bargaining were church-yards and other sites of sanctuary, no man could, though it were to save his family from starvation, shoot or snare one among the million of wild fowl thronging the great marshes and hernaries all over the kingdom, without peril of impalement. Worse even still; for the wicked King had actually commanded all hedges to be burnt, and all ditches to be filled throughout the wretched land, in order that his deer might fatten on the poor people's corn and his royal chase find no impediments!

Even Warrene and Pembroke kicked at such tyranny as this; even they at last secretly joined the confederation: and the baronial meetings were henceforth to be held now in Earl Warrene's Castle at Reygate, as the least likely place to be suspected of the King.

Reygate Castle, in those far-off days, was a strong Saxon fortress; and it remained a respectable edifice, though altered and remodelled from its ancient phase, until deep in the seventeenth century, when the jealousy of Parliament commanded its entire demolition, not one stone now remaining to mark its site. But, strange to say, notwithstanding this, the Baron's meeting-hall is still in existence; for it is a vast troglodytic cavern, analogous to those at Gilford already mentioned,—and to others still to be seen at Betchworth and the Deepdene and even undermining Dorking town. We shall enter the cavern ourselves ere long.

Well: Hal, as I said, was journeying through Reygate, and thought there must be a market there for the throng: so he asked a country wife what it might mean.

"Save thee, Sir,—to-day my Lord has all his friends about him in the Castle, and they do say,—but o' which part be thou, for king or people?"

"If the king were a king, for both; but, if he be a tyrant, a murderer, and a robber—"

"Enough said, and God be with thee, Sir: go in there under the round portal, and say 'Fitz-Walter' if the porter stops thee."

Hal saw it all at a glance: and thanked Heaven for good guidance. He went under the round portal, whispered the password,—and followed through the first court; thence through the inner ceinture to the second court; in the middle whereof, square and solid, stood the Castle-keep. There, with a string of other folks as all along, habited like himself as travellers and in disguise, and (albeit many of them magnates) with no baronial pomp nor circumstance, he entered a low-browed arch,—and by a sliding-door at side out of the gallery immediately found himself in a small chamber. The middle of its floor was open; an irregular-shaped trap-door having been lifted off, and leaned against the wall; and a smoky light streamed up from the opening.

Following on in his turn, Hal spoke to an official, stationed to examine each as he entered: it would have been certain and sudden death to any spy or John's-man who might dare to come so far. But Hal had proofs of loyalty to the People's cause positive and most welcome; to wit, his wallet full of letters from Stephan Langton. So, gratefully and gladly was he bade to go down.

First, some twenty steps cut in the sand-rock, then for 200 feet a narrow sloping gallery, till the plumb-depth might be 50 feet perpendicular from the surface, led to a large excavation 125 feet long, 14 wide, and 12 high; it was rudely shaped in to the semblance of an arched roof, and at one side had a similar offset cavern 50 feet long, with stone seats ranged laterally and at the end.

The gallery and caverns were set thick with torches which blazed and smoked prodigiously: quite a dense cloud hung along the crown of the roof.

A great crowd, hot and noisy filled the larger cavern: all were patriots there; but the notables among them lined the stone seats of the smaller one: and as Hal's embassy lay especially with these, by help of Fitz-Walter's chief esquire, he was led up the middle between those thronged seats.

It was no scene of feudal grandeur that—no armour, no pennons, nothing of the picturesque in chivalry: all seemed simple burgesses, or way-worn travellers, now and then a scalloped pilgrim for safer disguise, or a forester, or field serf, or halberdier, or what not.

But hearts beat higher there and truer than ever beat at common joust or tournament: and lips quivered, and pulses throbbed, and cheeks blanched, as they spoke one to another of their own hideous wrongs and of the sad estate of England. John the detested, John the accursed, was the centre spot of hate to all that angry cavern; and they took council of each other how to rid the realm of such a monster.

However, all was then mere clamour, unorganized indignation and aimless vengeance; who would bell the cat? They wanted a wise head, a leader; they had asked aloud for "Stephan Langton!" he was not here personally indeed at this their initiatory meeting; but by a happy chance his well-known faithful messenger had just found them out, and here he was with a wallet full of letters.

Stephan exhorted unity, secresy, and (till the time for action fully came) long-enduring patience; and he promised to be soon with them: for he was now on his way to Pope Innocent, if haply the Head of the Church would help in their extremity an outraged Christian People, cruelly oppressed by their own mad King.

As I said, that meeting was merely an initiatory one, and in itself produced no immediate results beyond the encouragement of one another in the good and necessary work—England's rescue and salvation. The heat too was suffocating, and they soon broke up for want of very air. But all this true incident of our tale and county explains Hal's speedier return,—which was what we professed to have to account for; and there will be plenty of time and space anon for politics and patriotism.

CHAPTER LII.

A MIRACLE: AND ITS EXPOSITION.

And what a clatter there was in St. Catherine's Nunnery when Angélique was nowhere to be found! What on earth could have become of her? Whither had the girl been spirited away? She had not spoken to a soul about leaving, seemed a favourite with the Abbess and often closeted with her, was quiet, mild and mopey, and couldn't get away if she would: a forty-female power of curiosity and watchfulness had been constantly directed towards that mysterious Frenchwoman; and how could she have escaped their vigilance? It was clearly impossible.

Was she then a witch, able by some drug or anointing oils, or repeating Pater Nosters backwards to make herself invisible? this was far from an unlikelihood, according to the light of those days; or had anybody made away with her, and buried her in the garden? horrid thought!—never were there such cowards as a houseful of nuns; or was she spring-locked into some chest? —yet every corner of the premises had been ransacked; or, likeliest suggestion of all, was that most blessed morsel of the True Cross at last asserting itself by working the miracle of invisibility on one of the favoured sisterhood, just as (now they came to think of it) it had already worked the unappreciated wonder of similarity between Angélique and their beautiful Abbess?

Alice, with a heart for love and lovers, and a shrewd remembrance of the simultaneous departure of Hal and the disappearance of that red cloak, guessed the truth, but in common charity and discretion could say nothing about it; whatever she might think, her tongue was tied from speaking; and after strict examination of all the premises and its out-houses buildings fields and woods, and the conviction that Angélique really was gone and that no cruel accident had happened to her or anyone else on the spot, the Lady Abbess seemed rather by her silence to incline to the last wise suggestion, a miracle; waiting to be sure of the truth at Hal's next visit. Meanwhile, to Alice's dismay, as being naturally too honest to promote imposture, those gossiping forty females chattered their nunnery into such exalted repute through this True Cross miracle, that all comers and goers on the Pilgrim's way stopped to worship the relic at the little Gothic chapel on that out-lying hill-top, and began to make St. Catherine's wealthy and famous.

We who are always well up to truths and never tolerate long the weakness of a mystery, can well afford to scorn such abject superstition, and not altogether to approve of any partial connivance with it: but Alice, let us remember, dared not suggest her likelier guess (after all it was no more) for Hal's sake, for Stephan's, and her own: even as to herself only,—the forty sisters would have baited her to death about that always unpopular because favoured stranger, and the whole neighbourhood would have risen up as one man to expel such an Abbess from the nunnery; she would certainly have been held as an accomplice in the novice's escape, an unfaithful steward, a winking guardian. Alice therefore wisely held her peace: and if the miraculous legend daily grew clearer and stronger, she could not help nor hinder it.

But by this time, Angélique is at Rome, longing yet dreading to meet Simon.

The embassy had sped well: Innocent in open conclave with his cardinals had accepted with manifest satisfaction the surrender of Stephan's Archiepiscopate; and in another audience of the Vatican had quite joyfully torn open that sealed treasure, the inestimable relic. It has since become the centre of a splendid diamond cross that blazes on the breast of successive Popes as an heir-loom and chief jewel of the Papacy; but none of them has so idolatrously worshipped it as first did Innocent. Stephan's name and influence rose comparatively: and the Pope was at a loss to know how best he could requite a man, a famous man too and an admirable, who had conferred on him such lasting obligations.

But meanwhile for Angélique and Simon: it was a notable interview. Simon Langton, a fine, bold and impetuous character, though inferior to Stephan in many ways, had rushed to Rome in the first access of his blind religious zeal as the head-quarters of church-privilege. And—he there had been disappointed, disenchanted, disgusted utterly: like many others who ascertain for the first time the difference between theory and practice, between the Catholic ideal and the Romish reality. He had found there infidelity nestled in what should have been the cradle of faith; shameless immorality throned on the altar of religion; utter idolatry, nay very heathenism, rampant over the prostrate and inanimate carcase of Christianity. For himself, though a believer in the oneness of the church, and so of its one earthly head (a false conclusion this, by the interpolated word, earthly) he could not see a reason why ambition should corrupt it; his own morals, though as an old soldier not like Stephan's quite immaculate, were yet white in comparison with the utter blackness of certain Cardinals and Abbots he knew of; and, as for idolatry, it was a chief worry in his mind, if inclined to worship any mere image, how very unlike in form and feature were divers famous figures of the Christ, the Virgin, and sundry popular Saints, whom he was well enough disposed to honour substantially, if he could. To him, indeed, (to tell plain truth) the only image he could find it in his heart honestly to worship was Angélique: therefore had he nobly shunned her.

He was alone in his cell one day, vexed and indignant at the profligacy yet hypocrisy of certain priests associated with him in the church of St. Sergius at Rome. Like the sons of Eli, they sinned notoriously in the very tabernacle. Simon was a man, but he also was an honest one; and no Englishman can brook hypocrisy. The baseness of those colleagues was intolerable: and he had stolen away to his solitary cell to be alone, and think—well, likely enough of that sparkling blue-eyed girl who whilome made the filthy Rue St. Jacques an avenue of brightness and beauty to him.

What is a man without affections? if you answer, a monk: I rejoin, then a monk is a demon. But Simon, though a monk was still a man; and his affections, though as celibate chained down, were alive and struggled to be free.

There was a gentle tap at the door; which he answered sharply: no doubt one of those detestable priests.

A youth came in with a letter; he never looked at the bearer except to take notice of his large buff boots, but tore away the rosined silk round the bit of parchment—a letter of the period.

What? brother Stephan alive?—he had utterly forgotten his existence: and an Archbishop too?—and on his way immediately to Rome?

The letter, it seems, never mentioned Angélique.

He turned to ask a question of the bearer, and was transfixed at that look like a frozen man! but she, with uncontrollable emotion flinging herself upon his neck, woke him from his mute astonishment with a tempest of tears and kisses.

What could Simon do? What should he do? Ought he to rebuke her,—or himself? No! human love, in spite of celibacy perforce, is a sacred and a mighty power, ennobled by the Source from whence it glows.

For the sweetest hour in their existence hitherto, those poor exiled spirits were a solace to each other; a most bright oasis in the howling desert of the monkery and the nunnery.

CHAPTER LIII.

A NEW PRIMATE.

STEPHAN LANGTON, Ex-Archbishop, Ex-Chancellor, the famous patriotic Englishman whom John dreaded and the Barons of England counted even in absence as their leader, was now with all his train at Viterbo; a city not far from Rome, but habitually (like most near relations) fighting with it. Lately there had been a terrible battle, wherein the Romans had won the day; and Viterbo had been forced to render back certain brazen gates to St. Peter's. Langton stopped at Viterbo, simply because he cared not to enter Rome simultaneously with Angélique so fascinatingly disguised: let her find out Simon first, and save the dilemma of Archbishop Stephan appearing as her sponsor. The interests of England were at stake: he could not afford any risk of reputation.

Now, it happened just at this time that twelve monks of Canterbury came to Rome, requesting the Pope to confirm their election of one Reginald their Subprior (a vain obscure and ignorant person, but the corporation characteristically desired to honour one of themselves) for Archbishop of Canterbury; Hubert, the late primate John's great friend, who had impudently crowned him as the "elected" king, knowing he could not claim as hereditary,—being just dead.

The King, hearing of these monks' insolence (so he termed it) in choosing an Archbishop without reference to him, commanded them to elect his choice, a certain warlike justiciary hight John de Gray, Bishop of Norwich; they dared not disobey, and so clumsily brought for confirmation to the papal chair both candidates, one of them to be chosen. Innocent saw his opportunity.

Instantly proceeding with all his court to Viterbo, on the plea of accepting in the Cathedral of the conquered city the homage of its principal inhabitants, Pope Innocent on the 17th of June, 1207, resolved by one great act of arbitrary will to humble both King and clergy: he would dictate to England. That the occasion was admirable so far as its chief subject was concerned, hear Dean Milman's testimony in his history of Latin Christianity, IV. 84, where he says, "Innocent could not have found a churchman more exceptionable, or of more commanding qualifications for the Primacy of England. Stephan Langton was an Englishman by birth, of irreproachable morals, profound theologic learning, of a lofty, firm, yet prudent character, which unfolded itself at a later period of his life in a manner not anticipated by Pope Innocent. Langton had studied at Paris, and attained surpassing fame and honourable distinctions. Of all the high-minded wise and generous prelates who have filled the See of Canterbury, none have been superior to Stephan Langton." This is great and discriminative eulogy, well justifying Innocent's selection.

