

EVERETT-GREEN EVELYN

**THE SECRET
CHAMBER AT CHAD**

Evelyn Everett-Green

The Secret Chamber at Chad

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The Secret Chamber at Chad

Chapter I: A Mysterious Visitor

The great house at Chad was wrapped in sleep. The brilliant beams of a June moon illuminated the fine pile of gray masonry with a strong white light. Every castellated turret and twisted chimney stood out in bold relief from the heavy background of the pine wood behind, and the great courtyard lay white and still, lined by a dark rim of ebon shadow.

Chad, without being exactly a baronial hall of the first magnitude, was nevertheless a very fine old house. It had been somewhat shorn of its pristine glories during the Wars of the Roses. One out of its original two quadrangles had then been laid in ruins, and had never been rebuilt. But the old inner quadrangle still remained standing, and made an ample and commodious dwelling house for the family of the Chadgroves who inhabited it; whilst the ground which had once been occupied by the larger outer quadrangle, with its fortifications and battlements, was now laid out in terraces and garden walks, which made a pleasant addition to the family residence.

The seventh Henry was on the throne. The battle of Bosworth Field had put an end to the long-drawn strife betwixt the houses of York and Lancaster. The exhausted country was beginning to look forward to a long period of prosperity and peace; and the household at Chad was one of the many that were rejoicing in the change which had come upon the public outlook, and was making the most of the peaceful years which all trusted lay before the nation.

Several changes of some importance had passed over Chad during the previous century. The wars had made gaps in the ranks of the family to whom it had always belonged. There had been sundry edicts of confiscation-as speedily repealed by the next change in the fate of the day; and more than once the head had been struck down by death, and the house and lands had passed either to a minor or to some other branch of the family. There had been the confusion and strife betwixt the various branches of the family which was a characteristic of that age of upheaval and strife; but the present owner of the estate, Sir Oliver Chadgrove, seemed firmly settled in his place. He had fought on Henry's side at Bosworth, and had been confirmed by that monarch in the possession of the estate of Chad; and since that day none had tried to dispute his claim; nor, indeed, would it have been very easy to do so, as he was undoubtedly the rightful representative of the older branch of the family.

A just and kindly man, he was beloved of those about him, and would have been staunchly supported by his retainers had any adversary arisen against him. His only enemy was the Lord of Mortimer, who owned Mortimer's Keep, the adjoining property, and had cast covetous eyes on Chad during the stormy days of the late wars, more than once trying unsuccessfully to step in between the disputing parties and claim it as his own, not by the power of right, but by that of might alone. However, he had not been successful in this attempt; and for the past few years there had been a semblance of friendliness between Sir Oliver and his proud and powerful neighbour.

The knight was well aware that the friendliness was more a seeming than a reality. He was perfectly well acquainted with the rapacious character of the owner of Mortimer's Keep, and with his covetous designs upon Chad. He knew he was a secret foe, always on the watch for any cause of complaint against him; and he could often feel that it would take very little to stir up the old jealous strife and hostility. Still, for the present an armed truce was the order of the day, and Sir Oliver, knowing his own loyalty, the cleanness of his hands, and the uprightness of his dealings, was not much afraid that his enemy would ever succeed in ousting him from his lands, or in gaining possession of the fair park and house of Chad for himself.

Sir Oliver was personally liked by the king, which was another point in his favour. Without being a brilliant ruler like his successors, the seventh Henry had the faculty of choosing men of parts to place about him, and he had recognized in Sir Oliver Chadgrove certain qualities which he approved, and of which he wished to avail himself from time to time. So the knight was frequently summoned to attend the king, and occasionally his wife went with him and appeared at court. On this particular bright June night, both the master and the mistress were absent, being at Windsor with the king's court; and the three boys-the children with whom Providence had blessed them-were the only members of the family sleeping beneath the roof of the great house.

The bedchamber of the three boys was a large, bare room looking out across the wooded park and ridge of hills, through which the little river of Chad meandered leisurely. The boys would have preferred the courtyard for their lookout; but a lover of nature could not but be struck by the exceeding beauty of the view from this row of latticed casements. And indeed the green expanse of home-like country had its charm even for high-spirited boys; and Edred, the second child of the house, often sat for hours together on the wide window ledge, gazing his fill at the shifting lights and shadows, and dreaming dreams of his own about what he saw.

The long room contained three small narrow beds, and very little furniture besides, In each of these beds a boy lay sleeping. The moonlight streaming in through the uncurtained windows illuminated the whole room, and showed the curly heads, two dark and one fair, lying on the hard pillows, and shone so straight into the face of the eldest boy, that he stirred a little in his sleep, and half turned round.

He was a handsome lad of some eight or nine summers, with regular, strongly-marked features, and dark hair and eyes. The brown hand and arm which lay exposed to view showed a muscular development that betokened great strength to come when the boy should be grown to manhood, and the face exhibited a like promise of strength of will and character.

Bertram Chadgrove, half aroused by the strong light of the moon in his face, opened his dark eyes sleepily for a few minutes, and then turned over towards the wall, and prepared to slumber again. But before he had sunk to sleep he became further aroused by a very peculiar sound in the wall (as it seemed), close to which his bed was stationed; and instead of drowsing off again, he woke up with all his faculties on the alert, much as a watchdog does, and sitting up in bed he listened with all his ears.

Yes; there could be no mistaking it! There was certainly a sound-a muffled, curious sound-within the very wall itself. He pressed his ear against the panel, and his eyes shone brightly in the moonlight.

"It is some living thing," he whispered to himself. "Methinks it is surely some human thing. Rats can make strange sounds, I know, but not such sounds as these. A human being, and within the thickness of the wall! How can such a thing be? I never heard the like before. It comes nearer-I hear the groping of hands close beside mine ear. Heaven send it be not a spirit from the other world! I fear no mortal arm, of flesh and blood, but I desire not to see a visitor from the land of shadows."

For a moment the boy's flesh crept on his bones, and the hair of his head seemed to rise up from his scalp. The groping of those phantom hands against the wall just beside him was enough to fill the stoutest heart with terror, in an age when superstition was always rife. He strove to call to his brothers; but his voice was no more than a whisper, and his throat felt dry and parched. Failing in making himself heard by his companions, he cowered down and drew the clothes right over his head, shivering with fear; and it was several minutes before his native courage came to his aid, and he felt ashamed of this paroxysm of terror.

"Fie upon me for a white-livered poltroon!" he cried, as the chill sweat of fear ceased to break out upon him, and he rallied his courage and his determination.

"I am no better than a maid! Shame upon me for a coward! I will not call to Edred and Julian. It shall not be said of me, even by mine own self, that I dared not face even a spirit from the lower

world alone. I will find out what this sound is, and that without the help of any other living soul, else shall I despise myself forever!"

And with that resolve hot within him, Bertram threw back his coverings and prepared to rise from his bed, when his attention was arrested by some strange stealthy sounds close against the great carved chimney piece, on the same side of the room as his own bed.

