EDGAR JOHN GEORGE

RUNNYMEDE AND LINCOLN FAIR: A STORY OF THE GREAT CHARTER

John Edgar

Runnymede and Lincoln Fair: A Story of the Great Charter

Edgar J.

Runnymede and Lincoln Fair: A Story of the Great Charter / J. Edgar — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

John G. Edgar
Runnymede and Lincoln Fair: A Story of the Great Charter

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the opening chapters of his story Edgar gives an idea of the turbulent state of the country just after the battle of Bouvines – the defeat to which, according to the historians, England owes its Magna Charta. The barons had now the upper hand. John was crestfallen, and "concealed his hatred of the barons under a calm countenance," says Matthew Paris.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

L. K. HUGHES.

April 1908.

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

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

[1] Sussex.

CHAPTER I
A SQUIRE AND A CITIZEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I would fain not appear vainglorious," answered the squire, smiling, "and, therefore, I care not to recount my own exploits. But you know that, when I was withdrawn from your companionship, and from the lessons in grammar and letters, to which, be it confessed, I never took very kindly, I

entered the castle of my mother's remote kinsman, William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, and there, not without profit, served my apprenticeship to chivalry. But no sooner did I attain the rank of squire than I began to sigh for real war, and such fields of fight as, for years, I had been dreaming of. And it chanced that about that time Don Diego Perez, a knight from Spain, reached the castle of Salisbury with tidings that Alphonso of Castille was hard pressed by the Moors, and like to lose his kingdom if not aided by the warriors of Christendom. On hearing Don Diego's report I and others in my Lord of Salisbury's household, with the noble earl's sanction, accompanied the knight to Castille; and I fought at Muradel on that day when the Christian chivalry swept the Moorish host before them as the wind does leaves at Yule."

"In good faith?"

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

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

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

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

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

"And will you go, Oliver Icingla? Will you put yourself into the lion's den?"

"Ay, man, as blithely as ever lover went to his lady's bower."

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

The squire changed colour, and his lip quivered nervously.

"Fables, Constantine!" exclaimed he, recovering his serenity with an effort, and tossing his head disdainfully backwards – "fables devised by Philip of France and the barons of England to justify

their own selfish and ambitious schemes, and such as ought never to gain credit with a person such as thou. But let French kings and Norman barons make dupes and tools of whom they may, I swear by the Holy Cross that never shall Oliver Icingla be either their dupe or their tool. So help me God and good St. Edward!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II
THE ICINGLAS

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

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

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

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

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

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

But Oliver was an Icingla in look, and thought, and word, and enthusiastic for the race to which he belonged; but, given to reflection and contemplation, he well knew, young though he was, that all violent attempts to better the condition of the English could only end in failure and ruin, and that the rise of the Anglo-Saxons – if they were to rise – could only be accomplished by patience and by gradual degrees. In the struggle which was impending between a Plantagenet king and the Norman barons, he would never, if free to act on his own impulses and reason, have hesitated to adhere to the crown; and the only mortification which he felt was that he was to be conducted to the Tower as a hostage – perhaps to become a prisoner, and even a victim – when he would have gone thither voluntarily to offer his sword to fight for the crown which had been worn by Alfred the Great and Edward the Holy. Dame Isabel did not, however, take the same view of the question; and when informed that Oliver, so lately freed from captivity, was required as a hostage, she wrung her hands and looked the picture of woe.

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

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

CHAPTER III
AN UNBIDDEN GUEST

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Guests at Oakmede!" said Oliver, with some surprise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"In what respect, my lord?" asked Oliver gravely.

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

Oliver's lip curled with disdain.

"Do you comprehend me?" asked De Moreville quickly.

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

"Nay, nay," exclaimed De Moreville, his bronzed visage suddenly flushing; "you are hasty; you start aside like a young charger frightened by its own shadow. I ask nothing but what it becomes you

to do as my kinsman and my ward. I have said that this is a struggle of life and death; and, such being the case, it is needful to walk warily; and I only ask you so to play your part as to prove yourself worthy of my confidence, and to merit the protection and good-will of the barons of England."