For, on a set day, the great Head of Christendom announced that he would hear the rival claimants at Viterbo. He felt that his decision would be a Papal triumph, and he resolved it should be a spendid one. In the ancient cathedral Innocent was shrined upon the altar: he looked every inch a Pope, a priest upon a throne: "well formed, still young, of a most pleasing countenance," (I am quoting from Maimbourg's French History of the Crusades in the life of Innocent the Third, book 7) "of a grand and most honourable bearing, a shrewd and enlightened mind, a wonderful memory, a solid judgment, a marvellous quickness of intellect combined with vast powers of application," Innocent was a natural King of men. He was clothed in a vesture of cloth of gold, covered with the finest lace needlework: he wore the tiara blazing with jewels, and behind him were the peacock fans. Particoloured guards (for Michael Angelo long afterwards selected the fashion of this period as most picturesque) with gaudy contrast surrounded the Triple Sovereign; and before him were ranged the scarlet semicircle of Cardinals. One black figure, spare, and white in face, with a thin red tonsure and a skull hung on the beads beside his crucifix, stood before the Pope in the attitude of prayer: it was the bloody fanatical enthusiast Dominic.

The monks of Canterbury were announced on deputation by a herald tabarded with embroidered keys. They came in clumsily enough—coarse, rustical, and vulgar, and stupidly dazed with the scene as unused to such splendour and ceremony: the cathedral alone outshone poor Canterbury, as much as Innocent in his glory outblazed the wretched Subprior. But their errand was as awkward as their coming, for they had, as we know, two candidates, their own, this cowed unequal man, and the King's a mere military bishop, a good hunter and wine-bibber, but no theologian.

Innocent did not vouchsafe to hear their relative merits, but by a word settled the business.

"Herald, summon Stephan Langton."

Of course he had been apprized of all beforehand; and was ready in his monkish robe, as an Augustine brother of Newark.

He came forward, as the man in his tabard of keys and a couple of splendid ushers guided, and knelt before the Pontiff, inquisitorial Dominic characteristically moving aside to give place to the Englishman.

"We, in the plenitude of our power, create thee, Stephan Langton, Cardinal of St. Chrysogonus at Rome, and Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, within the realm of England."

He rose, bowed to the Pope, sat on the Cardinal's bench, and blessed God that he might yet save England.

"But, an' it may please your Holiness, we'll give thee three thousand marks to buy our choice with!"

This bright thought of open bribery in the matter had it seems occured to one of the monks, Elias Brandlefield; but the other eleven saw it wise at once to be loudly indignant with him for such asinine diplomacy; so they exclaimed with one voice,

"Nay then, but it shall be Stephan Langton; we be the choosers by the King's command, and we choose—"

"Peace, fools!" quietly said a Cardinal, afterwards Pope Honorius.

CHAPTER LIV.

JOHN'S FINGER-RINGS: AND THE INTERDICT.

As John of England was likely enough to be furious when he heard of this arrogant usurpation, Pope Innocent thought he might endeavour to conciliate him by pandering to two of his known weaknesses, superstitious trifling and a vain love of jewelry. So, with that returning awkward squad of monks, he sent to the King a letter and a gift: the letter, charmingly paternal, " exhorts our son to receive for Archbishop of Canterbury a man, a native of thine own kingdom, very well skilled both in secular and spiritual learning, whose exemplary life and conversation will be of high advantage to thy bodie and thy soule." The gift consisted of four gold finger-rings, to an elaborate description whereof Hume gives the honour of a whole page in history, elaborating the mystical virtues of a sapphire, a ruby, an emerald, and a topaz; but which old Tyrrell dismisses much more contemptuously, "the great wonderful mysteries contained in the roundness of the rings, and their various colours must needs (forsooth) signifie the four cardinal virtues; and might, if his holinesse had pleased, have represented any other four things whatever he was pleased to conclude."

However, the speculation proved a failure; the papal investment did not pay by any means, for although John probably decorated his four fat fingers vain-gloriously enough with those magical rings, he was in a towering rage, both with the twelve stupid monks and that intolerable Pope. Hearken again to Tyrrell, II. 734: " When the King had received the Pope's letters concerning the vacating the election of the Bishop of Norwich, and the unexpected advancement of Cardinal Langton, he charged the monks of Canterbury with treason, alleging that, in prejudice of his prerogative, they had first chosen their sub-prior without licence, and then to make some feigned amends had elected the Bishop of Norwich; and that though they had received money out of his exchequer for the expenses of their journey to obtain the Pope's confirmation of the last election, yet they had, as an aggravation of their first offence, presumed to choose Stephan de Langton *his declared enemy*, and had caused him to be consecrated Archbishop; for which cause, the King, being in a great fury and indignation, sent Fulk de Cantelupe, and Henry de Cornebulle, two cruel and ill-natured knights, with armed officers to drive the monks of Canterbury out of England, as being guilty of treason. These ruffians, in pursuance of the King's commands, went to Canterbury, and there entering the monastery with drawn swords, they commanded the prior and his monks, in the King's name, presently to depart out of England; and if they refused to obey, they swore that they would burn them and their monastery together. The monks being at this greatly terrified, and acting without good advice, all departed without any opposition, much less violence; and so passing into Flanders, were kindly received into the Abbey of St. Bertin, and in other monasteries adjoining thereunto; then by the King's command, some of the monks of St. Augustin's abbey were put in their places to perform divine service, yet under the oversight of Fulk de Cantelupe abovementioned, who seized and confiscated all the goods of the monks. When they were thus expelled their monastery, the King sent messengers to the Pope, with expostulatory letters in which he sets forth the injury that had been done him in vacating the election of the Bishop of Norwich, and consecrating Stephan Langton Archbishop."

Our somewhile acquaintance Fulk de Cantelupe then, as we see, has survived that tremendous kick and his twelve-mile walk in plate armour: and the monk of St. Martha's has attained to the European and historic fame of being, by John's own complaining confession, the king's declared enemy. Furthermore, John swore by his usual terrible oath which need not here be repeated.

that "Stephan Langton at his peril should not set foot on the soil of England:" ere long he had to eat his words.

For, Pope Innocent was not a man to be baffled by a furious tyrant like King John; though he has, hereafter, to bend even the tiara beneath the English independence of the churl-born Stephan. So, the Pontiff commanded the Bishops of London, Ely, and Worcester, to lay the kingdom under Interdict "if John would not receive Stephan for Archbishop:" whereupon John retorted, "that he would send all the prelates and clergy of England to the Pope, if he presumed to interdict his territories, and also to confiscate their goods; further adding, that if he found any Romans within his dominions, he would first put out their eyes and cut off their noses, and then send them on to Rome."

And both Pope and King were as good or bad as they threatened. The Interdict, a most cruel proceeding to those who laid more stress than Protestants do now on church-ordinances, was then flung forth, a thunder-cloud curse on the realm. For one man's wickedness, all the churches were closed, all religious rites abolished. The dead was buried in a ditch; the bride married in the churchyard; priests alone without laics solemnized mass; crosses, images, relics, were all buried. The pious and paternal head of the Church, by way of punishing a refractory king, made, as much as in him lay, a whole Christian nation infidel and heathen. All intercourse between God and man (to speak as a papist) had entirely ceased. It is a comfort, however, to be told (I quote Milman), that by intercession with the Pope at Rome "Stephan Langton gained after awhile a relaxation of the interdict for his people, so far as to obtain Divine Service once a week." Already, our English hero was beginning to withstand the Pope.

CHAPTER LV.

A BROTHERLY MEETING: AND ANGELIQUE'S POSITION.

After that scene in the cathedral of Viterbo, and its consequent congratulations and offers of hospitality, our Primate soon found himself at Rome, the honoured guest of Pope Innocent, and fêted by all the college of Cardinals. That he gained friends wherever he went, and by his good sense, kind manners, independent bearing, and universal accomplishments, made the name of Englishman more popular than it ever was before or since, the present writer distinctly avouches: for Stephan won and wore his honours not for himself alone, but for God and his country. Therefore, when he sat in the highest seat, he was not proud; when men admired him, he was not vain: when all tongues spoke well of him, he was only humble and thankful. The Pope was amply justified in having consecrated such a Primate.

In Rome the pith and force of his discourses filled every church to overflowing where he was expected to preach; and his Notes upon the Gospels, multiplied by hand-copiers, were read everywhere, leavening the head quarters of Apostacy with primitive Christian doctrines. Dominic, indeed, more than once smelt out heresy, and expostulated; but the shrewd Pope wanted Langton to bring down a king—perhaps also a kingdom—withal: added to which, what true believer could find a particle of fault with the original and most eloquent preacher, whose sermons to the honour of the Virgin, allegorized as an enticing Alice, breathed more than a divine love—because, in truth, a human one.

All this popularity, secular and spiritual, was of many months growth and duration: but we may well be sure that Stephan had not been at Rome a day before he found out Simon.

The meeting between the brothers was not dramatic nor romantic nor anything of the sort; a bystander might have said it was barely affectionate: but when two sensible Englishmen of forty or thereabouts meet each other for the first time since infancy they practically do not, though haply born brothers, fall into each other's arms and faint away.

That each was heartily glad to see once more the brother he had long thought dead, (if he thought of him at all) is nothing more nor less than the simple truth: but they had no rhapsodies to expend on the occasion. At the same time both, as we know, were capable of the most ardent love, in spite of their monasticals, full of passion and affectionate emotions; but these volcanics are very much matters of sex; and, but for the prest hand, the lit eye, and the cordial word of welcome, Englishman with Englishman is not apt to be demonstrative. Germans may swear eternal friendship on the spot, embracing Frenchmen call on earth and heaven to witness their mutual ecstasy, Italy, Spain, nay nearer, Ireland also, give evidence of what may be styled a melodramatic attachment: but our self-contained and self-relying race are of a nature stern but true, that will meet a brother after three-and-thirty years with little more of the pomp and circumstance of friendship than if he had parted from us yesterday: not that we are a cold people, far from it; but we are habitually so sincere, so hateful of humbug, that we prefer to hide our feelings rather than be found to make a show of them openly. When we cannot help it (that is, when a woman's in the case, be she mother or wife or sister or lover), we are apt to break down utterly snd honestly: but even before a father or a brother we restrain ourselves and stand up firm, the indomitable, very possibly the proud, Anglo-Saxon islander.

Our pair of brothers, unless they entered at once on the separate stories of their lives, could not have many topics of conversation; for those sweet and early Friga-Street recollections were too few to last very long: but there were two others of no small interest common to both; their poor old father still existing, now happily after all his wanderings anchored in Surrey; and the engrossing theme of Angélique.

During Stephan's week at Viterbo we may well believe that she had poured out the best part of her late adventures into Simon's ear; and the two brothers, remarkably alike in person themselves from the cradle upwards, found a new sympathy with each other from that strange similarity as to their tastes and destinies in love. Angélique, the miraculous image of Alice, had brought the two brothers together, and stood as a sister between them: a sister, I say, pre-eminently to Stephan, though more than a sister to Simon.

We are picturing (remember) and with pretty accurate truth the state of society in England and elsewhere at the opening of the thirteenth century; and we must deal with facts as they were, stating broadly what was the general usage in those times, however little commendable they might be thought in these. Even now, however, an Irish prelate and a brace of reputable Colonial Bishops with him, are found to wink at polygamy in Christianized Caffres, on the principle of doing no injustice to scores of decent (and in their own country lawful) wives who would be ruined by a forced and immediate divorce: the practice may be allowed to die out, say their Most Reverend and Right Reverend Lordships; it would be cruelty and folly in the missionaries to attempt to kill it suddenly.

Now let us turn to Hume II. 458, who helps me out of a difficulty, explaining the social position of a hundred thousand happy and respected Angéliques in mediæval Europe: the words are those of our historian slightly abridged: "After the canons, which established the celibacy of the clergy, were by the zealous endeavours of Archbishop Anselm more rigorously executed in England, the ecclesiastics, almost universally and avowedly, gave into the use of what has since been called left-handed wedlock: and the court of Rome, which had no interest in prohibiting this practice, made very slight opposition to it. The custom was become so prevalent that in some cantons of Switzerland, before the Reformation, the laws not only permitted, but also enjoined, such alliances on the younger clergy, regarding them as a kind of *inferior marriage;* such as is still practised in Germany among the nobles, and may be regarded by the candid as an appeal from the tyranny of civil and ecclesiastical institutions, to the more virtuous and more unerring laws of nature."

Kings and Dukes in our own day have similarly made appeal; and Angélique (she was not a nun, recollect, as Alice is) would find herself even now in company with very noble names under like circumstances. Anyhow, happiness, fidelity, and love, were hearth-dwellers at Rome with Angélique and Simon. When the laws of men are daringly set up against the laws of God, obedience becomes a sort of sin: and when Anselm and his sort "forbid to marry," they wickedly compel their brethren to take a false position in the eyes of men, however justified before the throne of Heaven.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE SCOURGE: AND SIMON AT WINCHESTER.