His brothers slept on the opposite side of the big room. None of the sounds which were so astonishing Bertram would penetrate to their sleeping senses. Had the eldest boy not been awake at the beginning, he would scarce have heard the sound, so cautious and soft it was. But this noise was something new. It was like hands fumbling and groping in search of something. Bertram held his breath to listen, growing hot and cold by turns. But he drew some of his clothes cautiously towards him, and silently slipped into his nether garments. He felt that if there were some unseen enemy striving in mysterious fashion to penetrate into this room, he could better meet him if he were clothed, however scantily, than he could do as he was; and he had ample time to put on even his doublet and hose, and to cover himself up again in bed, with his small poniard closely held in his hand, before there was any further development of that strange night's drama which he was so breathlessly watching.

That something or somebody was seeking to find entrance into the room, he could not doubt for a moment; but, on the other hand, it seemed an incredible surmise, because the wall along which the unknown visitor had plainly felt his way was an outside wall, and if there really were any person thus moving, he must be walking along some secret passage in the thickness of the wall itself.

Such a thing was not impossible. Bertram knew of more than one such passage contrived in the thickness of the wall in his ancient home, and all the family were acquainted with a certain secret hiding place that existed, cleverly contrived in the rambling old building, which, with its various levels and its wilderness of chimneys, might well defy detection, even with the most skilled search. But the boy knew of no such passage or chamber in connection with their sleeping room, and he was sure his parents did not know of one either, or any member of the household. Therefore it was immensely surprising to hear these uncanny sounds, and it was small wonder if they did give rise to a wave of supernatural terror, of which the boy was man enough to feel ashamed the moment reason had time to assert her sway.

"I have done no wrong; I confessed but three days since, and received blessing and absolution. If any spirit were to come to visit this room, it could do me no hurt. Besides, methinks a spirit would pass easily along the straightest place, and would not need to fumble thus as if in search of hidden bolts.

"Ha! what is that! Methought some spring shot back. Hist! here IT comes!"

The boy lay back upon his bed, drawing the clothes silently up to his very eyes. The moonlight had shifted just a little, and no longer illumined his face. That was now in shadow, and would scarce reveal the fact that he was awake. He lay perfectly still, scarce daring to draw his breath, and the next moment a strange thing happened.

The whole of one of the great carved pillars that supported the high mantle shelf swung noiselessly forward, and stood out at right angles to the wall. From where he lay Bertram could not see, but he could well understand that when this was done a narrow doorway had been revealed, and the next moment a shadowy figure glided with noiseless steps into the room.

The figure was poorly clad in a doublet of serge much the worse for wear, and the moonlight showed a strangely haggard face and soiled and torn raiment. Yet there was an air of dignity about the mysterious visitor which showed to the astonished boy that he must at some time have been in better circumstances, and lying quite still Bertram watched his movements with breathless attention.

With a quick, scared glance round him, as though afraid that even the silence might be the silence of treachery, the gaunt figure advanced with covert eagerness across the floor, leaving the door wide open behind him, as if to be ready for him should he desire to fly; and precipitating himself upon a ewer of cold water standing upon the floor, he drank and drank and drank as though he would never cease.

Plainly he was consumed by the most raging thirst. Bertram had never seen anything but an exhausted horse after a burning summer's chase in the forest drink in such a fashion. And as he watched, all fear left him in a moment, for certainly no phantom could drink dry this great ewer of spring water; and if he had only a creature of flesh and blood to deal with, why, then there was certainly no cause for fear.

In place of dread and terror, a great pity welled up in the generous heart of the boy. He had all the hatred for oppression and the chivalrous desire to help the oppressed that seem born in the hearts of the sons of British birth. Who and what manner of man this was he did not know; but he was evidently some poor hunted creature, going in very fear of his life, and as such the boy pitied him from the very ground of his heart, and would gladly have helped him had he known how.

He lay for a few moments wondering and pondering. Certainly his father was no foe to any man. He could not be hiding from his displeasure. The fugitive had rather taken refuge in his house; and if so, who better could be found to help him than the son of the owner?

"Our father and our mother alike have always taught us to befriend the stranger and the oppressed," said the boy to himself. "I will ask this stranger of himself, and see if I may befriend him. I would gladly learn the trick of yon door. It would be a goodly secret to have for our very own."

It was plain that the fugitive, though aware that the room was tenanted, had satisfied himself that the occupants were all asleep. He had ceased his frightened, furtive looks around him, and was quaffing the last of the water with an air of relish and relief that was good to see, pausing from time to time to stretch his limbs and to draw in great gulps of fresh air through the open window by which he stood, as a prisoner might do who had just been released from harsh captivity.

The moonlight shining upon his face showed it haggard, unkempt, and unshorn. Plainly he had been several days in hiding; and by the gauntness of his figure, and the wolfish gleam in his eye as it roved quickly round the apartment, as if in search of food, it was plain that he was suffering keenly from hunger, too.

Bertram's decision was quickly taken. Whilst the man's face was turned the other way, he quickly rose from his bed, and crossing the room with noiseless steps, laid a hand upon his arm.

"Hist, friend!" he whispered whilst the start given by the other, and the hoarse exclamation that broke from his lips, might have wakened sleepers who were not healthy, tired boys. "Fear not; I am no foe to betray thee. Tell me who and what thou art, and I will help thee all I may."

The frightened eyes bent upon him bespoke a great terror. The man's voice died away as he tried to speak. The only word Bertram could catch seemed to be a prayer that he would not betray him.

"Betray thee! Never! Why, good fellow, dost not know that the Chadgroves never betray those who trust in them? Hence sometimes has trouble come upon them. But before we talk, let me get thee food. Methinks thou art well-nigh starved."

"Food! food! Ah, if thou wouldst give me that, young master, I would bless thee forever! I have well-nigh perished with hunger and thirst. Heaven be thanked that I have tasted water once again!"

"Come hither," said Bertram cautiously. "First close this narrow doorway, the secret of which thou must teach me in return for what I will do for thee, and then I will take thee to another chamber, where our voices will not disturb my brothers, and we can talk, and thou canst eat at ease. I must know thy story, and I pledge myself to help thee. Show me now the trick of this door. I swear I will make no treacherous use of the secret."

"I will trust thee, young sir. I must needs do so, for without human help I must surely die.

"Seest thou this bunch of grapes so cunningly carved here? This middle grape of the cluster will turn round in the fingers that know how to find and grasp it, and so turning and turning slowly, unlooses a bolt within-here-and so the whole woodwork swings out upon hinges and reveals the doorway. Where that doorway leads I will show thee anon, if thou wouldst know the trick of the secret chamber at Chad that all men have now forgotten. It may be that it will some day shelter thee or thine, for thou hast enemies abroad, even as I have."

Bertram was intensely interested as he examined and mastered the simple yet clever contrivance of this masked door; but quickly remembering the starved condition of his companion, he led him cautiously into an adjoining room, where were a table and some scant furniture, and gliding down the staircase and along dim corridors just made visible by the reflected radiance of the moon, he reached the buttery, and armed himself with a venison pasty, a loaf of bread, and a bottle of wine. Hurrying back with these, he soon had the satisfaction to see the stranger fall upon them with the keen relish of a man who has fasted to the last limits of endurance; and only after he had seen that the keen edge of his hunger had been satisfied did he try to learn more of him and his concerns.

