

EVERETT-GREEN EVELYN

**A CLERK OF OXFORD,  
AND HIS  
ADVENTURES IN THE  
BARONS' WAR**

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# **Evelyn Everett-Green**

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### **CHAPTER I**

#### ***THE DIE CAST***

"My son," spoke a gentle voice from behind the low, moss-grown wall, "we must not mourn and weep for those taken from us, as if we had no hope."

Face downwards upon the newly-made mound of earth lay a youth of some fifteen or sixteen summers. His slight frame was convulsed by the paroxysm of his grief; from time to time a strangled sob broke from his lips. The kindly-faced monk from the Priory hard by had been watching him for some time before he thus addressed him. Probably he now saw that the violence of the outburst was spent.

The youth started upon hearing himself addressed, and as he sprang to his feet he revealed a singularly attractive face. The brow was broad and massive, indicating intellectual power. The blue eyes beneath the pencilled arch of the delicate eyebrows looked out upon the world with a singular directness and purity of expression. The features were finely cut, and there were strength and sweetness both in the curved, thoughtful lips, and in the square outline of the jaw. The fair hair clustered in curling luxuriance about his head, and fell in sunny waves to his shoulders. His hands were long and white, and looked rather as though they had wielded pen than weapon or tool of craftsman. Yet the lad's habit was that of one occupying a humble rank in life, and the shoes on his feet were worn and patched, as though by his own apprentice hands. Beside him lay a wallet and staff, upon which the glance of the monk rested questioningly. The youth appeared to note the glance, yet it was the words addressed to him that he answered.

"I think it is rather for myself I weep, my father. I know that they who die in faith rest in peace and are blessed. But for those who are left – left quite alone – the world is a hard place for them."

Father Ambrose looked with kindly solicitude at the lad. He noted his pale face, his sunken eyes, the look of weary depression that seemed to weigh him down, and he asked gently, —

"What ails thee, Leofric, my son?"

"Everything," answered the youth, with sudden passion in his tones. "I have lost everything in the world that I prized. My father is dead. I have no home. I have no fortune. All that we had is swallowed up in paying for such things as were needful for him while he lay ill. Even that which he saved for masses for his soul had to go at the last. See here, my father, I have but these few silver pieces left in all the world. Take them, and say one mass for him, and let me kneel at the door of the chapel the while. Then will I go forth into the wide world alone, and whether I live or die matters nothing. I have no one in the wide world who will know or care."

But the monk gently put back the extended hand, and laid his own kindly upon the head of the youth.

"Keep thy money, my son. The mass shall be said – ay, and more than one – for the repose of thy father's soul. He was a good man and true, and I loved him well. That pious office I will willingly perform in memory of our friendship. But now, as to thyself. Whither goest thou, and what wilt thou do? I had thought that thou wouldst have come to me ere thou didst sally forth into the wide world alone."

There was a faint accent of reproach in the monk's voice, and Leofric's sensitive face coloured instantly.

"Think it not ingratitude on my part, my father," he said quickly. "I was coming to say good-bye. But that seems now the only word left to me to speak in this world."

"Wherefore so, my son? why this haste to depart? The old life has indeed closed for thee; but there may be bright days in store for thee yet. Whither art thou going in such hot haste?"

"I must e'en go where I can earn a living," answered Leofric, "and that must be by the work of mine own hands. I shall find my way to some town, and seek to apprentice myself to some craft. These hands must learn to wield axe or hammer or mallet. There is nothing else left for the son of a poor scholar, who could scarce earn enough himself to feed the pair of us."

Father Ambrose looked at the lad's white fingers, and he slightly shook his head.

"Methinks thou couldst do better with those hands, Leofric. Hast never thought of what I have sometimes spoken to thee, when thou hast been aiding me with the care of the parchments?"

The lad's face flushed again quickly; but his eyes met the gaze fastened upon his with the fearless openness which was one of their characteristics.

"My father, I could not be a monk," he said. "I have no call – no vocation."

"Yet thou dost love a quiet life of meditation? Thou dost love learning, and hast no small store for thy years. It is a beautiful and peaceful life for those who would fain flee from the trials and temptations of the world. And the Prior here thinks well of thee; he has never grudged the time I have spent upon thee. I shall miss thee when thou art gone, Leofric; life here is something too calm and same."