Meanwhile John raged like a demon through his miserable realm: most of the secular clergy were expelled; and as for monks and friars, everywhere the Abbeys and Priories were in flames; and if John's Poictevins and Flamands did not roast their wretched inmates in them then and there, rest assured they died miserably somewhere in the forests: as for laics, John divided them into Baronial partizans, on whom he executed razzia to the uttermost; and his own serf-subjects, whom he taxed, scutaged, and oppressed also to the uttermost, licentious with some, cruel with many, wantonly disgusting all.

For example: our old friend, Sir Wilhelm de Braiose, grandson and heir of the good Sir Tristrem, a moderate man, and of no special party, suffered terribly: for, unluckily, his Lady had been heard by one Mauluck, a royal eves-dropper, to allude to Prince Arthur's murder: which was evidently so sore a topic with the felon-king, that he immediately seized the Lady and her five children, (De Braiose himself happening, by good fortune, at that moment to be in Reygate cavern at a gathering there), and carrying them to Windsor, with fiendish deliberation, actually starved the whole family to death! This is a type and instance of what was going on everywhere throughout broad England.

Yet more, the raging king let loose war's hell-hounds, without the shadow of a pretext, against unoffending Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. His apologists (even this wretch has found apologists), pretend that he was mad; in some sort, his acts justified their silly charity: one proof being this, that he most cruelly destroyed twenty-eight young Welshmen of high family left in his custody as hostages; whom every sense of right and propriety ought to have saved, not only harmless, but in honour.

But one sickens at his crimes: the Devil who drove him raging over his realm, did not leave him quiet at home: the king accused his poor girl-queen of adultery, and imprisoned her; he seized and wantonly ill-used the wife of Eustace de Vesci, a magnate of high name; he caught an unfortunate Arch-deacon, and made him wear canonicals made of beaten lead, till he died miserably of the cold poisonous weight: and he heaped honours and wealth on a bold blaspheming preacher, named Alexander the Mason, who had the audacious assurance to tell his congregation that, "the King was the scourge of God's anger for their sins, ordained to rule his evil people with a rod of iron, and to break them in pieces like a potter's vessel; to bind their princes in chains, and their nobles with links of iron." John eagerly accepted the mission of his subject's scourge, and was proud to take office under Heaven as England's Attila!

But, just about this time, it rejoices us to see the chroniclers reporting that one "Simon de Langton came to him from over sea to Winchester, where the King lay: and there, before divers, bouldly desired him to receive Stephan, his brother, as archbishop:" and when the weak and wicked King replied, "He dared not now," that Simon answered, "Nay, I will do all things on thy Majesty's behalf, an' thou seek my brother's mercy." At which "sawcie answere" the King became—(and no wonder),—more furious than ever.

Simon, however, appears to have caught no damage: he had been sent over (Angélique, no doubt, with him) as Stephan's legate to King John from Pontivy in Bretagne; whither, to be nearer England, the Primate had progressed from Rome. Philip was easily reconciled to a man whom Innocent loved and fostered: more especially as the Pope had conferred the Archbishopric of Rheims on a special favourite of the King; in fact, it was exactly the thing he wished, seeing the great Englishman had many in France envious of his honours; only that the Pope had adroitly gained the dangerous precedent of appointing prelates in France, instead of the King.

Pontivy is not far from those vast strange Celtic ruins for which the Morbihan is famous: there still remain evidences of five winding parallel avenues, no less than twelve miles long, constructed of stone logs fixed in the earth, and of different heights, with cromlechs and rocking-stones at intervals: a gigantic relic of the Serpent-worship, which this spotted twelve-mile snake, with its joints and convolutions, may be supposed to represent to the eyes of a crow in upper air, and for men below gigantically to typify.

However, Stephan, with his heart full of England's wrongs, and never for a moment oblivious of his darling Alice, cared less about those wonderful monuments of man's power and superstition in the unhistoric age, than probably you or I do: therefore, we will say not much about the "Addison's walk" of those days where Langton used to meditate. But one thing we have seen he did both quickly and vigorously: though the ports were shut against himself, he forced them open to his legate; thus they were free to his "bold brother"—as Millman calls him: and Simon accordingly bearded the King.

CHAPTER LVII.

SIMON AND ANGELIQUE PAY CERTAIN VISITS.

Returning from Winchester towards Dover, local geography will tell us that the Pilgrim's Way necessitates a call at St. Catherine's and Aldeburie. Simon and his recognized semi-wife the happy Angélique, always with him to his great help and comfort, rejoiced at such a chance: for he had longed for many years to look up his childhood's haunts again; and there was possibly his old father there too, unseen for thirty-seven years. As for Angélique, her longing was to ask that gentle Abbess's pardon for having in some sort been ungrateful and deceived her: but she had not been over communicative on the subject with Simon; the nunnery was a hateful topic to her.

When, therefore, after having passed Farnham Castle and the hospitality of the monks of Waverley, they crossed the Hog's Back and neared St. Catherine's, Angélique's heart avowedly failed her, and she begged Simon to go forward alone first with half the train; intending to follow with the other half, after her husband had prepared the way by explaining her presence. He gladly undertook it to please her; but was surprised at the result.

Stephan had told him nothing very specially about Alice, nor her exact whereabouts: only Angélique had mentioned incidentally what she knew; and it was not much more than that Alice loved Stephan, and in face and figure was very like her. These matters, however, as mere words, made small impression upon Simon: so he went with no excessive curiosity to St. Catherine's beforehand, as agreed; and craved an audience of the Abbess.

In the same room where we have seen her a year or two ago, at the same oriel, and with the same padlocked casket of letters beside her, sat the beauteous matron, to receive her noble visitor: for he was announced without other name, as "the Primate's legate to the King."

He came in: the Abbess bowed,—and dropt her veil instantly, seeming to tremble as she stood; he spoke some casual words of compliment, advancing towards her; she replied in a nervous trepidation; and Simon to reassure her, thought it might be well to say,

"I have a message to thee, Lady Abbess; Stephan Langton—"

At that word, poor Alice, fancying this marvellous brotherly resemblance to be (however altered by twenty-two long years) none other than Stephan himself, ran forward and fell into his arms. Happily the audience was a private one.

"Sister,—I am Simon Langton, *his* brother: look up,—here, let me lead thee to the window: his name (I wot thou lovest it) hath touched thee: hearken, dear sister, he will see thee here ere long. Hearken, sister, and my own hearth-wife Angélique—"

"Art thou then only his brother? O Stephan, my heart hath pined to see thee many years;—can his brother be so like him?"

"Yes, good Abbess, yes; we were alike from infancy."

"And Angélique too? how strange."

It was now Simon's turn to be surprised; for when Alice raised her veil, the resemblance was extraordinary: albeit possession of the original made its charming copy of less heart-thrilling consequence.

And here too comes in Angélique herself; just in time to show Simon the living pair of sisterly portraitures, elder and younger. And then they kissed each other heartily, and matters were explained; and Alice was not a bit surprised to find she was right as to her untold guess about the mysterious disappearance: and Angélique was asked if she would like to see the sisterhood? but she decidedly declined that privilege; insomuch that the True Cross miracle remained for ages the unquestioned marvel of St. Catherine's nunnery: except the Abbess, nobody had seen the face of their eiled visitor.

Just at parting Alice said to Simon, "Brother, hou didst give me a good hope just now that haply

I may see him ere long: how soon, thinkest thou, how soon?"

"Thou hast had long patience, I wot, my sister, these many years; a little longer and the Primate will be here."

"The Primate? Is my Stephan then the Primate of all England?"

"Yea, Lady Abbess, he hath been consecrated by Pope Innocent Cardinal Lord Archbishop of Canterbury."

"His dream of greatness therefore is fulfilled; so also shall be his resolve of freeing wretched England: and so too (of less import to others, though everything to me) will be our mutual hope so long deferred of seeing one another once again. I thank Heaven for such blest fulfilments!"

They have said farewell; and on their way to Wodetone must needs pass through Aldeburie. Alas! for the havoc made by civil war all over the land: universal pillage, bloodshed, and fire,—the fields untilled for lack of peace and men, the hamlets in a blaze, and misery and desolation everywhere. The poor serfs cowered in corners of their smoking hovels like wild beasts, each man feeling in himself the curse of a wicked King. As for the magnates, come with our travellers and pass through Aldeburie Park on their route eastwardly. The good Knight is an exile, his family starved to death within four walls in the Round Tower of Windsor, the Great House burnt, and all the Braiose tenants massacred: this dark August in the year 1209 shows now a fearful contrast in the Park to our opening Mayday of bright 1186: O for the days of good King Henry!

A similar tide of devastation had flowed all down the valley; and the trouts were growing fierce and fat on blood. Marauders had very lately been that way, to work John's special vengeance on a neighbourhood that bred and reared the Langtons; and his ruffian Brabanters had spared nothing but the churches in their cruelty and superstition: old and young, man, woman and child, gentle and simple, cleric and laic, all had been ruthlessly murdered; their dwellings burnt, their orchards cut down, their wells and streams choked with the corpses of themselves and all they loved! How terrible a judgment is a tyrant king.

With sore hearts the sympathizing Angélique and indignant Simon reach old Friga-Street at last; passing through the drear demesne of Wodetone Manor with its rambling old mansion still smouldering from the recent flames. And where were all the inhabitants? What hope remained of finding his poor old father still alive? At all events though, let us look up that well-remembered grange of Lonesome, nestling in a dinted valley to the northward of Leith Hill.

All desolate still; but with fresher tracks than ever of the recent storm that has swept all life and loveliness before it: some cottages still blazing,—some mutilated wretches still alive.

Simon left his train, and went alone for a few paces forward to where he well remembered had been once his pleasant home.

Ah! to return anywhither after more than thirty years, what a melancholy homily of Life and Death it is. The place that knew us knoweth us no more; friends are gone, or have forgotten us; conscience is at work, miserably contrasting what we are with what we were; new houses have sprung up, and old ones been pulled down; the reverend oaks of our truant recollections are long ago turned into timber, and impudent young saplings in their stead have grown into large trees since; old haunts, glorified by memory and magnified by years of reverie, how mean they look now, how dark in the dim rushlight of reality! All is change, sorrow, and disappointment.

But when, as in Simon's case, the beautiful home which he left as a boy is next in middle age beheld a charred ruin, still asmoke and with blood upon the threshold, O what a freezer to the heart's warm hope, what a difference between expectation and fulfilment!

Simon drew nigh: yes, that old vine scorched upon the southern wall, must be the same wherefrom he and Stevie had so often gathered bunches; and there is his mother's own petted jessamine plant, very very old now, and covering the porch.

What was that? a groan? He went in, and clambered about the ruinous heap of smoking rafters. Hark! another? yes, under there; near the old chimney-corner.

A strange premonition seized him,—and shouting to his attendants to make all haste and help, he set the example of vigorous work by dragging out beam after beam.

"—I knew it would! I trusted to it: I knew it would!"—Simon and his train worked hard in the direction of that voice: he remembered it.

And now they had cleared a passage; and out of the charry dust and smoke have pulled out a poor old man bleeding and scorched and begrimed; faint, famished, dying: at a glance, in spite of all things, Simon recognized his father.

"It has saved me,—as I swore it would! O blessed, blessed,—ey? who's here?—and thou too, little Si—?"

Angélique ran in, with a precious cup of cold water: and greedily the old man let them pour the nectar down his fevered throat. He rallied for a moment:

"My son, my son! and I have seen them both!—I knew it would,—I trusted it: here, Si—, take it, take it, take the blessed treasure: one little morsel on my tongue when I am dead,—and all the rest, keep it, keep it, kee-e-ep—"

And thus he died quietly in Simon's arms within his own old home, even as he had prayed to die for years!

From his relaxing hand fell a little packet, the relic he adored, his trust, his Saviour, his God. Simon picked it up, read the Rouen certificate, and devoutly believed it all: his first act was to place a splintered morsel on the poor pale tongue; his next, carefully to stow in the safest corner of his pouch that precious fragment.

All seemed over now for Friga-Street; save only this.

The whole realm being still under Interdict, burial in consecrated places was impossible: the dead lay where he died, till some kindly neighbour scraped a hole to hide him in. So Simon, with a filial feeling towards his father, and an affectionate memory for his once dear home, did the best thing under the circumstances: in the old vine arbour at the corner of his mother's garden, with the help of his attendants who soon grubbed a grave, the good son not without a tear and a prayer reverently buried his father.

CHAPTER LVIII.

EXCOMMUNICATION AND DEPOSITION.

When Innocent heard that John was still obdurate and refractory (for the Pope cared little about his other crimes), he determined to follow up the blow of Interdict over the kingdom by those of Excommunication of the Man, and Deposition of the King. That the wretch deserved it richly, all are agreed, though, as often happens to criminals, for altogether other sins than that for which he specially suffered; the sole redeeming feature in John's character being his obstinate defiance of papal usurpation. But in every other sense he well deserved to have the mark of Cain set on him: to be a moral leper shunned and loathed of all men: to be curst, and accounted a contamination whithersoever he turned; to be an outcast, and altogether miserable: yea, and to have the royal crown dashed from the brows of a tyrant.