"Now tell me, my good friend, who and what thou art," said the boy, "and how comes it that thou seekest shelter here, and that thou knowest more of Chad than we its owners do. That is the thing which has been perplexing me this long while. I would fain hear from thy story how it comes about."

"That is soon told, young sir. Thou dost not, probably, remember the name of Warbel as that of some of the retainers of thy grandsire, but—"

"I have heard the name," said the boy. "I have heard my father speak of them. But I knew not that there were any of that name now living."

"I am a Warbel—I trow the last of my race. I was born beyond the seas; but I was early brought to England, and I heard much of the strife that encompassed Chad, because my father and grandfather both knew the place well, and would fain have gone back and lived in the old country had not fortune otherwise decreed it. To make a long story short, they never returned to the place. But when I was grown to man's estate, I was offered a post in the household of the Lord of Mortimer, and as it was the best thing that had fallen in my way, I accepted it very gladly; for I knew that name, too, and I knew naught against the haughty lord, albeit my father and grandsire had not loved the lords of that name who lived before him.

"For many years I have been in his service, and for a while all went well with me. I was made one of his gentlemen, and he seemed to favour me. But of late there has been a change towards me—I know not how or why. I have offended him without intending it, and he has sometimes provoked me almost beyond endurance by his proud insolence. But that I might have borne, for he was my master, had it not been for the insolence and insults I had to bear from others amongst his servants, and from one youth in particular, who seemed to me to be trying to oust me from my place, and to get himself the foremost place in his master's favour. That made my hot blood boil again and again, until at last the thing I believe they had long planned happened, and I had to fly for my life."

The man paused, and Bertram, who was drinking in this story, asked eagerly: "And what was that?"

"It was four days ago now, in the hall where we had supped. We had drunk much wine in honour of our master's birthday, and then we began playing and dicing to pass the time till we retired to bed. My adversary was this youth whom I so greatly distrust. As we played I detected him in unfair practices. He vowed I lied, and called upon me to prove my words at the sword's point; but in my fury and rage I sprang upon him with my bare hands, and would have wrung his neck—the insolent popinjay—had I been able. As it was, we struggled and swayed together till my greater weight caused him to fall over backwards against one of the tables, and I verily believe his back is broken. I know not whether he is living yet. But as he is not only a great favourite with the Lord of Mortimer, but a distant kinsman to boot, no sooner was the deed done than all in the hall called to me to save myself by flight, for that the master would revenge such a death upon the perpetrator of it without mercy, and that if I wished to spare my neck I must fly without an instant's delay.

"I knew this but too well myself. The baron was a fearful man to meet in his rage. Where to fly I knew not, but stay I could not. I had bare time to rush to my room, don a dress that would not excite inquiry if I had to lie hid in the forest a few days. I did not think flight would be so difficult a matter, but I knew that every moment spent in Mortimer's Keep was at peril of my life; and I had but

just made my escape through a small postern door before I heard the alarm bell ring, the drawbridge go up, and knew that the edict had gone forth for my instant apprehension."

He paused with a slight shudder, and seemed to be listening intently.

"There is naught to fear here," said Bertram. "Tell me more of thy flight."

"It was terrible," answered the man. "I had not looked to be hunted like the wild beasts of the forest; and yet an hour had not gone by before I heard, by the baying of the fierce hounds that are kept at Mortimer, that a hunting party had sallied forth; and I knew that I was the quarry. I doubled and ran like any hare. I knew the tricks of the wild things that have skill in baffling the dogs, and at last I reached the shelter of these walls, and ran there for protection. I had thrown off the dogs at the last piece of water; and in the marshy ground the scent did not lie, and could not be picked up. For a brief moment I was safe; but I was exhausted almost to death. I could go no further. I lay down beneath the shadow of some arbour within the sheltering precincts of Chad, and wondered what would become of me."

"Yes, yes! and then-?"

"Then I remembered a story told me by my grandsire, years and years gone by, of a secret chamber at Chad, which had sheltered many a fugitive in the hour of peril. Lying out in the soft night air, I recalled bit by bit all that I had been told—the very drawings the old man had made to amuse me in a childish sickness, how the door opened, and how access was had to the chamber. I knew that the country round would be hunted for days, and that I could never escape the malice of the Lord of Mortimer if I pursued my way to the sea. He would overtake and kill me before I could make shift to gain that place of refuge. But I bethought me of the secret chamber and its story, and methought I might slip in unseen did I but watch my opportunity, find my way up the winding stair to this room, and so to the secret chamber beyond."

"And thou didst?"

"Ay, I did, the very next morning. I saw thee and thy brothers sally forth a-hunting. I saw the men follow in thy train. I had heard that the knight and his lady with their retinue were absent at Windsor. It needed no great skill to slip in unseen and gain the longed-for hiding place. I had some food in my wallet. I fondly hoped it would prove enough; but the sounds of hunting day by day all around have told me too well that I must not venture forth; and as this room was slept in by night, I feared to sally forth after food, lest I should be found and betrayed. I had heard of the merciful nature of the master of Chad; but in his absence I knew not what his servants might say or do. Doubtless there is a reward offered for my apprehension; and if that be so, how could I help fearing that any hired servant would betray me to my lord?"

"And thou thoughtest that servants slept in this room, and dared not show thyself either by day or night for fear thou mightest be betrayed! And only hunger and thirst drove thee forth at length?"

"Ay. And from my heart do I thank thee for thy kindness, young sir; and gladly will I show thee in return the trick of yon chamber. If thou canst kindle a torch it will light us better, for the way thither is wondrous tortuous and narrow."

Bertram had a little lantern—a very treasured possession of his—and after the usual tedious process of lighting had been gone through, he softly led the way back to the sleeping chamber. With his own hands he undid the fastening of the door and saw it swing open, and then the two passed through into a very narrow aperture, which proved to be a long narrow gallery contrived in the thickness of the wall, which would only just admit of the passage of one figure at a time.

As they went in they drew to the door, and the fugitive showed his young companion how the bolt upon the inner side might be unloosed.

"It is easy enow in the light, but hard to feel in the black darkness," he remarked; and then they pursued their devious way on and on through this strange passage, which wound up and down and in and out, and landed them at last at the foot of a spiral staircase, so narrow and squeezed in by masonry as to be barely serviceable for the purpose for which it was contrived. It led them to a small

door, through which they passed, to find themselves in a room of fair size but very low, and without any window, which seemed to occupy (as indeed it did) a portion of the house between two of the other floors, and was so contrived as to absolutely defy detection by the examination of the structure of the house never so exhaustive. If the secret door were not found, nothing else would ever betray this cunning hiding-place. Doubtless that was why, during the many changes that had prevailed at Chad during the past fifty years, the knowledge of its very existence had been lost.