There was a touch of wistful regret in the father's tones which brought back the ready tears to Leofric's eyes. After his own father, he owed most to this kindly old monk, though it had never for a moment struck him that the teaching and training of a bright young lad had been one of the main interests in that monotonous existence.

"That is what I have felt myself," he answered quickly. "I love the calm and the quiet, the books and the parchments. I shall bless you every day of my life for all your goodness to me. But I would fain see the great world too. I have heard my father and others speak of things I would fain see with mine own eyes. It breaks my heart to go, yet I cannot choose but do so. I dare not ask to come to you, my kindest friend, my second father. I could not be a monk. I should but deceive and disappoint you were I to seek an asylum with you now."

Father Ambrose sighed slightly as he shook his head; but he made no attempt to influence the youth. Perhaps he loved him too well to press him to enter upon a life which had so many limitations and drawbacks.

Yet he would not let him go forth upon his travels with so small a notion of what lay before him. He led him into the refectory, where strangers were entertained, and had food brought and set before him. The lad was hungry, for he had of late undergone a very considerable mental strain, and had had little enough time or thought to spare for creature comforts. The long illness of his father, a man gently born, but of very narrow means, had completely worn him out in body and mind; and now, when thrown penniless upon the world, there had seemed nothing before him but to wander forth with wallet and staff, and seek some craftsman who would give him food and shelter whilst he served a long and perhaps hard apprenticeship to whatever trade he chanced upon.

He spoke again of this as he sat in the refectory, and again Father Ambrose shook his head.

"Thou art not of the stuff for an apprentice to some harsh master; thou hast done but little hard work. And think of thy skill with brush and pen, and thy knowledge of Latin and the Holy Scriptures; thy sweet voice, and thy skill upon the lute. What will all these serve thee, if thou dost waste thy years of manhood's prime at carpenter's bench or blacksmith's forge?"

Leofric sighed, and asked wistfully, —

"Yet what else can I do, my father?"

"Hast ever thought of Oxford?" asked Father Ambrose, rubbing his chin reflectively. "There be lads as poor as thou that beg their way thither and live there as clerks, being helped thereto by

the gifts of pious benefactors. They say that the King's Majesty greatly favours students and clerks, and that a lad who can sing a roundelay or turn an epigram can earn for himself enough to keep him whilst he wins his way to some honourable post. Hast ever thought of the University, lad? that were a better place for thee than a craftsman's shop."

Leofric's eyes brightened slowly whilst the monk spoke. Such an idea as this had never crossed his mind heretofore. Living far away from Oxford, and hearing nothing of the life there, he had never once thought of that as a possible asylum for himself; but in a moment it seemed to him that this was just the chance he had been longing for. He could not bring his mind to the thought of the life of the cloister; yet he loved learning and the fine arts with a passionate love, and had received just enough training to make him ardently desire more.

"Would such a thing as that be possible for such as I, my father?" he asked with bated breath, seeming to hang upon the monk's lips as he waited for the answer.

"More than possible – advisable, reasonable," answered another voice from the shadows of the room. Leofric started to his feet and bent the knee instinctively; for, unseen to both himself and Father Ambrose, the Prior had entered, and had plainly heard the last words which had passed between the pair.

The Prior was a tall, venerable man, with eagle eye and an air of extreme dignity; but he was kindly disposed towards Leofric, and greeted him gently and tenderly, speaking for a few minutes of his recent heavy loss, and then resuming the former subject.

"Oxford is the place where lads such as thou do congregate together in its many schools and buildings, and learn from the lips of the instructed and wise the lore of the ancients and the wisdom of the sages. There be many masters and doctors there who began life as poor clerks, begging alms as they went. What one man has done another may attempt. Thou mayest yet be a worthy clerk, and rise to fame and learning."

"Without money?" asked Leofric, whose eyes began to sparkle and glow.