On St. Michael's night Pope Innocent in a stole of white linen, as at Whitsuntide, pronounced the sentence of "Panteles Aphorismos" with all terrible severity.

At midnight mass, in the mortuary chapel of St. Chrysogonus, hung with inky sackcloth, and dimly lit by oil-wicks in skulls, surrounded by the black brothers of Augustin, and the cowled and hooded friars of Dominic, Innocent commanded the effigy of John of England to be brought in upon a bier. The Pope then, throned upon the altar, commanding the bearers to approach, with his foot spurned its crown from the head of the image, solemnly extinguished the two torches that stood at head and feet; and, the dead-bell tolling all the while, uttered over it thrice a hideous and comprehensive curse, the culminating phrase whereof consigned the typed original as damned to the custody of Judas and the Devil!

The force of all this protentous ceremonial was just the gist of other like forces, public opinion; in those days everybody believed it efficacious; every one held the Pope's ban and his blessing to be potencies; and therefore the sentence of Excommunication practically became a curse indeed.

When the Bishops of Ely, London, and Worcester, coming over from their temporary continental refuge for the purpose, promulgated that sentence in England, all men fled from John as from a pestilence: any might slay him, and none might aid him; his very Chancellor and Intimate, Hugo de Wells, deserted his evil master and went over to Primate Langton at Pontivy: the wretched King looked round him on every side, and save his bloody mercenaries, who now might kill him too, saw no friend, no counsellor, no follower, no helper of any sort in heaven or earth: he was alone, alone with his damned self and Judas and the Devil!

It was quite intolerable, and secretly he managed to send those legates word that he would yield, and take the Pope's Archbishop; but anon, with treacherous weakness, he recanted, and "vowed he would hang him if he caught him." Whereupon Pope Innocent published a Crusade against the kicking excommunicant, and gave his kingdom to Philip Augustus for the mere trouble of taking it.

Gladly did Philip accept the office, and made enormous preparations by land and sea; but, just as he had spent vast treasures therein, and had collected men and ships innumerable, the wily John sent to Pope Innocent his unconditional surrender of the crown of England.

The exulting Innocent had gained his end: and, by way of a higher triumph in killing two birds with one stone, resolved publicly to humiliate King Philip also: commanding him, as his obedient son, instantly to lay down his arms against John, seeing that he was now placed under Rome's ægis, as a feudatory of the Papal See.

Philip was furious at the disappointment; but a threat of excommunication if he disobeyed, soon brought his stout looks down; and so by way of doing something, and not being found in the ignominious position of him who

> "A king of France with forty thousand men,
> Marched up a hill and then marched down again,"

turned his chagrined wrath causelessly against Ferrand Count of Flanders, sticking thereby a cankrous thorn in his own side for years, and losing his own fleet instantaneously; for John of England, having then many ships collected to disperse the French armada, cleverly made instant alliance with Ferrand, and (in his behalf so as not to exasperate the Pope, who in fact secretly enjoyed it) destroyed the navy of King Philip.

The Pope's great end was thus secured, and John had now humbly to do three unpleasant things; first, personally to receive Stephan Langton as Primate; secondly, to pay down a hundred thousand marks by way of compensation to the clergy for the destruction of their properties; and thirdly, to surrender his crown to Pandulph, the nuncio of Innocent.

Before, however, John did either of this triad of inconveniences, he resolved on a piece of petty revenge by way of recreation, and on sundry wholesale cruelties by way of raising the wind.

First for the revenge: a certain poor old enthusiast, one Peter of Wakefield, an eremite, had prophesied that the excommunicated King should lose his crown before Ascension-Day; it was manifestly coming true, for Pandulph was to have the crown surrendered to him immediately— and Ascension-Day was some time off. So meanwhile, John, by dint of his ten thousand mercenaries being still too powerful for any to control him, seized the poor man, imprisoned him awhile in Corfe Castle, and thence had him "dragged at horses' tails to the town of Wareham, where he hanged him on a gibbet" as an impostor—however true a prophet for the nonce; and to make sure that his disloyal gift might not be hereditary, had his innocent son hanged also beside him.

But the King's other wholesale cruelties were less personally vindictive, and amounted to the dignity of a measure of finance, compendious and economical. To secure the required crore of compensation marks betimes, and sundry other lacs for himself, John seized all the Jews in the kingdom, male and female, and so "grievously tormented them that they gave up to him all they had, and promised more, so they might escape such cruel and various kinds of tortures."

No doubt, his Majesty's Exchequer was thus cheaply and agreeably replenished; and it appears that the process of extortion was sometimes conducted not without a spice of humour, if we make instance of a certain wealthy Jew of Bristol, who though cruelly whipped, pinched, burnt with red-hot brands, and otherwise terribly used, still held out manfully, and threatened to be a martyr unto death rather than pay down ten thousand marks; until John, who was conducting the sport in person, bethought him of the horrors of dentistry; and day by day for seven days the fine old Maccabæan father was brought before the throne to have a grinder tugged out; but on the eighth the poor wretch gave in, whereon the tyrant pleasantly observed, that "a Jew's eye might be a quick ransom, but Jews' teeth were the richer harvest."

CHAPTER LIX.

ARMORICA.

Stephan, now wishing to be nearer England, has somewhile left Pontivy, with his court of exiled prelates and the Chancellor; and passing through Rennes (where some say he was once bishop, but it is a manifest mistake for Rheims) went on to Mont St. Michel, that wondrous pile of strength and beauty, out-standing as a sea-girt watch tower to the Garden of Bretagne. There they tarried awhile; and in that aerial cathedral which pinnacles the rock, (midway thronged by its precipitous town, and surrounded at the base with a strong *enceinte* of Norman curtains and round towers) Stephan the Primate celebrated Mass, preached "Liberty to the captive," and remembered Alice.

Thence taking boat by the shore line of Avranches and Granville to Coutances, in that splendid Gothic temple his eloquence again was heard by listening crowds on behalf of God and his country; and from Coutances the Primate and his train embarked for Jersey, then better known as Csarsey, or Cæsarea, part of the ancient Norman province of Neustria.

In that train I need hardly say, always nearest to him was his dear old friend, the humble but noble-hearted Hal. Never since that fiery trial of his domestic afflictions had he left his master's side: upon Will Fern and others of King Robin's faithful foresters (several of whom conveniently were Normans) had long ago devolved the office of link between Stephan and the Barons: Hal, the faithful Christian Hal, chastened in the furnace of affliction, was now no more a servant, but a friend. As for Simon and Angélique, they lived a life of no small excitement, in tempestuous England, moving from place to place, as safety counselled in those perilous times; but they chiefly found refuge in Reygate and its neighbourhood.

Stephan's errand in Jersey, after threading the dangerous navigation of the Minquiers (those hundred rocky islets, sole remnants of the submerged territory that before the earthquake of March 709, united all Armorica), was twofold: to pay honour to the martyred St. Helier, and to win over for the Baronial cause a certain noble Cæsarean. Regnault de Carteret.

The holy martyr had already been dead three centuries; but even now, with the addition of seven more, his hermitage remains intact. On a lofty and lonely rock, ocean-girt at high-water, may still be seen the rudely-built hovel where, for years, until certain pirates slew him, the solitary eremite wasted his existence by preaching to the winds and to the waves: a long cavity in the rock, scooped like a grave to the shape of his body, marks the cold ascetic's bed; and a small enclosure on the top of the rock is still called St. Helier's garden, where he grew his lentils. Hard by, and accessible at ebb-tide, is the rugged islet since fortified, and called Château Elizabeth; but in those days its inhospitable shores contained only a small Priory of five black Augustine canons; who daily said mass there, though only to each other, in honour of the martyred saint.

Stephan paid his tribute of devotion where alone it was due; for, though he might fairly honour the godly man, he only paid worship to God; the wholesome doctrines of the Albigeois had sunk into his soul, and he had somewhile become less a Papist than a Christian. Nevertheless, as the Pope's Primate, he gave his Archiepiscopal blessing to those five old canons; enriching them besides with divers gifts and comforts; for, rest assured, Pope Innocent had been worldly-wise enough, not to let his created Archbishop go as a penniless friar on his triumphal way.

After this, they make progress to Jersey proper, with an especial view to St. Ouen's Manor, the fine old moated Castle of de Carteret; that ancient Armorican noble, who had recently repelled from his native island, with such gallantry and success, the invading forces of King Philip. On him all Stephan's eloquence was fruitless; let us confess one failure amid many successes; the burly Norman knight who abhorred a French king, and could hardly tolerate an English one, yet recognized in John, with all his sins, the only superior his pride could brook, his lawful Norman suzerain. He would not join the Barons' League, nor listen to what he called treason; nay more, he delicately counselled an early departure to the political Prelate; and Stephan was too wise a diplomatist not to take the hint.

It is only fair to state that a year or two afterwards the grateful John, who heard of all this, honoured Jersey with his personal presence, and conferred upon his faithful Channel islands, sole relics of Normandy to England, their famous "Bill of rights and privileges;" under which through many centuries they have enjoyed the blessing of liberty. It was given "graciously and freely to those loyal islands" as a piece of caprice and by way of spiting England for its zealous pursuit of the Great Charter, and is called 'The Constitution of King John:' whereby they are for ever held exempt from all foreign and intermediate dependence, being subject only to their sovereign in council; they are governed by their own laws and judged by native judges, 'the jurates' or sworn coroners elected by themselves: in language, manners and habits, they are a little nation of Normans still, the sole unmixed remnant in existence of that interesting people.

With all speed therefore, as De Carteret was choleric, our voyagers set sail for Guernsey; the ancient Cerniows-ey, Armorican for Corner-isle. Here they were gladly received and hospitably entertained, as all travellers between France and England were ever wont to be: but after his ill success with the stout De Carteret, our Patriot was too shrewd to attempt recruiting in those latitudes: so, as he had to stay there possibly some months, till circumstances should force for him an open way to England, he wisely held his tongue about political converts. The English Barons (our prelate calculated) would probably be strong enough to fight their own battle, without the help of Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, or Sark.

Therefore among Sarnia's romantic bays, ancient churches, and Druidical remains Stephan Langton patiently abode his time, which evidently was not yet: if he made no political converts, he probably made many religious ones; especially among the relics of aboriginal Celts in that island, who still worshipped Thor and Woden, nay the very stones themselves, at the frequent Cromlechs and Poquelayes. To the more enlightened sort also he preached a famous sermon on "the everlasting gospel of the grace of God," with little admixture of human superstitions, in the then new Church of Câtel, or Sancta Maria de Castro, consecrated in 1203: in old St. Sampson's, even at that time hoar with age, his christian eloquence was heard: and in the primitive vault-roofed chapel of St. Apolline, now desecrated as a barn and with its ancient red chalk frescoes whitewashed, he spoke in Norman-French to the wondering few it could accommodate, truths unheared within those walls since the days of Serk's first missionary, St. Maglorius. We may be sure that the zealous annotator and multiplyer of the Bible lost no occasion for saving souls; Stephan Langton, in the comparative obscurity of his Guernesey retreat could not be hid, but was a light of men. Let us leave him awhile doing good among the Islanders, and turn to another scene of our tale.

CHAPTER LX.

A CALL AT THE ALHAMBRA.

ONE unexpected effect of the deposition of England's King by Papal audacity had been to make many of our best Barons rally round him in spite of his excommunication. They stood for England,—ay, even side by side with a vile John too, as against that arrogant Pope: private wrongs, public tyrannies, the personal hatefulness of a felon monarch all were merged in baronial patriotism.

For a little while the recalcitrating King was even popular; Englishmen abhor Ultramontane usurpation. But it lasted not longer than his quarrel with the Pope; the moment he gave in, and lost the heroic attitude of standing up for his country's independence and his own, the tide turned, and he became more hateful than ever: in his fatuous desperation he then planned and well nigh executed a scheme incredible but for the respectable testimony of Matthew Paris.

The Moors were now overrunning Spain, and boasted that they would extinguish Christianity in that vast region: creeping across from Africa by the Pillars of Hercules, they had swarmed all over Andalusia, and threatened to be masters also of the two Castiles and Arragon. To the disordered mind of John, the excommunicated man, not yet absolved,—to the thought of the deposed English King, not yet restored as an Italian tributary, this triumph of Antichrist seemed to promise some shadow of help; and he actually sent over emissaries to treat with Mohammed al Nassir, then reigning Caliph of Granada, offering alliance, offensive and defensive, against Christian Europe: nay more, the caitiff volunteered to abjure the Cross, if desired, as the price of Mohammed's friendship.

One Robert, of St. Albans, a renegade monk, and a brace of John's most thorough-going followers, Sir Thomas de Erdington and Ranulf, son of Nicholas, his esquire, went the long weary journey to Granada with these precious propositions: and we may well believe the old chronicler when he asserts that they "marvelled greatly" at the glories of the Alhambra.

England was at least two centuries behind Southern Europe in the arts, refinements, and conveniences of life: while the Saracens had brought into Spain all the ancient Eastern luxury, with its barbaric pomp of colours, silks, embroidery, gems and gold.