"Air comes in freely through many cracks and slits," explained the prisoner. "It is not an unpleasant place save in the heat of the middle day, when it becomes like a veritable oven. That is why my thirst was so unbearable. There is a bed, as thou seest, and a chair and a few other things. One could be comfortable here were it not for starvation and thirst."

"I will feed thee so long as thou remainest hid," cried the boy, with generous ardour. "Thou shalt hide there by day, and by night shalt wander abroad as thou wilt, to breathe the air and stretch thy limbs. My brothers and I will be thy friends. Thou needst fear nothing now. We will find out when it is safe for thee to leave thy retreat, and then thou shalt go forth without fear; or, if thou likest it better, thou shalt abide here till our father returns and take service with him. I doubt not he would be glad enough to number a Warbel again amongst his trusty servants."

The man's face lighted up wonderfully.

"If he would do that," he cried eagerly, "I should have no wish for anything better. But my master, the baron—"

"My father fears not the baron!" answered the boy proudly; "and, besides, his young kinsman is not dead. We heard something of his side of the tale, and the youth is not even like to die now. My father could protect thee from his wrath. Stay here, and thou wilt have naught to fear."

The fugitive took the lad's hand and pressed it to his lips.

"I will serve thee for ever and ever for this boon," he answered; and Bertram went back to his room, to lie awake and muse over what had befallen till the dawn broke and his brothers awoke to the new day.

To keep any secret from his two brothers was a thing impossible to Bertram, and before they had finished dressing that morning, Edred and Julian were both made aware of the strange adventure of the night previous. Looking up to Bertram, as they both did, as the embodiment of prowess and courage, they did not grudge him his wonderful discovery, but they were eager to visit the fugitive themselves, and to carry him food and drink.

The days that followed were days of absolute enchantment to the boys, who delighted in waiting on Warbel and passing hours in his company. He told them entrancing stories of adventure and peril. He was devoted to his three youthful keepers, and wished for nothing better than to enter service with their father.

Later on, when all hue and cry after the missing man was over, and when Lord Mortimer's young kinsman was so far recovered that it would be impossible to summon Warbel for any injury inflicted on him, Bertram conducted him to the hut of one of his father's woodmen, who promised to keep him safe till the return of the knight.

When Sir Oliver came back, Warbel was brought to him, told a part of his tale, and was admitted readily as a member of the household; but the story of his incarceration in the secret chamber remained a secret known only to himself and the three boys. So delightful a mystery as the existence of this unknown chamber was too precious to be parted with; and it was a compact between the boys and the man, who now became their chief attendant and body servant, that the trick of that door and the existence of that chamber were to be told to none, but kept as absolutely their own property.

Chapter II: The Household At Chad

The office of mistress of a large household in the sixteenth century was no sinecure. It was not the fashion then to depute to the hands of underlings the supervision of the details of domestic management; and though the lady of the Hall might later in the day entertain royalty itself, the early hours of the morning were spent in careful and busy scrutiny of kitchen, pantry, and store or still room, and her own fair hands knew much of the actual skill which was required in the preparation of the many compounds which graced the board at dinner or supper.

Lady Chadgrove was no exception to the general rule of careful household managers; and whilst her lord and master went hunting or hawking in the fresh morning air, or shut himself up in his library to examine into the accounts his steward laid before him or concern himself with some state business that might have been placed in his hands, she was almost always to be found in the offices of the house, looking well after the domestic details of household management, and seeing that each servant and scullion was doing the work appointed with steadiness and industry.

There was need for some such careful supervision of the daily routine, for the large houses in the kingdom were mainly dependent upon their own efforts for the necessaries of life throughout the year. In towns there were shops where provisions could be readily bought, but no such institution as that of country shops had been dreamed of as yet. The lord of the manor killed his own meat, baked his own bread, grew his own wheat, and ground his own flour. He had his own brewery within the precinct of the great courtyard, where vast quantities of mead and ale were brewed, cider and other lighter drinks made, and even some sorts of simple home-grown wines. Chad boasted its own "vineyard," where grapes flourished in abundance, and ripened in the autumn as they will not do now.

Nothing, perhaps, shows more clearly the change that has passed upon our climate by slow degrees than a study of the parish records of ancient days. Vineyards were common enough in England some hundreds of years ago, and wine was made from the produce as regularly as the season came round. Then there were the simpler fruit wines from gooseberries, currants, and elderberries, to say nothing of cowslip wine and other light beverages which it was the pride of the mistress to contrive and to excel in the making. Our forefathers, though they knew nothing of the luxuries of tea and coffee, were by no means addicted to the drinking of water. Considering the sanitary conditions in which they lived in those days, and the fearful contamination of water which frequently prevailed, and which doubtless had much to do with the spread of the Black Death and other like visitations, this was no doubt an advantage. Still there were drawbacks to the habit of constant quaffing of fermented drinks at all hours of the day, and it was often a difficult matter to keep in check the sin of drunkenness that prevailed amongst all classes of the people.

At Chad the gentle influence of the lady of the manor had done much to make this household an improvement on many of its neighbours. Although there was always abundance of good things and a liberal hospitality to strangers of all sorts, it was not often that any unseemly roistering disturbed the inmates of Chad. The servants and retainers looked up to their master and mistress with loyalty and devotion, curbed their animal passions and wilder moods out of love and reverence for them, and grew more civilized and cultivated almost without knowing it, until the wild orgies which often disgraced the followings of the country nobility were almost unknown here.

Possibly another humanizing and restraining influence that acted silently upon the household was the presence of a young monk, who had been brought not long since from a neighbouring monastery, to act in the capacity of chaplain to the household and tutor to the boys, now fast growing towards man's estate. There was a beautiful little chapel connected with Chad. It had fallen something into neglect and ruin during the days of the civil wars, and had been battered about in some of the struggles that had raged round Chad. But Sir Oliver had spent both money and loving care in restoring and beautifying the little place, and now the daily mass was said there by Brother Emmanuel, and

the members of the household were encouraged to attend as often as their duties would permit. The brother, too, would go about amongst the people and talk with them as they pursued their tasks, and not one even of the rudest and roughest but would feel the better for the kindly and beneficent influence of the youthful ecclesiastic.

Brother Emmanuel had one of those keenly intelligent and versatile minds that are always craving a wider knowledge, and think no knowledge, even of the humblest, beneath notice. He would ask the poorest wood cutter to instruct him in the handling of his tool or in the simple mysteries of his craft as humbly as though he were asking instruction from one of the learned of the land. No information, no occupation came amiss to him. He saw in all toil a dignity and a power, and he strove to impress upon every worker, of whatever craft he might be, that to do his day's work with all his might and with the best powers at his command was in truth one excellent way of serving God, and more effectual than any number of *Paters* and *Aves* said whilst idling away the time that should be given to his master's service.

Such teaching might not be strictly orthodox from a monkish standpoint, but it commended itself to the understanding and the approval of simple folks; and the brother was none the less beloved and respected that his talk and his teaching did not follow the cut-and-dried rules of his order. Sir Oliver and his wife thought excellently of the young man, and to the boys he was friend as well as tutor.