"Yes, even without money," answered the Prior: "for at Oxford there are monasteries and abbeys to each of which is attached a *Domus Dei*; and there are gathered together poor clerks and other indigent persons, to whom an allowance of daily food is made from the monks' table; whilst, through the liberality of benefactors, a habit is supplied to them yearly, together with such things as be absolutely needful for their support. Once was I the guest of the Abbot of Osney, and I remember visiting the *Domus Dei*, and seeing the portions of meat sent thither from the refectory. I will give thee a letter of recommendation to him, good lad. It may be that this will serve thee in some sort upon thy arrival."

Leofric bent the knee once more in token of the gratitude his faltering lips could scarce pronounce. The thought of a life of study, in lieu of that of an apprentice, was like nectar to him. Prior and Father alike smiled at his boyish but genuine rapture.

"Yet think not, my son, that the life will be free from many a hardship, to a poor clerk without means and without friends. There be many wild and turbulent spirits pent within the walls of Oxford. Men have lost life and limb ere now in those brawls which so often arise 'twixt townsmen and clerks. The Chancellor doth all he can to protect the lives of scholars and clerks; yet, do as he will, troubles ofttime arise, and men have ere this been forced to leave the place by hundreds till the turbulent citizens can be brought to reason and submission."

But Leofric was in nowise daunted by this aspect of the case. Trained up hardily, albeit of studious habits, the fear of hardships did not daunt him.

"So long as I have food to eat and raiment to wear, I care for no hardship, so as I may become a scholar," he said. "And can I, reverend Father, rise to the dignity of a master, if I do not likewise take the vows of the Church upon me?"

"Ay, truly thou canst," was the reply. "There are the scholastic *Trivium* of grammar, logic, rhetoric, and the mathematical *Quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. These

form the magic circle of the arts, of which thou mayest become a master without taking any vow to Holy Church. Yet methinks thou wouldest do well to wear the tonsure and the gown, that thou mayest in all quarrels or troubles have the right to claim the benefit of clergy, and so escape from the secular arm if it were stretched out against thee. This is the usual custom of clerks at Oxford and Cambridge. But it commits thee to nought, if thou art not willing to join thyself to any of our brotherhoods."

The Prior eyed him kindly, but Father Ambrose sighed, and Leofric himself felt a qualm of shame at his own distaste for the life of the cloister.

"The wish, the call, may come perchance," he answered humbly, glancing from one to the other; "but methinks I am not fit for the life of holy meditation, or surely the kindness I have here received would have inclined mine heart that way."

"Thou art still too young to take such vows upon thyself," said the Prior. "It is men who come to us awearied of the evils and strife of the world that know the blessedness of the cloistered life. Thou mayest learn that lesson in time; or thou mayest link thy lot with that of these wandering friars, who teach men that they have found the more acceptable way. For myself, I have found the place of rest, and I desire to end my days here in peace."

"And how may I journey from here to Oxford?" asked Leofric with some timidity, after a short silence. "Surely the way is long; and I have never fared farther than Coventry, which place I thought to make my home, if I could but find a master who would receive me as apprentice."

The Prior pondered awhile before replying.

"There be two ways of journeying – by land and by water," he replied; "if by land, thou wouldest have to beg thy way from place to place. At some hostel they would give thee bed and board, most like, if thou wouldest make them merry by a song; or at some great house, if thou couldst recite a ballad or speak a Latin grace. At the Monasteries thou wouldest receive food and bed, and mayhap an alms to help thee on thy way. Many a clerk begs his way to Oxford year by year, and is well received of all. Yet the perils of the way are many and great through the forests which lie betwixt thee and thy goal. It might be that the water way would be the better."

"I love the water," said Leofric eagerly; "and my little canoe lies beneath the bank under the alder clump. I have made many a miniature voyage in her before. Methinks she would carry me safely did I but know the way."

"And the way thou canst not miss," answered the Prior. "This little stream which flows past our walls joins itself, as thou dost know, to the wider Avon, which presently flows into a river men call the Cherwell, and in its turn that doth make junction with the Isis, whereon the town of Oxford is situate. This junction is hard by the town itself; when thou dost reach that, thy journey will have an end."

Leofric listened eagerly. He had heard, indeed, of these things, but hitherto they had been but names to him. Now it seemed as though the great unknown world, lying without the circle of his daily life, were about to open before him.