When our rough knight and his esquire, plated in steel and buff-leather, in company with that black-robed shaveling their spokesman, strode up to the marble-inlaid courts beneath those wondrous roofs, fretted and stalactitically dropped with gilded carving, they were positively terrified, believing it an enchanted palace: all so quiet, vast, lonely, beautiful; nothing heard but the silver fall of fountains, nothing seen but exquisitely painted ceilings, walls, and arches, apparently uninhabited, and opening into gardens full of gaudy flowers and aromatic trees.

Anon, the scene changed dazzlingly. Their unsandalled guides, a hideous black eunuch and two mutes with drawn scimitars, fingered their thick lips for silence to those noisy spurs as they neared a tapestried archway. On a sudden, by some means unseen, the curtains slowly drew aside; and at the end of a vast vault of colour, lit with a thousand golden lamps, and surrounded by a gorgeous crowd sat in his divan Mohammed the Conqueror.

Alone of all that brilliant court, the great Emir seemed to be blind to its magnificence; for he was, or affected to be, absorbed in the Koran: not the rainbow of veiled beauties round his golden cushions, nor the plumed array of swarthy warriors beyond, nor even the arrival of barbarian England's awkward embassage, could draw his holy glances from the sacred page.

At last, by an interpreter, out spoke the monk Robert; for he was not half so much abashed as the knight and his esquire.

"John, the King, salutes Mahommed, the Emir, and seeks an alliance with him."

"Enquire of the messenger if 'John, the King," intends 'his people' also."

"No! I'll be sworn upon my sword, no!" shouted the proud Norman,—"John of England, as king, standeth alone, and taketh not account of the rabble."

There was an uneasy murmur in that thronged hall, when the interpreter made known that the ruler despised his people.

"But our King," interposed Ranulf, with additional want of tact, "will kiss the Koran, ay, and give his creed up and his crown too, an thou wilt help him."

"Ask if the Giaour is a tyrant."

"Yea!" said Robert, the monk, with over-plainness; for he was vexed at his stolid colleagues, and ashamed of the embassy: "his highness is renounced of his own nation, and renounces them and their religion: but he can bring a crown and a convert to Mohammed."

"Bid the embassy depart, with safe conduct: such a king must be a madman: Allah forbid that his servant be allied with that infidel lunatic. As for this black fakir with his circlet of hair, give him a shawl to turban his head withal, and a purse of gold sequins for his bold embassage: the others may depart without a gift."

So ended this disgraceful mission: wherein John's moral depths reach the abyss of degradation; it is a parallel case to that of the infamous Pope Alexander the Sixth, who as a climax to his crimes and cruelties wound up all by avowed worship of the devil. On monk Robert's return, he must have made his own story good, and silenced both knight and squire, for John rewarded his service by making him Abbot of St. Albans

CHAPTER LXI.

A SHIPWRECK.

News came to Langton in Guernesey that John had yielded, and desired to receive him at Winchester. A special providence prevented it; for the treacherous King meant to hang him out of hand, and so by another murder get rid of a man he hated.

However, the Primate bade farewell to his kind hosts in Sarnia, sent most of his train and the Bishops with him (who much distrusted John's sincerity) to St. Maloes, and thence to Paris; and with his faithful Hal and a few personal attendants took boat for Weymouth, accounted a most perilous voyage in those days: the wretched junk-like galley of the period rolled about helplessly as a tub in the Channel seas, (for, though the mariner's compass was just invented, it was a scarce and precious luxury,) and there was mighty little skill to help the luck or boldness of the mariner.

Nevertheless, on the high poop of a great open boat, half-decked and with three rows of oars, Langton stood and blest the people of St. Pierre crowding to see his departure: while overhead swung perilously the loose coarse sail of matting from its clumsy yard on a short thick mast with a hamper atop; wherein sat the skipper looking out; large gaudy streamers on cross-sticks awkwardly tangling the willow-ropes, and flapping smartly in all faces.

Scarcely had the rowers well struck out beyond the castellated islet of Cor-nez and got clear of its reefs at low water, than one of those typhoons, so reasonably dreaded by the Channel Islanders, came sweeping over the sea like a charge of cavalry. It was full in our voyager's favour, and there was plenty of sea room; so far well: and the rowers hastily lugged in their oars, while the mainsail, full to bursting, did the work for them.

Anon,—and light was fast failing to boot,—the skipper in his bird's-nest spied danger ahead: he was making for Aurigny, (or as we now say Alderney) but the stormy wind had driven him right into the Swinge, just past its only quiet time of flood, and ebbing furiously; like a mad sea-rapid, cascading over rocks and shallows. Hopelessly and helplessly the mariners looked on, while the huge craft, whirling round and round like a log in a whirlpool, seemed rushing to inevitable wreck. But Stephan maintained his self-possession, and seemed the true pilot in the storm: watercraft had not been wanting to the accomplishments of his forestry days, and his spirit always rose with the occasion of danger: so, the skipper being still aloft on the look-out, and instantly engaged in shouting directions to the steerer, Stephan took virtual command of the idle oarsmen, and by directing their energies wisely, averted the catastrophe for a time; for, making them use their oars in masses as punt-poles to avoid collision with the rocks, they swung from menacing rock to rock through many perilous places; until at last on a sudden the bow of the wretched junk was hurled higher than its poop's wont upon a grating granite reef just under the wrathful waters,—and immediately the vessel went to pieces.

Blow after blow, the breakers crashed it like an egg-shell; night was coming on, and the gale rising; but Stephan, not without an apostolic prayer aloud to Him who stills the storm and saves in trouble, remembering Paul's shipwreck, bade everybody lash himself to a spar or plank, or to a couple of oars, these being fortunately at hand in abundance as extemporaneous life-preservers. For himself and Hal, both men of courage and action, their resolution was to stand by the vessel so long as two boards held together; and then to commit themselves to God's mercy and the Swinge on some such fragile raft. Many of the mariners, in hopes to get ashore (not a mile off) before the increasing darkness made escape still more questionable, leapt off from time to time; and were seen for a little while battling with the torrent: but Hal's keen eye, noticing how fast the tide ebbed, counselled further patience: haply this very reef of danger might become their path of safety.

Soon uprose the moon, shining placidly through swift and ragged clouds upon that scene of desolation: and with the sinking tide down went the stormy wind; and the moonlight now shone brightly upon a broken prow stuck high upon the craggy reef, a flapping foresail, several mariners floating on the smoother swell, and sundry figures picking their difficult way along the reef's teeth to shore: among them our honest Hal, and Stephan the Great Primate.

How the rude inhabitants received them hospitably at La Ville, and how thankful our travellers were at their escape, I need hardly stop to tell you. But it is as well to say this: viz., that had it not been for this shipwreck, Stephan must have fallen into John's murderous hands: for, disappointed of his prey at Winchester, and hearing through De Carteret of the Primate's sojourn in Guernesey, he sent over to seize him. Nothing but the account of his shipwreck somewhere in the Channel, with the loss of all on board, prevented further search, and made John happy in his assured destruction.

Meanwhile, Stephan, with his friendly Hal, had escaped to Cherbourg, thence to Paris, and thereafter to Soissons; where, at a great assembly convened by Philip of France, he met his friends, the Bishops of Ely and London. Here they held counsel about the wicked King, resolving to dethrone him, and place the crown on the head of some more worthy sovereign.

CHAPTER LXII.

PANDULPH AND HIS HOMAGER.

TIME flies, and we must evermore fly with it: we have come in this drama to Woden's-day, the 15th of May, 1213, the Eve of Ascension: the scene is Dover Castle, then the chief stronghold of John, under his almost only faithful servant, Hubert de Burgh; and the chief actors are our worst English King, the forsaken of God and man, and his now sole hope towards either, Pandulph the Pope's nuncio.

A vast gathering of burgesses, serfs, and villeins crowded all about that castle hill; indignant at the coming shame, and venting their sense thereof in loud cries of rage against the craven monarch. Within the walls a large number of the baronial retainers and their followers, throng every courtyard: and the great hall itself is filled with the Lords and chief Estates of England in sullen expectation. They are all seated; and in the middle stands one empty gilded throne under a red silk canopy, and an embroidered footstool near it.

Anon, through the open portal at the end of the hall comes solemnly a short procession: but no one of England's magnates stirs from his seat nor rises in its honour; though Church and King in their worst-seen phases both are there.

First, some bowing ushers in the gay liveries of the Di Masca family; next the Nuncio Pandulph, Cardinal of the Twelve Apostles, a proud and portly figure robed in crimson, and wearing the broad red hat and tassels: on either side and a little in arrear so as to give him the step, two knights templars stride along in full armour, with their vizors down, and swords drawn: following them, more servants in the Di Masca livery: then a royal herald, and two trumpeters of the Brabant guard: and last, in a sordid robe, without one trace of ornament or honour, John of England, humbly carrying the crown on a black cushion before him. When he came in, pale, trembling, and with dishevelled hair, there was an uneasy clatter of spurs upon the pavement, and a thrill of disgust ran electrically through the hall.

But the haughty priest is seated on that central throne, with his two armed supporters right and left, his livery men about him, John kneeling on the footstool, and the herald with his trumpeters behind.

At a signal from the Nuncio, the herald, without an obeisance, handed a document to the abject King, who, in order to receive it, put down the cushion and the crown for a moment at Pandulph's feet: the proud Roman kicked it over by a seeming careless accident, —and many a sword started half-way from its scabbard then and there: but Pandulph took no heed of the disturbance; he left the crown upon the ground and signed to the kneeling King to read.

John tried; but could not get beyond a husky half-audible, "We John—" his voice refused the next words "by the grace of God, King of England:" so, with a contemptuous glance at the despicable object, Pandulph signed to the herald to take the writing from him and to read it aloud.

Now, in its dull integrity as given by the chroniclers that writing is too technical and lengthy for my purpose: but only imagine how the Barons must have writhed and groaned in spirit, to hear that herald mouth such sentences as these: they only endured it for a little season.

"We abase ourselves, and with our kingdom have willingly humiliated us; therefore not by force nor compulsion but of our own free will confirmed in the common council of our Barons" (a lie) "we have freely given to God and his holy apostles Peter and Paul, and our mother the Holy Church of Rome, and our Lord Pope Innocent, with his catholic successors, the whole kingdom of England, and the whole kingdom of Ireland!" &c., &c.: all to be held of the Pope secondarily at a tribute of a thousand marks a year—and this fiefship to be "irrevocable by any of our successors on pain of forfeiture of his crown."

The craven King! the wicked foolish coward! How utterly despised and hated of his people then was he; the salesman of England's independence to buy Rome's protection. But our Honour sprang from the reaction of this shame, our English liberties were begotten from this very scene of Italian tyranny.

John feebly picked up the crown, and like a servitor mechanically held it out to Pandulph. The Cardinal took it, looked at the jewels, and kept the abject monarch waiting awhile: there was a dangerous rustle in the hall: Englishmen are long-suffering to a fault, but the Pope must not be master of our crown even for a minute. The Barons looked at one another, and Magna Charta was conceived in that look.

Pandulph, having sufficiently shown his power as Rome's arrogant representative, placed the crown on John's head and bade him rise. Immediately, the trumpeters sounded a royal salute; and of course the intention was, that the assembly should stand and shout in John's honour; but all remained sullenly seated and in dead silence.

John trembled with rage and shame; but Pandulph seemed indifferent, for England was humbled in her wicked king.

And now another ceremony has to be performed; this, this alone was the key-note to the Barons' patience: they had waited thus long, and had endured all, to see (according to programme) their acknowledged patriotic leader, Stephan Langton, accepted by the King as Primate. That Stephan could not have brooked the arrogance of Pandulph, had he been present, I for one am well assured: and it is a consolation to find the chroniclers reporting that he, being absent personally for the moment, was against the King's surrender of the crown to Rome; he desired John's humiliation, but not England's.

John stood, and the Nuncio sate, as did the Barons— when the herald left that hall to summon from an antechamber "the Primate Cardinal Langton, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury."

In full canonicals, robed, mitred, croziered, preceded by a cross-bearer and acolytes, but with a modest self-possession, entered Stephan Langton: and the whole assembly immediately, with a thundering shout, rose as one man. He advanced towards the King, holding out the hand of reconciliation. John, abased at his recent degradation (and all this like most other matters in our story is historical) fell at his feet in tears: and as Stephan bent down and raised him, he whispered, "Old Tangley!"

Astonished, the King looked into his Primate's face with a keen and searching glance: was this Langton then, whom he had so deeply hated as the monk of St. Martha's, this Langton whom he had so much feared as the near ally of Innocent and Philip, this Langton who headed up the Baronial confederation, this lofty prelate in his vesture of lace and gold, none other than the bold young forester, whose daring exploit in the rescue of his bride he so well remembered? None other, none other truly: and conscience in that moment made the bad King once again fall at his feet like an abject.