On this hot midsummer day the mistress of Chad was making her usual morning round of the kitchens and adjoining offices-her simple though graceful morning robe, and the plain coif covering her hair, showing that she was not yet dressed for the duties which would engross her later in the day. She had a great bunch of keys dangling at her girdle, and her tablets were in her hands, where from time to time she jotted down some brief note to be entered later in those household books which she kept herself with scrupulous care, so that every season she knew exactly how many gallons or hogsheads of mead or wine had been brewed, what had been the yield of every crop in the garden or meadow, what stores of conserves had been made from each fruit as its season came in, and whether that quantity had proved sufficient for the year's consumption.

The cherry crop was being gathered in today. Huge baskets of the delicious fruit were ranged along one wall of the still room, and busy hands were already preparing the bright berries for the preserving pan or the rows of jars that were likewise placed in readiness to receive them. The cherry trees of Chad were famous for their splendid crop, and the mistress had many wonderful recipes and preparations by which the fruit was preserved and made into all manner of dainty conserves that delighted all who partook of them.

"I will come anon, and help you with your task," said the lady to the busy wenches in the still room, who were hard at work preparing the fruit. "I will return as soon as I have made my round, and see that all is going well."

The girls smiled, and dropped their rustic courtesies. Some amongst them were not the regular serving maids of the place, but were the daughters of the humbler retainers living round and about, who were glad to come to assist at the great house when there was any press of work-a thing that frequently happened from April to November.

None who assisted at Chad at such times ever went away empty handed. Besides the small wage given for the work done, there was always a basket of fruit, or a piece of meat, or a flagon of wine, according to the nature of the task, set aside for each assistant who did not dwell beneath the roof of Chad. And if there was sickness in any cottage from which a worker came, there was certain to be some little delicacy put into a basket by the hands of the mistress, and sent with a kindly word of goodwill and sympathy to the sufferer.

It was small wonder, then, that the household and community of Chad was a happy and peaceable one, or that the knight and his lady were beloved of all around.

The morning's round was no sinecure, even though the mistress was today as quick as possible in her visit of inspection. Three fat bucks had been brought in from the forest yester-eve, when the

knight and his sons had returned from hunting. The venison had to be prepared, and a part of it dried and salted down for winter use; whilst of course a great batch of pies and pasties must be put in hand, so that the most should be made of the meat whilst it was still fresh.

When that matter had been settled, there were the live creatures to visit—the calves in their stalls, the rows of milch kine, and the great piggery, where porkers of every kind and colour were tumbling about in great excitement awaiting their morning meal. The mistress of the house generally saw the pigs fed each day, to insure their having food proper to them, and not the offal and foul remnants that idle servants loved to give and they to eat were not some supervision exercised. The care of dogs and horses the lady left to her husband and sons, but the cows, the pigs, and the poultry she always looked after herself.

Her daily task accomplished, she returned to the still room, prepared for a long morning over her conserves. It was but half-past nine now; for the breakfast hour in baronial houses was seven all the year round, and today had been half-an-hour earlier on account of the press of work incident to the harvesting of the cherry crop. Several of the servants who were generally occupied about the house had risen today with the lark, to be able to help their lady, and soon a busy, silent party was working in pantry and still room under the careful eye of the mistress.

One old woman who had been accommodated with a chair, though her fingers were as brisk as any of the younger girls', from time to time addressed a question or a remark to her lady, which was always kindly answered. She was the old nurse of Chad, having been nurse to Sir Oliver in his infancy, and having since had charge of his three boys during their earliest years. She was growing infirm now, and seldom left her own little room in a sunny corner of the big house, where her meals were taken her by one of the younger maids. But in the warm weather, when her stiff limbs gained a little more power, she loved on occasion to come forth and take a share in the life of the house, and work with the busy wenches under the mistress's eye at the piles of fruit from the successive summer and autumn crops as they came in rotation.

"And where be the dear children?" she asked once; "I have not set eyes on them the livelong day. Methought the very smell of the cherries would have brought them hither, as bees and wasps to a honey pot."

The lady smiled slightly.

"I doubt not they will be here anon; but doubtless they have paid many visits to the trees ere the store was garnered. I think they are in the tilt yard with Warbel. It is there they are generally to be found in the early hours of the day."

"They be fine, gamesome lads," said the old woman fondly—"chips of the old block, true Chads every one of them;" for the custom with the common people was to call the lord of the manor by the name of his house rather than by his own patronymic, and Sir Oliver was commonly spoken of as "Chad" by his retainers; a custom which lingered long in the south and west of the country.

"They are well-grown, hearty boys," answered the mother quietly, though there was a light of tender pride in her eyes. "Bertram is almost a man in looks, though he is scarce seventeen yet. Seventeen! How time flies! It seems but yesterday since he was a little boy standing at my knee to say his light tasks, and walking to and fro holding his father's hand. Well, Heaven be praised, the years have been peaceful and prosperous, else would not they have fled by so swiftly."

"Heaven be praised indeed!" echoed the old woman. "For now the master is so safely seated at Chad that he would be a bold man who tried to oust him. But in days gone by I have sorely feared you proud Lord of Mortimer. Methought he would try to do him a mischief. His spleen and spite, as all men say, are very great."

The lady's face clouded slightly, but her reply was quiet and calm.

"I fear me they are that still; but he lacks all cause of offence. My good lord is careful in all things to avoid making ill blood with a jealous neighbour. That he has always cast covetous eyes upon

Chad is known throughout the countryside; but I trow he would find it something difficult to make good any claim."

"Why, verily!" cried the nurse, with energy. "He could but come as a foul usurper, against whom would every honest hand be raised. But, good my mistress, what is the truth of the whisper I have heard that the Lord of Mortimer has wed his daughter to one who calls himself of the house of Chad? I cannot believe that any of the old race would mate with a Mortimer. Is it but the idle gossip of the ignorant? or what truth is there in it?"

"I scarce know myself the rights of the matter," answered Lady Chadgrove, still with a slight cloud upon her brow. "It is certainly true that Lord Mortimer has lately wed his only child, a daughter, to a knight who calls himself Sir Edward Chadwell, and makes claim to be descended from my lord's house. Men say that he makes great boasting that the Chadwells are an older branch than the Chadgroves, and that by right of inheritance Chad is his.

"Methinks he would find it very hard to make good any such claim. Belike it is but idle boasting. Yet it may be that there will be some trouble in store. He has taken up his abode at Mortimer's Keep, and maybe we shall hear ill news before long."

All eyes were fixed for a moment on the lady's face, and then the hands moved faster than before, whilst a subdued murmur went round the group. Not one heart was there that did not beat with indignation at the thought that any should dare to try to disturb the peace of the rightful lord of Chad. If the loyalty and affection of all around would prove a safeguard, the knight need have no fear from the claims advanced by any adversary.