"I would fain try the water way," he said. "I am skilful with the paddle; and I can carry my little craft upon my back whenever rocks and rapids impede my progress. The season is favourable for the journey. The ice and snow are gone. There is a good depth of water in all the streams, and yet the weed and slime of summer and autumn have not begun to appear; nor will the overarching boughs from the trees hinder progress as they do when clad in their summer bravery. I love the river in the early spring, and if I do but follow the course of the stream I cannot miss my way, as I might well do upon the road in the great forest tracks."

"Yes, that is very true. Methinks thou wilt be safer so, if thou canst find sustenance upon the way. But thou canst carry with thee some provision of bread, and there be several godly houses beside the river where thou wilt be welcomed by the brothers, who will supply thy needs. Take, too, thy bow and arrows; thou wilt doubtless thus secure some game by the way. But have a care in the King's forests around Oxford how thou dost let fly thy shafts. Many a man has lost his life ere now for piercing the side of some fat buck."

Leofric's heart was now all on fire for the journey which lay before him. He could scarcely believe that but one short hour ago he had believed himself hopelessly doomed to a life of uncongenial toil. He had never thought of this student life – he hardly knew of its existence; but the Prior of the Monastery and some of the monks, who had known and befriended both Leofric and his father, had themselves discussed several times the question of dispatching the youth to Oxford for tuition; and the rather unexpected death of the father, after a lingering illness, seemed to open the way for the furtherance of this design.

Leofric had been the pet of the Monastery from his childhood. Always of a studious turn, and eager for information, it had been the favourite relaxation of several of the monks to instruct him in the Latin tongue, to teach him the art of penmanship, and even to initiate him into some of the mysteries of that wonderful illumination of parchments which was the secret of the monks in the Middle Ages.

Leofric profited by every opportunity afforded him. Already he could both speak and understand Latin easily. He had a very fair knowledge of certain portions of the Scriptures, and possessed a breviary of his own, which he regarded as his greatest treasure. For the age in which he lived these were accomplishments of no mean order, and it would have seemed to the ecclesiastics little short of a disgrace to them had they permitted their pupil to lose his scholarship in some craftsman's shop. They had frequently spoken of sending him as a clerk to Oxford, unless he could see his way to becoming one of themselves. This, however, was not to be. The boy, though reverent and devout, had no leanings after the life of the cloister, and the Prior was too wise a man to put pressure upon him. But he was willing to forward, by such means as he could, any project which should secure to Leofric the advantages of a liberal education.

So the lad was bidden to remain a guest of the Monastery for the few days necessary to his simple preparations. The Prior wished him to be provided with a habit suitable to his condition of clerk. This habit was made of a strong sort of cloth, and reached to the knees, being confined at the waist by a leather girdle. He was also provided with a change of under-raiment, with strong leggings and shoes, and with a supply of coarse bread and salted meat sufficient for several days. The Prior wrote a letter to the Abbot of Osney, recommending the lad to his favourable notice, and asking for him a place in the *Domus Dei*, should no better lodging be obtainable.

Leofric himself spent his time in the mending of his canoe, which had been somewhat battered by the winter storms. He had made the little craft out of the bark of trees, and had covered it with pitch to make it waterproof. Some story he had heard about wild men in unknown lands had given him the idea of constructing this little boat, and now it seemed as though it would be of real service to him in his new career.

Father Ambrose would sit beside him on the river bank, and talk to him as he prosecuted this task. There was a strong bond of affection between the old monk and the young lad.

"Thou wilt come back some day and see us, Leofric," he said once, as the task drew near to its accomplishment; "I would fain look again upon thy face before I die."

"Indeed I will, father. I too shall always love this place, and shall never forget the kindness I have received, nor how these many days masses have been said for my father, and never a penny paid by me, albeit I would gladly give my all."

"Nay, nay, boy, it is a labour of love; and we know that thou wilt some day, when thou art rich and famous, give of thine abundance to our shrine here. Thou wilt see strange things in the great world, my son. Thou wilt see the great ones of the earth rising up against their anointed King, and that King taking vows upon his lips which he has neither the wish nor the intention to fulfil. The world is full of terrible things, and thou wilt quickly see many of them. Yet keep through all a pure heart and clean hands, so will God love thee, be thy path what it will."