The hall rang with acclamations; for the Barons felt it as a special triumph that their avowed leader thus was doubly honoured; and Pandulph was glad of the exaltation of the Church, aye and of the Pope's Primate: but in Stephan Langton's mind there was another thought, deep-rooted in sad memories and hot affections: in this fallen King his Alice is avenged: yet there remains a higher mission; Langton is to save his country.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AN INTERVIEW LONG LOOKED FOR.

Straight from Dover Stephan turned not to the right hand nor to the left till he had passed along the Pilgrim's Way. Dean Milman strangely corroborates the truth of our Surrey love story: for whereas we are assured by Tyrrell and others that John first met Pandulph and the Primate at Dover, Milman says that Langton went straight to Winchester, there to see the King: the fact being, that so far as the King's presence was concerned, the fallen monarch was doomed to repeat his abject homage to Rome in that cathedral, where Nicholas Bishop of Tusculun gave him absolution from the Pope; and so far as respected the Primate's immediate journey thitherward who can wonder at it when informed that the vale of St. Martha's and the nunnery of St. Catherine's lie in the route direct?

Stephan's progress was a triumph: for strangely enough the Pope's choice was with papal astuteness the man of the people, a personal foe to the King, and acknowledged leader of the patriotic nobles: none could have chosen better for England than the Pontiff; and (as we shall see anon) none could have selected worse for the interests of Rome: for the great hinderer henceforward to Ultramontane pretensions is this same Stephan Langton, by whose sterling Anglo-Saxonism the designs of Innocent were doomed to grevious disappointment.

Just passing through Canterbury (in a tumult of joy banners and bell-ringing), so as to strike the route to Winton, Stepnan and his train go on through the well-remembered lanes and forest tracks and hill paths. That an escort of Robin's merrymen should help them on the way is nothing wonderful; for Hal kept frequent counsel with Will Fern, and Friar Tuck himself might wish for Langton's blessing. And so, for many days they travelled on through Kent and East Surrey, till, having passed and visited Reygate cavern, Betchworth Castle and Dorking, our hero comes to revisit home scenes; at Reygate being joined by Simon and his hearth wife, the now matronly Angélique.

It must have been a dreary day when Stephan saw in Friga-Street valley the blackened ruins of his mother's grange, and the mound above his father in the arbour: and all along the vale, as we know, was the same dark scene of desolation and misery. Everywhere with princely bounty our native-born Primate relieved the wretched inhabitants still left of what erst was called The Happy Valley; everywhere from Wodetone to Gomershal and Shire and Aldeburie, was he followed by the blessings of the multitudes rejoicing in his prodigal largesse; everywhere with a bursting heart he moved among those desolate old scenes, saluted by the gratitude of hundreds.

But the climax of his personal feelings is not yet come. Robin's scouts, his heralds all along the route, have some time since conveyed a letter to Alice, announcing the great event of his approach: O loved, O long-desired, and much-dreaded coming!

And the Primate has arranged to celebrate high Mass on a set day at St. Martha's, specially inviting thither the few remaining monks hovering round Newark (the priory itself having been long since sacked and burnt) and the Abbess and sisters of St. Catherine's nunnery: the chapel was too small to hold many beside, even if any able-bodied folk remained capable of climbing that hill. John's mercenaries had left for population thereabouts few that were not maimed or halt or blind; and it is a sharp pull up to St. Martha's.

The set day came: the Abbess (poor trembling heart!) and a deputation of calm sisters came in religious procession over the heights still called Chauntry Downs from the hymns and chants sung there, and were early in their places; and the Newark brothers were there, with a few more: all waited for the Primate, whose train was slowly winding up the steep East side.

And when, in full pontificals, Stephan entered by the great Western arch, and the solemn Sanctus as he advanced went up from the deep bass of the monks and the treble of the nuns, and he stood now after an interval of twenty-seven years by that well-remembered shrine, and knew that the trembling veiled figure next to him beside the rail was Alice,—who knows how nearly the strong man had swooned away like a girl? but fortunately a Gothic stone sedile served for the Primate's throne, and he hardly wrestled down his weakness by a prayer.

In that High Mass was offered up to Heaven not alone those consecrated elements which typify the God who dwells in man, but in chief two flaming hearts full of immortal love for that Blessed One and for each other: together they ate of one bread, together drank of one cup; in spirit ever one, even in body they now were not divided: if in any case marriage is eternal, those twin souls will for ever be united.

And when, now for the first time after so many years and prayers and yearnings, they at the holy altar saw each other so long-desired eye to eye, how beatified in love, how beauteous in expression, how full of human rapture intensified yet calmed by heavenly grace were those two faces! With what an ecsatcy of earnestness did he bless her, and in how sweet a transport of deep joy did she from those loved lips receive his blessing. It was an antepast of Heaven, that communion of true souls, a golden minute antedated from the glorious Age of Happiness-to-come.

Just before the Benediction, an anthem was thrillingly sung: it was "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." And the Abbess, evidently overcome by her feelings, had knelt while others stood, close beside the Primate at the rail, and she sobbed audibly. Of course he could notice such fervour of devotion only by infusing a deeper intensity into the final blessing he pronounced over her head: as he left her there worshipping, after the Missa est.

The service is over, and save the Primate all descend the hill in company; obsequious monks and gossiping sisters elated at such unusual gaiety and the beautiful view; and so they walk down the glen to the blackened ruins of old Tything, where attending serfs have littered down the mules and palfreys, and are now getting them rubbed up again for the departure.

Alice, however, is not there; the holy Abbess whose devotion at that shrine is so well known, and who frequently has spent hours there in solitary devotion, alone has lingered in the chapel; and is kneeling still at the communion rail.

Stephan, with Hal in a fitting garb officiating as acolyte, is in the little vestry disrobing, and getting into traveller's trim again; telling his faithful friend too in the highest spirits that he will overtake Alice on the way ere she is aware and go on with her to St. Catherine's, and tell her eye to eye to their very heart's mutual rejoicing more than all the loving things he ever had written to her by letter: the evening of their days might yet be gladdened by seeing one another frequently and intimately; their middle age should yet be happy in the sunshine of interchanged affections.

When the Primate with his attendants came out of the vestry, they saw at a glance that the Abbess was still at her prayers: and with a throbbing heart Stephan gently went up to her and knelt beside her. She must be strangely absorbed indeed not to notice this, he thought: but with infinite delicacy, he waited yet a little, and prayed a calming prayer.

A terrible suspicion crossed Hal's mind; he quietly crept forward and touched the kneeling figure: no sign, no motion, no reply. Hal then touched his master's hands, clasped over his face in prayer. Stephan looked up quickly and happily, thinking it was Alice who had touched him.

"Ah, my master! my poor dear master!"

"Hal, why that cry, why these bitter tears? What—what,—Alice! Alice! wake,—wake! It is I, Stevie! —O God, she is dead!"

He fell almost as senseless as that inanimate kneeling figure.

Yes! it were better for her to have died thus with a heart broken by its own ecstatic joy, than to have still lived on her melancholy life, divorced from him she loved. Yes! it were wiser for him that even his own Alice should mount to bliss a martyr, a Virgin-confessor beside God's altar, than fill his consecrated heart with thoughts of hopeless love. The sainted Abbess and the holy Primate had best have thus met and parted on St. Martha's.

When Stephan came to himself, he was not long before he thus discerned how merciful and wise was even this stern Providence: and dear old Hal comforted him: and some of the sisters running back to see for the Abbess, (whose litter had been waiting a quarter-glass) ascertain what has happened, and give the alarm.

It was all in vain: restoratives were utterly useless; the glazed blue eyes wide open, the fallen mouth, the white waxen face, the lissom-jointed form heavily lying still in any change of posture, the clammy chilliness, and those pale lips proclaim that the spirit of Alice has departed.

I draw a veil over that sacred theme, Stephan Langton's sorrow; the more so, because it was so secret; none but Hal there knew how dear to the great Primate's inmost heart was the Lady Abbess of St. Catherine's; none but Hal could tell that the bitter tears he dropped upon her grave when within a day or two they buried her in the chancel of St. Martha's, (himself officiating) were more than those of a feeling man when haply he has lost some friend.

Stephan had sent orders instantly to a mason of Gilford to hew him out two stone coffins, and to place them one each side of the chancel of St. Martha's, just under the surface, the lids to be flush with the floor: they were both ready and in place on the day of burial; in one of them the weeping nuns deposited their Abbess; the other at present remained empty.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A GALLOP TO RUNNE-MEAD.

But much of the great work which Langton came into the world to do is still remaining to be done; the Liberties of England are yet to be achieved. Langton remembered not only that he was an Archbishop, but an Englishman, and a noble of England. "He had asserted with the Pope the liberties of the Church against the King; he asserted the liberties of England against the same King though supported by the Pope." Almost the first act of Langton on his arrival in England was to take the initiative on the part of the Barons.

John, just returned from his complimentary visit to De Carteret at Jersey, was furious against his contumacious nobles, and especially swore vengeance on the Primate. Civil war now raged horribly over the land—the King backed by his mercenaries with a few favourites and the Pope on one side; the confederated Barons of England, headed by the Primate, on the other.

At Northampton the Archbishop in person courageously expostulated with the tyrant of his people, but was dismissed with scorn: thence he followed him to Nottingham, threatening excommunication against all who levied war on the Barons of England till their just claims were heard, and, thereafter, immediately convened a great assembly of the Estates of the realm at London.

Here on the 25th of August, 1213, before all the civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries congregated in old St.

Pawles', Langton produced and read aloud the Charter of Liberties granted by King Henry the First, a hundred years agone. As its chief clauses were afterwards incorporated in the Great Charter, they need not yet be detailed; but it tells volumes for the utter destruction John's dozen years of misrule had occasioned to monasteries, and libraries, and literature in general, when we find that one only copy of King Henry's charter was then believed to be extant; namely that which Langton read, having found it in an old chest at Edmondsbury Priory. As he gave out clause after clause, the excitement was prodigious; and at the close, "with loud acclamations the Bishops and Barons there swore with one voice that they would contend to death itself for those liberties."

There is a famous historical picture by Arthur Devis, which, as engraved and published by Bowyer, has popularized the striking scene: and the picture is the more remarkable from the fact that every personage depicted by the artist is a portrait of the then living descendants of the Englishmen who gained Magna Charta.

We must not, however, further encumber our story with the details which any one may read for himself in any of our chronicles. My errand is with Stephan Langton personally, and not to be recording the various successes of John or the Barons, still less the ambitious schemes of France in a meditated invasion of our distracted country. But I may as well mention that the Barons chose our friend the Lord Robert Fitz-Walter their general, calling him the "Marechal of God and the Holy Church," and that after London itself had pronounced for the Patriots, the "perjured King" was forced to a parley. It falls also within the province of our story to record that Stephan sent his brother Simon, as a legate to Rome, to expostulate with Pope Innocent against the madness of his protégé, King John; and that the Pope arrogantly upholding the King, and threatening to excommunicate Stephan if he revisited him, our hero quietly held on his way, and on Simon's return consecrated him a Prelate of England in spite both of John and the Pope. Further, we may mention shortly and without another word-painted scene there, that in Reygate cavern the draft of Magna Charta was settled and approved by the confederates in council then assembled, Earl Warenne being President. And now, not to exhaust your patience, we may fairly hurry on to Runne-meade.

Not on account of the races there, however ancient, still less for the river running by, however immemorially; but because of old time that had been the place for the "Runes" (our savage forefathers' Mohican-like discussions) is that famous spot so named: everybody knows it—a little flat of some 150 acres, near Staines, with the Thames running through it and enclosing a small osiered eyot now called Magna Charta's isle: like many of our other scenes, this also is in the county Surrey; to wit, in its northern hundred of Chertsey.

CHAPTER LXV.

MAGNA CHARTA.

We are now come, rapidly as flying Time himself, to Friday the 15th of June, 1215.

A vast encampment of pavilions blazing with heraldry and thronged by men-at-arms, covers the green plain of Runne-mead; for the King, finding "that he had scarce seven knights left him at Odiham, and was quite forsaken of his people, and fearing lest the Barons should seize all his castles now ungarrisoned, yet having conceived in his heart an implacable hatred against them, he so far dissembled as to make peace with them for a time, in hopes that, when he should become stronger, he might be more severely revenged upon them separately, with whom whilst in a body he found he was not able to cope."

A pleasant, honourable foe, goodsooth, our patriots have to deal with, and one who, as we shall see, no sooner signed and sealed, than he repudiated his own autograph!

And now appears our good Archbishop, a mediator between King and people, with William, Earl of Pembroke, and scores of bishops and barons. And the royal pavilion is pitched upon that little island, and his Highness has come thither in his barge upon the Thames from Windsor: he came privately, the rowers being out of livery, and himself, with Pembroke and the Archbishop, the only passengers; they landed quietly, and got into the tent almost unperceived of the multitude at Runne-mead.

However, assembled there to meet the King were twenty-five chosen barons, and Cardinal Pandulph with some others; and directly his Highness had landed, up went the Royal Standard over the pavilion, amid thundering shouts from the vast encampment, a mixture of exultation and execration.