"There has been a muttering of coming tempest anent those vexed forest rights," continued the lady, in reply to some indignant words from the nurse. "I would that difficult question could be settled and laid at rest; but my good lord has yielded something too much already for the sake of peace and quietness, and at each concession Mortimer's word was passed that he would claim no further rights over the portion that remained to us. But his word is broken without scruple, and we cannot ever be giving way. Were no stand to be made, the whole forest track would soon be claimed by Mortimer, and we should have nothing but the bare park that is fenced about and cannot be filched bit by bit away. But all the world knows that Chad has forest rights equal to those of Mortimer. It is but to seek a quarrel that the baron continues to push his claims ever nearer and nearer our walls."

Another murmur of indignation went round; but there was no time for further talk, as at that moment the three boys entered from the tilt yard; hot, thirsty, and breathless, and the fair-haired lad with the dreamy blue eyes held a kerchief to his head that was stained with blood.

"Art hurt, Edred?" asked the mother, looking up.

"'Tis but a scratch," answered the boy. "I am not quite a match for Bertram yet; but I will be anon. I must learn to be quicker in my defence. Thanks, gentle mother; belike it will be better for it to be bound up. It bleeds rather too fast for comfort, but thy hands will soon stop that."

The other boys fell upon the fruit with right good will, whilst the mother led her second son to the small pump nigh at hand, and bathed and dressed the rather ugly wound in his head.

Neither mother nor son thought anything of the hurt. It was easy enough to give and receive hard blows in the tilt yard, and bruises and cuts were looked upon as part of the discipline of life.

As soon as the dressing was over, Edred joined his brothers, and did his share in diminishing the pile of luscious fruit. And as they ate they chattered away to the old woman of their prowess in tilt yard and forest, relating how Bertram had slain a fat buck with his own hands the previous day, and how they had between them given the *coup-de-grace* to another, which had been brought to bay at the water, father and huntsmen standing aloof to let the boys show their strength and skill.

Nine years had passed since that strange night when Bertram had been awakened by the advent of the mysterious stranger at his bedside. He had developed since then from a sturdy little boy into a fine-grown youth of seventeen, who had in his own eyes, and in the eyes of many others, well-nigh reached man's estate; and who would, if need should arise, go forth equipped for war to fight

the king's battles. He was a handsome, dark-haired, dark-eyed youth, with plenty of determination and force of character, and with a love of Chad so deeply rooted in his nature, that to be the heir of that property seemed to him the finest position in all the world, and he would not have exchanged it for that of Prince of Wales.

The second son, Edred (Ethelred was his true name; he was called after his mother, Etheldred), was some half-head shorter than his brother, but a fine boy for all that. He was fifteen, and whilst sharing to a great extent in the love of sport and of warlike games so common in that day, he was also a greater lover of books than his brothers, and would sometimes absent himself from their pastimes to study with Brother Emmanuel and learn from him many things that were not written in books. The other lads gave more time to study than was usual at that period; for both Sir Oliver and his lady believed in the value of book lore and the use of the pen, deploring the lack of learning that had prevailed during the confusion of the late wars, and greatly desiring its revival. But it was Edred who really inherited the scholarly tastes of his parents, and already the question of making a monk of him was under serious discussion. The boy thought that if he might have a few more years of liberty and enjoyment he should like the life of the cloister well.

Julian bore a strong resemblance to Bertram both in person and disposition. He was a very fine boy, nearly fourteen years old, and had been the companion of his brothers from infancy, so that he often appeared older than his age. All three brothers were bound together in bonds of more than wonted affection. They not only shared their sports and studies, but held almost all their belongings in common. Each lad had his own horse and his own weapons, whilst Edred had one or two books over which he claimed absolute possession; but for the rest, they enjoyed all properties in common, and it had hardly entered into their calculations that they could ever be separated, save when the idea of making Edred into a monk came under discussion; and as that would not be done for some years, it scarcely seemed worth troubling over now. Perhaps things would turn out differently in the end, and they would remain together at Chad for the whole of their natural lives.

Nurse never wearied of the tales told by her young masters, and listened with fond pride to the recital. So eagerly were Bertram and Julian talking, that they did not heed the sound of the horn at the gate way which bespoke the arrival of some messenger; but Edred slipped out to see who could be coming, and presently he returned with a frown upon his brow.

"There is a messenger at the gate who wears the livery of Mortimer," he said. "An insolent knave to boot, who flung his missive in the face of old Ralph, and spurred off with a mocking laugh. I would I had had my good steed between my knees, and I would have given the rascal a lesson in manners. I like not these messengers from Mortimer; they always betide ill will to my father."

Lady Chadgrove looked anxious for a moment, but her brow soon cleared as she made answer: "I shall be sorry if aught comes to grieve or vex your father; but so long as we are careful to give no just cause for offence, we need not trouble our heads overmuch as to the jealous anger of the Lord of Mortimer. I misdoubt me if he can really hurt us, be he never so vindictive. The king is just, and he values the services of your father. He will not permit him to be molested without cause. And methinks my Lord of Mortimer knows as much, else he would have wrought us more ill all these past years."

"He is a tyrant and an evil liver!" cried Bertram hotly; "and his servants be drunken, brawling knaves, every one-as insolent as their master. If I had been old Ralph, I would have hurled back his missive in his face, and bidden him deliver it rightly."

"Nay, nay, my son; that would but be to stir up strife. If others comport themselves ill, that is no reason why our servants should do the like. I would never give a foe a handle against me by the ill behaviour of even a serving man. Let them act never so surlily, I would that they were treated with all due courtesy."

Bertram and Julian hardly entered into their mother's feelings on this point; but Edred looked up eagerly, and it was plain that he understood the feelings which prompted the words, for he said in a low voice:

"Methinks thou art right, gentle mother; albeit I did sorely long to give the varlet a lesson to teach him better. But perchance it was well I was not nigh enough. Surely it must be nigh upon the hour for dinner. Our sport has whet the edge of appetite, and I would fain hear what the missive was which yon knave brought with him. Our father will doubtless tell us at the table."

It was indeed nearly noon, and mistress and maids alike relinquished their tasks to prepare for the meal which was the chiefest of the day, though the supper was nothing to be despised.

The long table in the great banqueting hall was a goodly sight to see when the dinner was spread, and the retainers of the better sort and some amongst the upper servants sat down with the master and his family to partake of the good cheer. At one end of the long board sat the knight and his lady side by side; to their right were the three boys, the young monk, and Warbel the armourer, who now held a post of some importance in the house. Opposite to these were other gentlemen-at-arms and their sons, who were resident at Chad; and at the lower end of the table, below the great silver salt cellars, sat the seneschal, the lowlier retainers, and certain trusted servants who held responsible positions at Chad. The cooks and scullions and underlings dined in the great kitchen immediately after their masters' meal had been served.

The table at Chad always groaned with good things, except at such seasons as the Church decreed a fast, and then the diet was scrupulously kept within the prescribed bounds. Sir Oliver and his wife were both devout and earnest people, and had every reverence for their spiritual superiors. The Benedictine Priory of Chadwater stood only a mile and a half distant, and the prior was on excellent terms with the owner of Chad. Brother Emmanuel had been an inmate of the priory before he was selected by Sir Oliver for the education of his sons. He was considered a youth of no small promise, and the knight was well pleased at the progress made by his boys since they had been studying with him.