Leofric looked up quickly.

"I have heard somewhat from time to time of the feud betwixt the King and the Barons; but to me such tales are but as idle words. I know not what men mean."

"Thou wilt know more anon," answered the monk gravely. "We have heard from those who pass to and fro that times are dangerous, and men's minds full of doubt and fear. I know not what may betide this land, but there be those who say that the sword will ere long be unsheathed, and that brother will war against brother as it hath not been seen for many a long day. God forbid that such things should be!"

"And will such strife come nigh to Oxford?" asked Leofric. "Shall we hear ought there of the battle and the turmoil?"

"I trow well that ye will. Knowest thou not that the King hath a palace close by the walls of the city, and another but a few leagues away? Methinks that in yon city there will be much strife of tongues anent these burning questions of which we scarce hear a whisper. Thou must seek to be guided aright, my son; for youth is ever hot-headed, and like to be carried away by rash counsels. It is a grievous thing for a nation to rise against its anointed head; and yet, even as Saul was set aside by God, and another put in his place, we may not always say that a King can do no wrong – albeit we must be very slow to judge and condemn him."

Leofric listened eagerly. Every day of late he had heard words which roused within him the knowledge that beyond the peaceful circle of his past life lay a seething world into which he was shortly to plunge. The thought filled him with eager longings and desires. He wanted to shoot forth in his tiny craft and see this world for himself. And, behold, to-day his task was finished, and the Prior had ordained that at dawn upon the morrow he should go.

His habit and provision were already packed and stowed away. He had received his letter and messages, and had listened in meek silence to the admonitions and instructions of the Prior. He had slept his last night beneath the hospitable Monastery roof, and had heard mass for the last time in the grey dawning.

Now he stood with one foot in his little craft, pressing the hand of Father Ambrose, and looking round at the familiar faces and buildings with smiles and tears struggling for mastery in his face.

Then the canoe shot out into the midst of the stream.

His voyage was begun.

## CHAPTER II

### *A RIVER JOURNEY*

It was no light task that Leofric had set himself. The river wound in and out through forest tracts hardly ever traversed. Trees blown down in winter storms lay right athwart the stream. *Débris* brought down from above was often packed tight against such obstructions; and then there was no way of proceeding save by dragging up the canoe out of the water and launching it again lower down. As the forest was often very thick and tangled along the banks of the river, this was no light matter, and had Leofric not been gifted with a strong will and a very resolute purpose, he might well have given up in despair.

As it was, he found travelling a great deal slower work than he had anticipated, and already his store of provision was greatly diminished, although he could not flatter himself that he had travelled any very great distance. He was sometimes disposed to doubt whether, after all, he had been wise in choosing the waterway in preference to the road.

Night was falling, and it looked as though rain was likely to come on at moonrise. The clouds were sullen and lowering; the wind moaned and whistled through the trees, and lashed the water into angry little wavelets. Leofric was feeling weary and a little depressed by the intense loneliness of his voyage, when suddenly he heard himself hailed by a friendly voice from somewhere out of the thicket.

"Whither away, good friend, and why art thou afloat and alone at this hour of the evening? What dost thou in yon frail craft out on the darkling river?"

Leofric looked eagerly about him, and espied, not far away, a ruddy-faced youth of about his own age, sitting beside the water fishing, with a basket at his side that showed he had not thus sat in vain. With a few strokes of his paddle he brought himself alongside the bank. The sound of a human voice was as music to his ears after the long silence of the forest.

"Good-even, good comrade," he answered, stepping lightly ashore; "and welcome indeed is thy friendly voice. For four days have I been alone upon this river, and the sight of a kindly face is like a draught of new wine."

"But what dost thou alone upon the river?"

"Marry, that is soon told. I am a poor lad who would fain become a clerk, and I am on my way to Oxford, there to seek to maintain myself whilst I study the arts and win my way to a livelihood – "

Hardly had he got out these words before the other youth sprang to his feet with a whoop of joy, and to Leofric's astonishment flung his arms about his neck, and fairly danced in the exuberance of his delight.

"Now, what ails thee?" he asked, half amused, half bewildered. "Hast thou taken leave of thy senses, good friend?"