Within the tent, on a small table, with a stool at side, lay a fair sheet of parchment fully engrossed, a pen and an ink-horn. The King seated himself, all others standing, and Archbishop Langton took up the document, intending to read it aloud: he bowed to John, and began, "Johannes, Dei gratia Rex—"

"Nay, Sir Priest; we are come to sign away everything, but it irketh us to hear your lawyer's latin: cease, I say."

"Your Highness will surely read the Articles then."

"No Priest, no: we are here to sign them."

The wily John was even then getting up the pleas of compulsion and surprise, whereby, through Pandulph's present help, he afterwards persuaded Pope Innocent to annul this covenant.

"But your Highness is aware—" interposed Pembroke,

"Baron, I know that thou and all these with thee claim my very kingdom, and would make me—yea, make *us*, a slave."

(John was the first English King who used the plural pronoun; and it was then, as in the parallel case of Majesty long afterwards in 1519, accounted a species of blasphemy, being taken to imitate the attributes of the Sacros-anct Trinity.)

Then Langton spoke—

"These be in chief the liberties granted by your Highness's great Predecessor Henry Beauclerc, grounded on the earliest grants of Edward the Confessor, and since confirmed by Stephen of Blois, and your Highness's royal father of most blessed memory."

"Curse—" even John stopped there: but he hated that good and weak father: "give me the deed, I say—Gad's teeth, I came to sign it."

Stephan, with a calm glance round upon the twenty-five witnesses who signed assent, set the document forthwith before the King, who seized the pen and hastily scratched on it his monogram. The first witness who signed after King John was Stephan Langton; and after the signatures and seals of all the others, the great seal of England was appended in brown wax.

And what was Magna Charta? Why do Englishmen claim it as the very root of their spreading tree of liberty? Wherefore would those barons willingly have died the death to compass this great end, which thus their bad King granted with so much levity, and such utter lack of grace? What was the Charter to them,—what is it to us?

Nothing could be drier, nor easier, than to copy it off for your edification, with a running comment; but as the chroniclers have made that famous parchment accessible to everybody who choses to search for a copy of it, (by a strange providence the original even after seven centuries being still visible at the British Museum) the biographer of Stephan Langton need only touch in a general and popular way upon the reasons which actuated *him* in wishing to obtain it.

Before Magna Charta, then, the crown was absolute over its immediate vassals—and these similarly over their own slave-servants; not only with regard to such public matters as levying of arbitrary aids, taxes, and scutages; but even as to seizing any man's personal property, especially on death; farming out the heritage of miners, to the best bidder; appropriating horses, carts, even ploughs and mattocks to the lord's use, and so starving the serf: selling rich widows in marriage; making law and justice open matters of purchase; degrading the judges to be abjectly dependent on the King's caprice, and following his person; consecrating bishops and appointing all other church officers at his mere will without election of clerics or of laymen; changing by the like caprice the ancient privileges of counties cities and boroughs; hindering by heavy exactions the freedom of trade and commerce; and making every Englishman, who might wish to travel for pleasure or otherwise, pay enormously for leave to go away. Then, the forest laws were terribly bloody; the King's deer and other game, even feathered fowl as we have seen, were not only to be at free quarters in any man's cornfield, but woe betide him if he drove them away; and as to killing them, in John's time, a poor serf's family would have been cruelly exterminated for such a crime.

Now, all these tyrannies are cured by Magna Charta, we may amass and hold property in peace; may marry or not at pleasure; can make our wills at death, with fair assurance of their execution; have a free church; just, impartial, independent judges; absolute liberty of coming and going; untrammelled trade and commerce; and no tax of any kind without our own free choice thereto actual or virtual. Justice is now neither sold, denied, nor delayed. No man is amerced except by judgment of his peers. The rigours of all feudal rights are entirely abated. Every man is amenable to the laws, and to them only. No human being can tyrannize with impunity on any one, however, humble in enfranchised England. In a word, the Great Charter made Englishmen free; and they were but slaves before it.

Hear also the strong testimony of Hallam (Middle Ages, vol. II. p. 447), on the theme of Magna Charta. "It is still the key-stone of English liberty. All that has since been obtained is little more than as confirmation or commentary: and if every subsequent law were to be swept away, there would still remain the bold features that distinguish a free from a despotic monarchy. It has been lately the fashion to depreciate the value of Magna Charta, as if it had sprung from the private ambition of a few selfish barons and redressed only some feudal abuses. It is, indeed, of little importance by what motives those who obtained it were guided. The real characters of men, most distinguished in the transactions of that time, are not easily determined at present. Yet if we bring these ungrateful suspicions to the test, they prove destitute of all reasonable foundation. An equal distribution of civil rights to all classes of freemen forms the peculiar beauty of the charter. In this just solicitude for the people, and in the moderation which infringed upon no essential prerogative of the monarchy, we may perceive a liberality and patriotism very unlike the selfishness which is sometimes rashly imputed to those ancient barons. And, as far as we are guided by historical testimony, two great men, the pillars of our church and state, may be considered as entitled beyond the rest to the glory of this monument; Stephan Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and William, Earl of Pembroke. To their temperate zeal for a legal government, England was indebted during that critical period for the two greatest blessings that patriotic statesmen could confer; the establishment of civil liberty upon an immoveable basis, and the preservation of national independence under the ancient line of sovereigns, which rasher men were about to exchange for the dominion of France."

Enough: we cannot stoop to the dullness of inditing an essay on Magna Charta. Let those who love black-letter and the unreadable homilies of chroniclers and lawyers search out the matter wearily for themselves, and blame my brevity as tediously as they will.

The great exploit of Stephan Langton's life was now in theory accomplished: but in practice there arose at once a terrible struggle to make that exploit anything but an idle bravado of a few score barons against one King.

CHAPTER LXVI.

LEWIS THE DAUPHIN.

JOHN, mad with vexation, "cursed his mother that bare him, ye houre that he was borne, and ye paps that gave him sucke: he whetted his teeth, and did bite now on one staffe and now on another, and often brake the same in pieces when he had doone, &c., &c.;" according to old Hollingshed: he ran away and hid himself in the Isle of Wight, often drest as a common fisherman; he raised a still more barbarous army of mercenaries against his unhappy subjects, "letting them loose to spread devastation all over the land;" and got the Pope to absolve him from his written grant. Innocent excommunicated all the barons in a lump, but they only laughed at him; and he suspended Stephan Langton in particular from his Archbishopric.

A less conscientious mind than Langton's would have equally disregarded this: but the Pope was still (according to Church views in those times) his spiritual superior; and Langton would not disobey. So he hastened to Rome to lay all the shocking facts of England's misery under her mad King before the Pontiff, in whose character from much personal knowledge our hero seems to have had good confidence. Had he remained in England, the barons would have been surely persuaded by his patriotic good sense to have abstained from their next false move.

Let us hear them, however, in their evil case, in mitigation of conduct which England has never forgiven. John, with his overwhelming and desperately cruel bands of brigands over-ran the whole realm, desolating it by fire and sword: wherever he lodged at night, it is reported of the wretch that "with his own hand he took delight in setting fire to that house in the morning:" its native inhabitants having first been most cruelly tormented and killed.

The King was mad,—worse, was horribly wicked: and what between the Pope's still potent authority in his behalf, and those ferocious Brabanters, Poictevins, and Flamands who thronged to his standard for plunder and crime, was still so strong as to be well nigh master of all England; ay, and of Scotland too; whose King Alexander, pitying the wretched case of his neighbour nation, had resolved to aid the patriot cause, and was well nigh extinguished himself for his philanthropy: for John's brigands laid all waste as far as Edinburgh.

Our English Barons then, in sore strait, resolved as a last sad resource to invite Lewis the Dauphin, son of Philip Augustus, to come over and be King of England. They had this poor excuse for such a proposition; namely, that Lewis's wife, Blanche of Castile, was John's niece: but as John had children of his own, and there were several others in succession long before the line reached Blanche, any such reason, if alleged, was futile. The plain fact was they wanted a potent ally; and Philip was nearest and strongest and readiest to help. The death of Pope Innocent happening simultaneously, Philip was free from the dread of being excommunicated for invading a realm under the protection of Rome. So then Lewis, glad enough of such an invitation, quickly collected an army, landed, and actually penetrated as far as London, where he received the homage of Englishmen.

Among his chief adherents, I regret to say, is found "Simon de Langton" (the absent Primate's brother) who undoubtedly would never have been so un-English had Stephan been at hand to counsel him, and if he himself had been less under the French influence of Angélique. And this is the last we hear of Simon; except that the canons of York elected him Archbishop, but the Pope failing to confirm their choice, and consecrating one Walter de Gray in his stead, Simon's latter end is veiled from us in the shadow of history; and I doubt whether, after all, his hearth-wife Angélique did him any good.

But Lewis, the invader, had hurried past Dover, where

Hubert de Burgh held the castle stoutly, and Lewis at first was in too great haste to stop and take it: now, however, after his London ovation, he returned, sat down before Dover, and made a solemn vow that he would not move till it was taken. That rash vow saved England: the barons repented, especially when they found he scrupled not to call them "Traytors;" even John, fighting for England, once more became popular; the whole nation rose as one man, and Lewis, with his invading French, were ignominiously driven across the Channel.

CHAPTER LXVII.

JOHN'S END.

Stephan was all this while at Rome: he had pacified and convinced Innocent; but just as all was coming right again for England, and Stephan's own suspension was withdrawn, the Pope suddenly fell ill at Perugia while engaged in rousing the Pisans and Genoese to join the new crusade, and died at the age of fifty-five. So Stephan returned to England as Archbishop.

Meanwhile, however, a great event had taken place, which set all the church-bells a-ringing, all the village greens a-dancing, and made broad England more beside itself with joy than even that expulsion of the French invaders.

Let me be didactically calm in telling you why: though the first acts in the drama were rather cause for sorrow.

The King, having miserably wasted Suffolk and Norfolk, and utterly destroyed the abbeys of Peterborough and Croyland, essayed to go across the Wash towards Spalding in Lincolnshire. He carried with him all his treasure, "with the sacred relics, his moveable chapel, and his portable regalia:" it seems this cruel despot of ours could also be characteristically a superstitious bigot. The King and his immediate attendants being on horseback passed safely at ebb-tide over the sands and the river Welstream: but the heavier-laden carriages following with all their precious freight, "the earth opened in the midst of the floods, and they sunk down into the gulf, both men, horses, and carriages."

That night, John in great anguish of mind at the loss of his jewellery and the means of paying his Brabanters (terribly did he fear and bribe them) got safe to Swinstead Abbey and there lodged: his grief and fear were excessive: and (as his wont was) to solace himself and drive away care he commanded the company of the Abbot's "niece;" whereat the scared Cistercian was much afflicted.

One Symon, however, a monk, and an admirer of the damsel himself, volunteered to his superior that he should "poyson" the tyrant, if the Abbot would absolve him previously; an arrangement seemingly of no sort of difficulty: and the matter was further excused, on patriotic principles, to the Cistercian consciences, from the fact that the bad King had been heard to threaten that "he would burn so many corn ricks as to make the penny loaf throughout England worth a shilling." Furthermore, the Lincolnshire Judith professed entire willingness to stab our English Holophernes on her own account, if need were; but probably this would be superfluous; the royal traveller's first care was sure to be the larder; his gluttony was notorious, especially for fruit; and nothing would be easier than to dose his dessert.

Monk Symon was perhaps cook to the establishment, for he produced immediately a dish of stewed pears: a pleasant commixture of henbane, nightshade and "y^e poyson of a toade," evidently kept ready for use in that immaculate abbey, having doctored all the pears except three; which, marked by cloves in a different way from the rest, the prudent monk saved harmless: and well for him and the damsel that he did so.

Impatiently the tyrant had been kept waiting, and no doubt blaspheming also to the full; when at last in trips Judith, followed by Symon with his pears.

"At last, ey, Sirrah? well, my fair, and who so tardy? Hither, thou shalt eat out of the King's dish; nay, and thou too, Sirrah,—ha!—taste, I say, before us."

The monk with manifest gusto ate a wholesome pear, and handed another to the damsel.

"'Tis well, fellow: now depart, and bring us a flagon of wine: ha! by St. Apicius, but the fruit is luscious."

"Isn't the flagon long a coming? let me speed it for your Highness," quoth Judith.

"Nay now, pretty minx, thou shalt not be tripping away from us: come nearer, take this last pear."

She knew it to be a poisoned one, and with adroit awkwardness dropped it on the sandy floor, so evidently from a rustic fear of royalty that his Highness was pleased to laugh at her—right ghastlily,—for in the midst of it a spasm seized him.

"Ha! where is that wine? call for it quick!"

Symon, waiting outside, came in demurely; he had not drugged this posset, because he well knew he would be told to drink first.

"That wine, Sirrah! there is colic in the fruit, ha!" Another terrible convulsion seemed to struggle with him like grim death; the King ought to have suspected something, but he had been yesterday so fevered and anguished at his losses, and your pears are cold eating, and that country wench and this simple monk had indubitably eaten too, and, "Ha! the wine I say, but drink first, Sirrah!"

The monk obeyed heartily: and gave the beaker to his Highness, who drained it to the foot; rich good hot wine too, ha!