Today there was a look of annoyance upon the handsome face of Sir Oliver Chadgrove. It was a striking countenance at all times, in which sternness of purpose and kindness of heart were blended in a fashion that was both attractive and unusual. He had the same regular features, rather square in the outline, which he had transmitted to his children; and his hair, which was now silvered with many streaks, had been raven black in its day. His carriage was upright and fearless, and he was very tall and powerfully proportioned. It was Bertram's keenest ambition to grow up in all points like his father, and he copied him, consciously and unconsciously, in a fashion that often raised a smile on his mother's face.

"I have been favoured with another insolent letter from my Lord of Mortimer," he said. "He had better take heed that he try not my patience too far, and that I go not to the king and lay a complaint before him. I will do so if I be much more troubled."

"What says he now, father?" asked Bertram eagerly, forgetting in his eagerness the generally observed maxim that the sons spoke not at table till they were directly addressed. But the knight did not himself heed this breach of decorum.

"It is the same old story; but every year he grows more grasping and more insolent. Today he complains, forsooth, that the last buck we killed was killed on his ground, and by rights belonged to him. He threatens that his foresters and huntsmen will wage war with us in future if we 'trespass' upon his rights, and wrest our spoil from us! Beshrew me if I submit to much more! Patience and forbearance are useless with such a man. I would I had not conceded all I have done in the interests of peace."

Bertram's face was crimson with anger, Edred's eyes had widened in astonishment, whilst Julian burst out in indignant remonstrance and argument.

"His ground! his rights! How can he dare say that? Why, the buck was killed at Juno's Pool; and all the world knows that that is within the confines of Chad, and that all forest rights there belong to the Lord of Chad! I would I could force his false words down his false throat! I would I could-"

but the boy suddenly ceased, because he caught his mother's warning eye upon him, and saw that his father had opened his lips to speak.

"Ay, and he knows it himself as well as we do; but he is growing bolder and bolder through that monstrous claim he is ever threatening to push—the claim of his son-in-law to be rightful Lord of Chad! Phew! he will find it hard to prove that claim, or to oust the present lord. But Mortimer has money and to spare, and Chad has long been to him what Naboth's vineyard was to King Ahab—

"Brother Emmanuel, that simile is thine, and a right good one, too.

"He will seize on any pretext to pick a quarrel; and if he dares, he will push that quarrel at the point of the sword. I do not fear him; I have the right on my side. But we may not blind ourselves to this: that he is a right bitter and treacherous foe, and that should we give any, even the smallest cause of suspicion or offence, he would seize upon that to ruin us."

Sir Oliver looked keenly round the table at all assembled there, and many knew better than his sons what was in his mind at the time and what had caused him to speak thus.

For a long while now the leaven of Lollardism had been working silently in the country, and there were very many even amongst orthodox sons of the Church who were more or less "bitten" by some of the new notions. It need hardly be said that wherever light is, it will penetrate in a mysterious and often inexplicable fashion; and although there was much extravagance and perversion in the teachings of the advanced Lollards, there was undoubtedly amongst them a far clearer and purer light than existed in the hearts of those of the common people who had been brought up beneath the sway of the priests, themselves so often ignorant and ill-living men.

And so the light gradually spread; and many who would have repudiated the name of Lollard with scorn and loathing were beginning to hold some of their tenets, and to wish for a simpler and purer form of faith, and for liberty to study the Scriptures for themselves; and no one knew better the leavening spirit of the age than did Sir Oliver Chadgrove, himself a man of liberal views and devout habit of mind, and his wife, who shared his every thought and opinion.

They had both heard the stirring and enlightened preaching of Dean Colet, and were great admirers of his; but they took the view that that divine himself held—namely, that the Church would gradually reform herself from within; that she was awakening to the need of some reformation and advance; and that her sons were safe within her fold, and must patiently await her own work there.

This was exactly the feeling of the knight and his lady. They rejoiced in the words they had heard, and in the wider knowledge of the Scriptures which had been thus unfolded; but that any such doctrine, when preached and taught by the Lollard heretics, could be right or true they would have utterly denied and repudiated. The Lollards had won for themselves a bad name, and were thought of with scorn and contempt. Nevertheless, in country places the leaven of their teaching permeated far and wide, and Sir Oliver had more than once occasion to fear that amongst his own retainers some were slightly tainted by heresy.

Of course if it could be proved against him that his followers were Lollards, his enemy might take terrible advantage and deal him a heavy blow. It was the one charge which if proved would strike him to the earth; even the king's favour would scarce serve him then. The king would not stand up in opposition to the Church; and if the Church condemned his house as being a harbouring place for heretics, then indeed he would be undone.

It was this thing which was in his mind as he glanced with keen eyes round his table on this bright midsummer day; and his wife, and the monk, and the bulk of those sitting there read the true meaning of his words and of his look, and recognized the truth of the grave word of warning.

Chapter III: Brother Emmanuel

The hush of a Sabbath was upon the land. The sounds of life and industry were no longer heard around Chad. Within and without the house a calm stillness prevailed, and the hot summer sunshine lay broad upon the quiet fields and the garden upon which so much loving care had of late years been spent.

The white and red roses, no longer the symbols of party strife, were blooming in their midsummer glory. The air was sweet with their fragrance, and bees hummed drowsily from flower to flower. In the deep shadow cast by a huge cedar tree, that reared its stately head as high as the battlements of the turret, a small group had gathered this hot afternoon. The young monk was there in the black cassock, hood, and girdle that formed the usual dress of the Benedictine in this country, and around him were grouped his three pupils, to whom he was reading out of the great Latin Bible that was one of the treasures of Sir Oliver's library.

All the boys were Latin scholars, and had made much progress in their knowledge of that language since the advent of the young monk into the household. They had likewise greatly increased in their knowledge of the Scriptures; for Brother Emmanuel was a sound believer in the doctrine preached by the Dean of St. Paul's, and of the maxims laid down by him—that the Scriptures were not to be pulled to fragments, and each fragment explained without reference to the context, but to be studied and examined as a whole, and so explained, one portion illuminating and illustrating another. After such a fashion had Brother Emmanuel long been studying the Word of God, and after such a method did he explain it to his pupils.

All three boys were possessed of clear heads and quick intelligence, and their minds had expanded beneath the influence of the young monk's teaching. They all loved a quiet hour spent with him in reading and expounding the Bible narrative, and today a larger portion than usual had been read; for the heat made exertion unwelcome even to the active lads, and it was pleasanter here beneath the cedar tree than anywhere else besides.

"Now, I would fain know," began Julian, after a pause in the reading, "why it is that it is thought such a vile thing for men to possess copies of God's Word in their own tongue that they may read it to themselves. It seems to me that men would be better and not worse for knowing the will of God in all things; and here it is set down clearly for every man to understand. Yet, if I understand not amiss, it is made a cause of death for any to possess the Scriptures in his own tongue."