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

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

"My lord," said Oliver calmly, "forbear from using language which only tends to exasperate, and let me speak my mind frankly. My sympathies – so far as they are in operation – are assuredly not with the barons; nor, considering who I am, can I be expected to regard them save as foes of my race. For yourself," continued the squire, "I say this: you have been a hard guardian, reaping where you have not sowed, and gathering where you have not reaped. But of that I make no complaint, seeing that, I doubt not, you have acted according to law; and now that you ask me to surrender my liberty at your pleasure, I do not refuse. I am ready to go as your hostage to the king. But," added he warmly, "my honour and my conscience are mine own; and, by the Holy Cross! an Icingla cannot violate the dictates of honour and conscience at the bidding of any Norman baron. I have said."

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV
CHRISTMAS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In broad daylight, however, and especially where men assembled in crowds to celebrate Christmas, neither the bold nor the timid, who were superstitious, cared much for preternatural

terrors; and as Hugh de Moreville and Oliver Icingla entered Ludgate and ascended the hill, and passed the spot where the grand church since known as Old St. Paul's was about to rise from the ruins of the Temple of Diana, no thought of demons or of were-wolves damped the enjoyment of the Londoners. And loud was the mirth and high the excitement of the populace as through the crowded streets, where standards pierced the sky and evergreens waved and rustled in the frosty atmosphere, slowly and with stately tread rode the Norman baron and the English squire till they reached the Tower, and reined up their steeds, and halted before the great fortress of the metropolis.

CHAPTER V
THE TOWER OF LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI
KING JOHN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Assuredly I would," answered the boy.

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

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

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

Whether Arthur had been killed by King John and flung into the Seine, or whether he had fallen into the river and been drowned while attempting to escape from the castle of Rouen, remains an historic mystery. But neither the Bretons nor Philip Augustus expressed any doubt on the subject. Within a week after the tragical event the Bretons demanded justice on the head of the murderer; and Philip summoned John, as one of his vassals, to appear before the Twelve Peers of France, and answer to the charge. Without denying the jurisdiction of the court, John declined to appear unless granted a safe conduct; and, the Twelve Peers having pronounced sentence of death and confiscation, Philip took up arms to execute the sentence, and seized cities and castles in such numbers, that, ere long, John retained little or nothing of the Continental empire of the Plantagenets, save Bordeaux, and a nominal authority in Guienne. One effort he did make to redeem his fortunes. But, losing heart and hope, he abandoned the struggle, and, returning to England, entered on that contest with the Church which was destined to involve him in ruin.

In the year 1205, Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, departed this life, and in his place the monks of Canterbury elected Reginald, their prior, to the vacant see. The king, however, far from sanctioning their choice, insisted on elevating John Grey, Bishop of Norfolk, to the primacy; and the dispute between the monks and the crown was referred to Innocent III., one of those popes who, like Hildebrand and Boniface VIII., deemed it their mission "to pull down the pride of kings." In order at once to show his impartiality and his power, Innocent set aside the man nominated by the monks and the man nominated by the king, and gave the archbishopric to Stephen Langton, a cardinal of

English birth, who was then at Rome. The monks, in consequence, found themselves in an awkward predicament. However, they were under the necessity of doing as the Pope ordered. In vain they talked of their scruples and fears, and protested that they could do nothing without the royal sanction. When urged, only one monk stood firm; all the others, out of deference to the head of the Church, confirmed the nomination of Stephen Langton.

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

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

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

It was the month of May, 1213, and John, then suffering from anxiety and ill health, was residing at Ewell, near Dover, when Pandolph, the papal legate, arrived in England, and sent two Knights of the Temple to ask a private interview with the king. “Let him come,” replied John; and Pandolph, coming accordingly, made such representations that the king promised to obey the Pope in all things, to receive Stephen Langton as primate, and to give complete satisfaction for the past. Of course, Pandolph expressed his gratification at the turn affairs were taking; and, after John had, in the Temple Church, at Dover, surrendered his kingdom to the Pope, and agreed to hold it as a fief of the Holy See, the legate passed over to France, and intimated to Philip Augustus that the King of

England was under the special protection of the Church, and that he was not to be meddled with. In fact, it now appeared that John had, by yielding to the papal power, freed himself from his troubles; and perhaps he flattered himself that he should henceforth govern in peace, and have everything his own way. If so, he was very much mistaken. Between the Plantagenet kings and the Anglo-Norman barons there had never existed much good feeling; and between John and the barons, in particular, there existed a strong feeling of hostility. Even when he was engaged in his contest with the Pope, the great feudal magnates of England gave indications of their determination to set the royal authority at defiance; and, ere the inglorious close of that contest, they had made up their minds either to rule England as they liked, or to plunge the country into a civil war. Affairs were rapidly approaching a crisis at the Christmas of 1214 – that Christmas when Hugh de Moreville conducted Oliver Icingla as a hostage to the Tower of London.