"Thou mayest well ask – methinks it must even seem so; but listen, fair youth, and soon shalt thou understand. I am the son of a farmer, but I, too, have a great longing after letters. I have heard of this same city of learning, and I have begged and prayed of my father, who has many other sons, to let me fare forth and find my way thither, and climb the tree of learning. At first he listened not, but laughed aloud, as did my brothers. But my mother took my part, and I learned to read last winter at the Monastery, and the kindly fathers spoke well of my progress. Through these winter days I have gone daily thither, taking an offering of fish, and receiving instruction from them – "

"That is how I obtained such learning as I possess," interposed Leofric eagerly; "and my father taught me too, for he was a scholar of no mean attainments. But it is the monks who possess the books and parchments."

"Yea, verily; and these last weeks I have mastered in some poor sort the art of penmanship. And now my father has almost consented to letting me go. Only he has said that I must wait until

chance shall send me a companion for the way. From time to time there pass by clerks and scholars returning to Oxford after an absence, or making their way thither, even as thou art doing; and my father has promised that I may join myself to the next of these who shall pass by. Now thou dost understand why I did so embrace thee. For if thou wilt have me for a travelling companion, we may e'en start forth to-morrow, and find ourselves in Oxford ere another week be passed."

No proposition could have been more welcome to Leofric. He had had enough of loneliness, and this sturdy farmer's son would be the best possible comrade for him. He was delighted at the notion. His canoe would carry the double burden, and the fatigues of navigation would be greatly lessened when shared between two.

"Come up to the farm with me," cried his new friend, "and there will be bed and board and a hearty welcome for thee; thou shalt find there a better lodging than in some hollow tree by the river-banks; and my mother will give us provision enow ere we start forth upon our voyage to-morrow."

Leofric was grateful indeed for this invitation. He made fast his canoe, saw that his few possessions were safely protected from a possible wetting, and followed his new friend along the narrow winding track which led from the river-side to the clearing round the farmstead.

On the way he learned that his companion's name was John Dugdale – commonly called Jack. The farm where he had lived all his life was situated not more than five miles from the town of Banbury. Jack had plainly heard more of the news of the world than had reached Leofric in his quiet home on the upper river. Something of the stir and strife that was agitating the kingdom had penetrated even to this lonely farm.

The great Earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort, had passed through Banbury on his way from Kenilworth to London, not long ago. There was a great stir amongst the people, Jack told Leofric, and men spoke of the Earl as a saviour and deliverer, and he was received with something very like royal honours when he appeared. Leofric asked what it was from which he was to deliver the people, and Jack was not altogether clear as to this; but it had something to do with the exactions of the King and the Pope; and he was almost certain that the clergy themselves were as angry with the King as the Barons could be. He had heard it said that half the revenue of the realm was being taken to enrich the coffers of the Pope, or to aid him in his wars. More than that Jack could not say, rumours of so many kinds being afloat.

"But let us once get to Oxford, good comrade, and we shall soon learn all this, and many another thing besides. I want to know what the world is saying and thinking. I am weary of being stranded here like a leaf that has floated into some backwater and cannot find the channel again. I want to know these things; and if there be stirring times to come for this land, as many men say there will, I would be in the forefront of it all. I would wield the sword as well as the pen."

This was a new idea to Leofric, who had contented himself hitherto with dreams of scholastic distinction, without considering those other matters which were exercising the ruling spirits of his day. Jack's words, however, brought home to him the consciousness that there would be other matters of interest to engross him, once let him enter upon the life of a rising city. Oxford could not but be a centre of vitality for the whole kingdom. Once let him win his way within those walls, and a new world would open before his eyes.

Talking eagerly together, the lads pursued their way through the forest path, and suddenly emerged upon the clearing where the farmhouse stood. Lights shone hospitably from door and window; a barking of dogs gave a welcome to the son of the house; and Leofric speedily found himself pushed within a great raftered kitchen, lighted by the blaze of a goodly fire of logs, where he was quickly surrounded by friendly faces, and welcomed heartily, even before Jack had told all his tale and explained who the stranger was.