Now nothing makes your toad-drop work its deadly will like wine: Symon had calculated this; and waited, watching stealthily like a cat.

"Hither, minx!—ha—again, again!"

He writhed and rolled upon the couch in agony, was hurled upon the floor by some invisible wrestler, and every feature of his face and muscle of his frame was twisted into hideous contortions.

Withal, his mind was clear; and he feared that he was dying: however, could he suspect anything? both of those clowns had eaten and drank first.

"Let some one — call our litter, — onwards — to Newark."

Gladly the monk obeyed: and Judith hid her knife and hurried to hail the bearers. The arrow had shot home, that toad was feeding on his vitals.

Instantly the royal train was in attendance: and they lifted into the litter the wretched John, groaning in a mortal agony; for hours and hours, gnawed and excruciated by the subtile poison, he rolled upon his bed of pain: conscience too was terribly at work, for in the midst of all those torments his mind clearly called up a black phantasmagoria of life-long crimes and cruelties, thronging round his soul like evil spirits. Without a friend or helper in heaven or earth, surrounded only by those bloody Brabanters (who even now spurned the dying lion) amid shocking agonies and horrid imprecations (just as his litter entered the court-yard of Newark Abbey) perished the tyrant John.

How strange a Nemesis that he must die at Newark, another Newark indeed from our's in Surrey,—but still retributively connected with the wrongs of him, who as a brother of Newark Priory had a profligate King for his persecutor, and an oppressed country for his grateful client.

As to almost no event in that evil King's career are the chroniclers agreed except about the universal joy wherewith all men received the news of his death. Whether or not he was "poysoned," as universally believed, or died of a flux occasioned by "a surfeit of peaches and bracket or new ale,"—any how the pest was dead, and the nation emancipated from a monster rejoiced frantically at an unlooked-for deliverance; the caitiff Symon was beloved of all men, and that buxom Swinstead Judith held as honourable as the noble daughter of Merari.

In truth, England had good cause for joy: through the long course of nearly eighteen years of actual, and ten more of virtual reign, John as King or prince-protector, had ravaged and destroyed his people with deliberate and excessive oppression. Beginning as Lackland, he lived up to the credit of his name by losing everything a King can lose: and in the French form of it "Sansterre" seems to have been redivivus in one of the bloodiest leaders of the Revolution in 1793. Cruel as Nero, prodigal as Caligula, insatiate in grovelling appetites as Tiberius and Vitellius, our model wicked-king combined in his single person all the vices that ever wore a crown.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

ALL ACHIEVED.

The accession of the boy-king Henry, the Third at ten years old was a blessed event for England: for the virtuous Pembroke was Protector of the realm, Archbishop Langton being its ruling genius.

"We bring our years to an end as it were a tale that is told:" and ever towards the last our sands run out more rapidly. In a few sentences, now that the great errands of his life have been fulfilled, now that his love is glorified and his country free, we may crowd the events that remain to illustrate our hero's good career.

Perhaps no reigns are more variously reported by the chroniclers than those of John and our third Henry; probably because the land was in such a state of anarchy from misrule and civil contest as to make the knowledge of historic facts almost inaccessible to enquirers. Even as to dates, our records differ; and if any reader, fresh from one historiographer, thinks fit to arraign any of our facts or figures, it may be as well for him to remember that there are a dozen other chroniclers and none alike. John's reign is a capital theme for the romantic historian,—and Stephan's life equally a first-rate subject for imaginative biography. Nevertheless, be it fairly understood that we have invented next to nothing but details.

For yet twelve years the greatest Prelate that ever sate enthroned at Canterbury Cathedral ruled the Church and blest the realm with piety and vigour.

He had annotated chapter by chapter the whole Bible, and was the earliest of that noble band in good-doing, the Scripture-reader and home-missionary: in especial his commentaries on the Psalms, and his religious tractates on St. Paul's Epistles were circulated by hundreds of scribes all over the land. He wrote also a panegyrical life of Thomas à Becket, and is our chief contemporary historian of the difficult reign of Richard Cœur de Lion. In addition, we read that in his early days he was considered no indifferent poet: and there is said to be extant a sort of religious epic from his hand in the Anglo-Norman dialect on the passion of our Lord Christ.

For other matters; on the 17th of May, 1220, Archbishop Langton crowned the young King Henry at Westminster with the plain gold circlet of St. Edward the Confessor: John having characteristically lost in a quicksand (as we have heard) the principal crown jewels: and, we are picturesquely told that, by way of making the plain circlet on that coronation day appear less humble (as it would have done by contrast with the heraldic coronets of earls and barons) Stephan ordained that all the peers should instead of their coronets wear white fillets: whereby the King, in spite of the plainness of his diadem, remained in a due prominence.

Furthermore, the Archbishop publicly invested him with a consecrated rosary from Palestine, from which depended in a crystal frame a morsel of the True Cross. Soon after the ceremony, Stephan induced Henry to confirm the Great Charter publicly: and when Fawkes de Breauté and some others of the bad John's-men would have persuaded the King otherwise, the Archbishop boldly said, "Nay then, sirs, by your counsels he will lose his royal crown:" on which, at Pembroke's suggestion, the king signed and sealed immediately.

Early in the year 1222, the active and enlightened Archbishop held a great synod of all the ecclesiastical dignitaries of the realm at Oxford, "for the Reformation of the English Church," both in points of Scriptural doctrine and moral practice: and, with especial reference to the latter, in 1225 issued a decree against the corruptions of the clergy; especially of the monastic houses, which a long period of neglect as to episcopal supervision had lowered into utter degradation. In fact, he anticipated Luther and Melancthon.

For another matter, it will interest the believers in this tale to know that, with extraordinary honour, Archbishop Langton translated the body of Thomas à Becket "out of its stone coffin in a vault at Canterbury, into a rich shrine all of gold and beset with precious stones." Surely, in that splendid ceremonial, when all the conduits in Canterbury ran wine, and even the king himself with all his court attended to honour the translation, Stephan remembered a certain shrine on St. Martha's hill, and a certain gentle martyr there laid beside the altar.

CHAPTER LXIX.

A GOOD MAN'S DEATH.

And now we are drawing to the end of this great theme of usefulness, patriotism, and love both human and divine: and there is no occasion to make a melo-dramatic scene of it. A good man's death is often quiet as a sleep, unnoticed as an ordinary sunset: his life has been throughout a chequered scene of clouds and sunshine, and he fears not to walk obscurely down a short dark valley to the portal that hides from his expectant eyes the Everlasting Glory, his Rest and his Reward. From the public ministrations at Westminster and Canterbury, Stephan often retired awhile to a country-seat he had chosen at Slinfold, near the hundred of Wodetone, and not far removed from the scenes of his youth. He would gladly have found a dwelling in the midst of them, but John's rage against the Langton and Braiose families had (as we know) made a literal desert of that rich valley: so the nearest suitable mansion for a Primate was Slinfold Manor. His dear old Hal was always with him, a happy mixture of the valet and the friend, his personal confidant and attendant.

One fine summer's evening at Slinfold, looking out at the sun's last rays over the north-western heights of Hascomb, Stephan said abruptly to Hal, laying both hands with an expression of pain on the region of his heart,

"Dear friend, be not afraid nor grieved, if it pleaseth God some day to take me suddenly: I often feel Death's finger tapping here."

"Well, dear Master, I am myself some seventy-four, and hale still, though thine elder by twelve years; and by His good mercy too am ready to depart, if God will: only it were sadness to leave thee here alone. None other ever spoke to thee about Lady Alice, and I wot my speech doth comfort thee betimes."

"Hal,—I will now say a word while I have breath, for thy faithful zeal to see obeyed. When I die (and, dearest friend, I know it will be soon, for this heart-spasm clutches me sorely) see thou that my body is laid beside her's in that empty grave."

They spoke not much beside, for both were sad; and as it were forebodingly the premonitory shadows of Holmbury and Leith Hill gloomed from that setting sun over Slinfold Manor. However, in the evening the good Archbishop prayed fervently with his household as usual, and retired to rest; Hal, as his habit was, helping to disrobe him. A cheerful "Good night, Hal, God bless thee," sent his friendly servitor to his accustomed couch in an ante-chamber.

Next morning, Hal marvelled as he dressed himself, that he did not hear his good Master at orison: it was Stephan's habit to pray aloud at sunrise, "and the Lord hearkened and heard it:" but this morning all is silent.

Hal crept in. His Master was fast asleep with his left hand under his head. It were pity to disturb him. So Hal retired for an hour or so.

But now the sun is well up, and all are astir, and Hal thinks it time to look in again. Still asleep, and in the same quiet, easy posture.

Strange that he should not have moved all this time. Hal drew near,—and thought he looked pale; nearer,—there was no breathing,—touched his cheek, and it was cold as stone!

Enough: he knew the truth; and (however his bursting heart relieved itself by sobs) was neither terrified nor surprised: often had he seen death, and knew his look intimately: hope of life there here was none. The

Archbishop had been dead for hours, probably within a minute of that cheerful "God bless thee," he had suddenly been summoned away.

CHAPTER LXX.

AND BURIAL.

But Hal has an important mission to perform, instantly, secretly: and he set about it like a shrewd man, zealous to execute his friend's last wishes. It was not easy, but he managed the matter well.

Robin Hood was (he knew) far away in Nottinghamshire, where his Marian, now grown old, lay sick of a fever: Friar Tuck has long been dead; and Little John has not been seen in Surrey for years. But Will Fern, with his lieutenancy-detachment of foresters, was in the neighbourhood of Lonesome Valley: and Hal straightway sent a swift messenger to bid Will and eight of his men come with all speed on horseback to Slinfold, with a two-horse litter; and he bade him go round by way of Dorking, buy of the plumber there a leaden coffin, fill it with earth, solder it down, and bring it in the litter: likewise a crowbar, and a bag of cement, and two of his men to be habited as mortuary servitors.

Meanwhile, to gain time for Will's coming, he went down and told the household that his Master had been taken ill in the night, and would not rise that morning for the worship. Further he sent word to the monks of Canterbury (a long three days' journey at the speediest) to say that the Primate was dead, and bidding them haste to Slinfold. Some hours after this, as it was getting dark, he let up one after another of the servants quietly to see their Master; for after long patience and vain attempts to wake him, Hal has found him dead in his bed.

By this time Will Fern is arrived: it is now night, and Hal has had the coffin placed in a lower room by the seeming mortuaries—surrounded it with torches, and covered it with the Archbishop's pall the mitre and crozier atop, and a Blessed Relic that he always wore, in a crystal Pyx before the mitre. By next morning, the household perceived that the old servant of their good master had caused all due honours to be done to him in the lying in state; and they agreed to take watch and ward by turns, night and day, beside the coffin, till the monks should come.

However, that same night, Hal had got the body, wrapped in its bed-clothes, cleverly into the litter, and next morning sent it off by Fern's men to old Tything; there to wait (although the house was ruinous) in the little upper chamber, till Hal appeared with further directions. He managed this in the course of the day: enjoining first continual watching by the coffin's side on the mourning household, and so took horse for Aldeburie.

He called there for two reasons: first, to look up one of the scattered priests of Newark living there; and next to drop a tear on his Emma's grave under the Yew, in the south-west corner of that Old Churchyard. This done, and with the monk in company, he duly arrived by eventide at Tything: finding Fern and his men awaiting him, with the poor dear body, and that crowbar and bag of plaster which his generalship had foreseen to be necessary.

The sun had set, when in simple but sad procession they bore the corpse of Stephan to its last earthly rest in the chancel of St. Martha's: with their crowbar they lifted the heavy stone lid of that empty sarcophagus to the right; the one on the left being already full, as Hal remembered well, and then the body was deposited where its spirit wished, beside the grave of Alice. The Newark priest performed his office, though he knew not over whom, by torchlight, while the foresters stood round; and honest Will Fern did his best to comfort the inconsolable and faithful Hal: seldom has funeral seen a truer mourner.

And now that ponderous lid is crowbarred to its place again, and fixed with the cement, and the torches are extinguished, and in the calm clear moonlight they return mournfully.

CHAPTER LXXI.

REPEATED.

But little remains to be told.

When the monks of Canterbury, with the Subprior at their head, arrived in all possible haste at Slinfold Manor, they found that all things had been done, under the circumstances, decently and in order. The watchers still stood at head and foot of the coffin, torches were continually renewed, and what was very satisfactory (especially when that relic in the Pyx was considered), several miracles of healing had been already performed by the good archbishop in his lead, on divers sick folk who had crowded in to touch it for that purpose: nothing could have been a better evidence of their late Primate's worth than such unquestioned cures. Already they mooted among themselves the great idea of the archbishop's canonization.

And now, in mournful cavalcade through several towns and villages, amid open demonstrations of national sorrow at so sad a loss, and all the church-bells tolling, they carry that sacred coffin to Canterbury, and with a gorgeous ceremonial consign it to the plain stone sepulchre in the Warrior's Chapel, where through a long succession of similar true believers, the verger will even now assure you reposes the body of Stephan Langton.

THE END.

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