CHAPTER VII
A MAN OF THE FOREST

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"War in England?" said Wolf.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wolf turned to the speaker, and, as he found his sleeve grasped, appeared somewhat more awed than was reasonable at finding himself alone with such a person and in such a place, and he would have been still more so had it been an hour after dark.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wolf hesitated.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII
THE KING AND THE BARONS

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

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

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

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

But meanwhile Maude had become the mother of a son, who, as years passed over, proved a very formidable adversary. Henry Plantagenet was a native of Mantz, in Normandy, where he drew his first breath in 1133; but at an early age he was brought to England to be educated, and while passing his boyhood at Bristol, was made familiar with the country whose destinies he was one day to control. It was not, however, till, on the death of his father, he had become Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy, and, by his marriage with Eleanor of Guienne, Duke of Aquitaine and Poitou, that, in 1153, he landed in England with the determination of asserting his rights. At first a sanguinary struggle appeared imminent; but Stephen consented to a compromise, and, excluding his own son,

acknowledged Henry as heir to the crown, stipulating, however, that he should wear it during his lifetime. Next year Stephen breathed his last, and Henry was crowned in the Cathedral of Winchester, which up to that date was regarded as the proper constitutional capital of England. A terrible task was before him.

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

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

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

It was in the midst of his struggles with Philip Augustus that John was first involved in disputes with the barons, on account of their positive refusal to accompany him to the Continent. On this point the barons appear to have been somewhat unreasonable; and John treated them with such hauteur that they announced his bearing quite intolerable. Gradually matters grew worse; and when John was in the midst of his quarrel with the Pope, the barons, believing that the time for retaliation had arrived, espoused the papal cause, and formed a conspiracy for seizing the king, and giving the crown to Simon de Montfort, a French nobleman who afterwards gained an unenviable notoriety as leader of the crusade against the unfortunate Albigenses. Moreover, the barons took great credit with the Pope for having forced John to surrender his crown to the legate. But no sooner did Innocent signify his intention of supporting the king on his throne than the barons changed their tone, and made what political capital they could out of the humiliation which the king had brought upon England when he consented to become the vassal of Rome. Nor were other charges of a scandalous nature wanting to embitter the dispute and add to the exasperation. Almost every baron, in fact, had some complaint to make, and in particular the chiefs of the house of Braose, Fitzwalter, and De Vesci.

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

Robert Fitzwalter was one of the proudest nobles in England, and Lord of Baynard's Castle, in London; and he had a daughter so celebrated for her beauty that she was called Maude the Fair. On

this damsel John cast his eyes with evil intent. His advances were repelled. Maude the Fair died soon after, and the king was accused of having caused poison to be given to her in a poached egg.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No sooner, indeed, had the Christmas of 1214 passed, and the year 1215 begun its course, than the barons came to London with a strong military force, and demanded an interview with the king. At first John was inclined to ride the high horse, and refuse them an audience; but, learning that they were strongly attended, he deemed it politic to temporise, and met them at the house of the Knights of the Temple. On finding himself face to face with his adversaries, and on being handed a petition embodying their demands, which were by no means trifling in extent, John attempted to intimidate them; but finding that his attempts were ineffectual, he asked them to allow the business on which they had come to lie over till Easter, that he might have time to give it his deliberate consideration.

The barons hesitated. At length, however, they consented to the delay on condition that Archbishop Langton and the Earl of Pembroke were sureties for the king's good faith. The primate and the earl pledged themselves as was wished; and the king and the barons parted, each party distrusting the other, and vowing in their inmost souls never, while they had life and breath, to bate one jot or tittle of their pretensions.