"Yea, that is what the heretic Lollards do—read and expound the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue and after their own fashion," said Bertram. "Have a care, Julian, how thou seemest to approve their methods; for there is a great determination in high places to put down at once and for all the vile doctrines which are corrupting all the land."

"I approve no heresy," cried Julian eagerly. "I do but ask why it be heresy to read the Word of God, and to have in possession a portion of it in the language of one's country."

"Marry, dost thou not know that one reason is the many errors the translators have fallen into, which deceive the unwary and lead the flock astray?" cried Edred eagerly. "Brother Emmanuel has told me some amongst these, and there are doubtless many others of which he may not have heard. A man may not drink with impunity of poisoned waters; neither is it safe to take as the Word of God a book which may have many perversions of His truth."

Edred looked up at Brother Emmanuel for confirmation of this explanation. It was the monk's habit to encourage the boys to discuss any question of interest freely amongst themselves, he listening in silence the while, and later on giving them the benefit of his opinion. All the three turned to him now to see what he would say upon a point that was already agitating the country, and was preparing the way for a shaking that should lead to an altogether new state of existence both in Church and State. Even out here in the garden, in the sanctuary of their own home, with only their friend and

spiritual pastor to hear them, the boys spoke with bated breath, as though fearful of uttering words which might have within them some germ of that dreaded sin of heresy.

As for Brother Emmanuel, he sat with his hands folded in his sleeves, the great book upon his knees, a slight and thoughtful smile playing around the corners of his finely-cut mouth. His whole face was intensely spiritual in expression. The features were delicately cut, and bore the impress of an ascetic life, as well as of gentle birth and noble blood. He was, in fact, a scion of an ancient and powerful house; but it was one of those houses that had suffered sorely in the recent strife, and whose members had been scattered and cut off. He had no powerful relatives and friends to turn to now for promotion to rich benefice or high ecclesiastical preferment, and he had certainly never lamented this fact. In heart and soul he was a follower of the rules of poverty laid down by the founder of his order, and would have thought himself untrue to his calling had he suffered himself to be endowed with worldly wealth. Even such moneys as he received from Sir Oliver for the instruction given to his sons were never kept by himself. All were given either to the poor by his hands direct, or placed at the disposal of the Prior of Chadwater, where he had been an inmate for a short time previous to his installation as chaplain at Chad. He had not sought this office; he would rather have remained beneath the priory walls. He thought that it was something contrary to the will of the founders for monks to become parochial priests, or to hold offices and benefices which took them from the shelter of their monastery walls. But such things were of daily occurrence now, and were causing bitter jealousy to arise betwixt the parochial clergy and the monks, sowing seeds of strife which played a considerable part in the struggle this same century was to see. But it was useless to try to stem the current single-handed, and the rule of obedience was as strong within him as that of poverty and chastity.

When sent forth by his prior (who secretly thought that this young monk was too strict and ascetic and too keen-witted to be a safe inmate of a house which had long fallen from its high estate, and was becoming luxurious and wealthy and lax), he had gone uncomplainingly to Chad, and since then had become so much interested in his pupils and in his round of daily duties there that he had not greatly missed the life of the cloister.

He had leisure for thought and for study. He had access to a library which, although not large, held many treasures of book making, and was sufficient for the requirements of the young monk. He could keep the hours of the Church in the little chantry attached to the house, and he was taken out of the atmosphere of jealousy and bickering which, to his own great astonishment and dismay, he had found to be the prevailing one at Chadwater.

On the whole, he had benefited by the change, and was very happy in his daily duties. He rejoiced to watch the unfolding minds of his three pupils, and especially to train Edred for the life of the cloister, to which already he had been partially dedicated, and towards which he seemed to incline.

And now, eagerly questioned by the boys upon that vexed point of the translated Scriptures and their possession by the common people, he looked thoughtfully out before him, and gave his answer in his own poetic fashion.

"The Word of God, my children, is as a fountain of life. Those who drink of it drink immortality and joy and peace passing all understanding. The Saviour of mankind-Himself the Word of God-has given Himself freely, that all men may come to Him, and, drinking of the living water, may find within their hearts a living fountain which shall cause that they never thirst again. But the question before us is not whether men shall drink of this fountain-we know that they must do so to live-but how they shall drink of it; how and in what manner the waters of life shall be dispensed to them."

The boys fixed their eyes eagerly upon him. Julian nodded his head, and Edred's eyes grew deep with the intensity of his wish to follow the workings of the mind of his instructor.

"For that we must look back to the days of our Lord, when He was here upon earth. HOW did He give forth the Word of Life? How did He rule that it was from that time forward to be given to men?"

"He preached to the people who came to Him," answered Edred, "and He directed His apostles and disciples to do likewise-to go forth into all lands and preach the gospel to every creature."

"Just so," answered Brother Emmanuel, with an other of his slight peculiar smiles. "In other words, he intrusted the Word-Himself, the news of Himself-to a living ministry, to men, that through the mouths of His apostles and those disciples who had received regular instruction from Him and from them the world might be enlightened with the truth."

The boys listened eagerly, with mute attention.

"Go on," said Edred breathlessly. "Prithee tell us more."

"Our blessed Lord and Master laid no charge upon His apostles to write of Him-to send forth into the world a written testimony. We know that the inspired Word is written from end to end by the will of God. It was necessary for the preservation of the truth in its purity that its doctrines should be thus set down-that there should be in existence some standard by which in generations to come the learned ones of the earth might be able to judge of the purity of the doctrines preached, and refute heresies and errors that might and would creep in; but it was to men, to a living ministry, that our Saviour intrusted the precious truths of His gospel, and to a living ministry men should look to have those truths unfolded."

"I see that point," cried Edred eagerly. "I had never thought of it quite in that way before. Does it so state the matter anywhere in the Holy Book? I love to gather the truth from its pages. Thou hast not told us that we are wrong in that."

"Nay, under guidance all men should seek to those holy truths; but will they find the priceless jewel if they seek it without those aids our blessed Lord Himself has appointed? Wouldst thou know more of His will in this matter? Then thou shalt."

The monk turned the leaves of the book awhile, and then paused at an open page.

"On earth, as we have seen, the blessed Saviour intrusted His truth to the care of chosen men. Now let us see how He acted when, ascended into the heavens, He looked down upon earth, and directed from thence the affairs of this world. Did He then ordain that a written testimony was to be prepared and sent forth into all lands? No. What we learn then is that when He ascended into the heavens and received and gave gifts to men, He gave to them apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers-a living ministry again, a fourfold living ministry-that by this living ministry, surely typified in the vision of St. John by the four living creatures with the fourfold head, the saints were to be perfected, the unity of the faith preserved, and the body of Christ edified and kept in its full growth and perfection till He come Himself to claim the Bride."

Edred's eyes were full of vivid intelligence. He followed in the Latin tongue the words as Brother Emmanuel spoke them, and looking up he asked wistfully:

"But where are they now, the apostles and prophets, the evangelists and pastors? Have we got them with us yet?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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