CHAPTER IX
A BLOW IN SEASON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ay, a fat buck, if ever there was one," responded King John. "You see," added he, merrily, as he glanced round the circle – "you see how this buck has prospered, and yet I'll warrant he never heard a mass."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER X
WILLIAM DE COLLINGHAM

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

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

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

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

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

Naturally enough, John felt much alarm when he learned that his enemies were at the head of such a force as he could not cope with; but at this crisis he was not deserted. Not only the Nevilles, but the great Earls of Pembroke and Salisbury and Warren remained faithful in the day of adversity; and faithful also remained many chevaliers and gentlemen, who, without any personal liking for John, and without any of the young Icingla's hereditary veneration for the memory of St. Edward, were yet determined to stand by the king and fight for the Confessor's crown. However, it was necessary to take some steps to avert civil war if possible; and John, having summoned Archbishop Langton, sent

him, in company with Pembroke and Warren, to hold a conference with the barons at Brackley, and offer to refer their dispute to arbitration. But they found the insurgents in no compromising mood. Producing the petition which, on the day of Epiphany, had been presented to the king in the house of the Templars, they recited the chief articles.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was Sunday, the 17th of May, 1215; and the king, having just heard morning mass, and summoned Oliver Icingla and other hostages, was informing them that their lives were forfeited by the rebellion of their kinsmen, and that they could only save themselves by taking an oath to serve him faithfully in the war, when William de Collingham presented himself, pale and agitated, but endeavouring to be calm.

"Sire, sire," said he, "all is lost!"

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XI
ANCIENT LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

unbroken, he will be tumbled into the water, and the boat passes on. Nevertheless, there are always two boats ready to succour him."

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

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

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

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

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

and when the wine, which had neither been produced on the banks of the Holborn nor in the vineyards of Gloucester, flowed freely, their tongues were loosened, and they expressed themselves without hesitation as to the crisis which public affairs had reached, not by any means sparing King

John, whose character they evidently viewed in the very worst light. Two of the party, however, preserved their discretion. One was Joseph Basing, a cautious man, who had been Sheriff of London in the previous year; the other a youth of patrician aspect, in a half-martial dress, with handsome features, and a keen eye which kindled with enthusiasm when noble words were spoken, and a proud lip which curled with scorn when a mean sentiment was expressed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XII
THE BARONS IN LONDON

FITZARNULPH'S project prospered.

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

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

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

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

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

No sooner, therefore, did the barons forming "the army of God and the Church" find themselves in London, and in a position to do whatever they pleased with the city, than they proceeded to pay off some of their debts to the Jews after a fashion which was little to the taste of the Israelites. Proceeding with such intent to the Jewry – the quarter set apart for and inhabited by the Jews, and remarkable as concerned the construction of the houses, which were of a peculiar style, with a chimney over the door, a mode of building to which the persecuted race were compelled to adhere, in order that their dwellings might be distinguished from those of Christians – they stopped at one of them, over which was inscribed in Hebrew characters, "This is the station or ward of Rabbi Moses, son of the

honourable Rabbi Isaac," and, to the terror of the inmates, began to tear down the building, not forgetting in the meantime to look out for plunder, and to lay their hands on all that was not too hot or too heavy to carry away. Proceeding with the work of destruction, which some were foolish enough to mistake for doing God service, the baronial insurgents pulled down the houses of all the principal Hebrews, and had the stones carried away to repair the gates of London, especially Ludgate and Aldgate – which had so easily admitted them, but which they were determined should not admit any other armed force, save at their pleasure – rebuilding them after the Norman fashion, with small bricks and Flanders tiles. Nearly four centuries later, when Ludgate was pulled down, and when, to borrow the words of the poet, when their names were forgotten, and the places that had once known them knew them no more, and their lands had become the prey of the grooms and minions who pandered to the passions and obeyed the behests of the Tudor sovereigns, the stone which had been taken from the house of the Rabbi Moses was discovered, and the inscription interpreted – an interesting memorial of other days, and one which might have suggested salutary reflections.

"The knights were dust,
And their swords were rust – "

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

Fortunately for the king, the Earl of Pembroke, on learning that a crisis was imminent, had hastened to London; and the earl, being a man of such high character and unquestionable patriotism that he either had no personal enemies or only such as were ashamed to confess their enmity, was in a position to exercise great influence with both parties. He was quite firm in his support of the crown, and was one of those men who would have stood by it, even if it had hung on a bush; but at the same time he was zealous for liberty, and as anxious as any of the confederate barons to have full securities for the liberty of Englishmen. When, therefore, Pembroke was summoned to John's presence, along with William de Hartarad, the king's cup-bearer, and Robert of London, a clerk of the Chapel Royal, he went with the intention of suggesting some such compromise as might prevent war and bloodshed.

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

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

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

every satisfaction. William de Hartarad and Robert of London will bear thee company; and may God speed you in your errand!"

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XIII
EVACUATION OF THE TOWER

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

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

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.