The Dugdales were honest farmer folks, always glad to welcome a passing stranger, and to hear any item of news he might come furnished with. Leofric had little enough of this commodity; but the fact that he was making his way to Oxford as a prospective clerk there was a matter of much

interest to this household. Farmer Dugdale was a man of his word. He had promised Jack to let him go so soon as he should find a companion to travel with. He would have preferred as companion one who had had previous experience of University life; but he would not go back on his word on that account. Leofric's handsome and open face and winning manner gained him the good-will of all at the farm: they pressed him to remain their guest for a few days, whilst Jack's mother made her simple preparations for sending out her boy into the world for an indefinite time, and the two companions learned to know each other better.

Leofric was willing enough to do this. He was very happy amongst these hearty, homely people, and became attached to all of them, especially to Jack. Together they strengthened the canoe, made a locker in which to stow away sufficient provision for the journey, and a second paddle for Jack to wield, which he quickly learned to do with skill and address.

Jack's mother took Leofric to her motherly heart at once, and she made sundry additions to his scanty stock of clothing, seeing that his equipment equalled that of her own son. It was little enough when all was said and done; for times were simple, and luxuries unknown and undreamed of, save in the houses of great nobles. The boys felt rich indeed as they beheld their outfits made ready for them, and there was quite a feast held in their honour upon the last evening ere they launched forth upon their long journey.

Happy as Leofric had been at the farm, he was still conscious of a thrill of pleasure when he and Jack dipped their paddles and set forth upon their journey together. The Dugdale family, assembled on the banks, gave them a hearty cheer. They answered by an eager hurrah, and then, shooting round a bend in the stream, they found themselves alone on the sparkling waterway.

To Leofric this voyage was very different from the last. There were the same obstacles and difficulties to be overcome, but these seemed small now that they were shared between two. Jack was strong, patient, and merry. He made light of troubles and laughed at mishaps. They fared sumptuously from the well-stocked larder of the farm, and the weather was warm and sunny. To make a bed of leaves in some hollow tree, and bathe in the clear, cold river on awaking, was no hardship to either lad. They declared they did not mind how long the journey lasted, save for the natural impatience of youth to arrive at a given destination.

"And I should like an adventure," quoth Jack, "ere we sight the walls and towers of Oxford Castle. Men talk of the perils of travel; but, certes, we have seen nothing of them. I've had more adventure tackling a great pike in the stream at home sometimes than we have seen so far."

Nevertheless Jack was to have his wish, and the travellers were to meet with an adventure before they reached their journey's end.

It came about in this wise.

They knew that they must be drawing near their journey's end. They had been told by a woodman, whose hut had given them shelter upon the last night, that the forest and palace of Woodstock were near at hand. They wanted to get a view of that royal residence. So upon the day following they halted soon after mid-day, and leaving their canoe securely hidden in some drooping alder bushes, they struck away along a forest track described to them by the woodman, which would, if rightly followed, conduct them to a hill from whence a view could be obtained of the palace.

Walking was tedious and difficult, and they often lost their way in the intricacies of the forest; but still they persevered, and were rewarded at last by a partial view of the place, which was a finer building than either of the lads had ever seen before. But the sun was getting low in the sky by this time, and they had still to make their way back to their boat, unless they were to sleep supperless in the forest; so they did not linger long upon the brow of the hill, but quickly retraced their steps through the forest, trying to keep at least in the right direction, even though they might miss the actual path by which they had come.

Suddenly they became aware of a tumult going on in a thicket not very far away. They heard the sound of blows, of cries and shouts – then of oaths and more blows. Plainly there was a fight going on

somewhere close at hand, and equally plain was it that travellers were being robbed and maltreated by some forest ruffians, of whom there were always a number in all the royal forests, where fat bucks might chance to be shot, undetected by the king's huntsmen.

The lads had both cut themselves stout staffs to beat down the obstructions in the path. Now they grasped their cudgels tightly in their hands and looked at each other.

"Let us to the rescue!" quoth Jack, between his clenched teeth. "I can never hear the sound of blows without longing to be in the thick of the fray. Like enough in the gathering shades the assailants will think we be a larger party, and will make off. Be that as it may, let us lend our aid whilst it may serve those in distress."

Leofric nodded, grasping his staff firmly in his hand. He had all the courage of a highly-strung nature, even if he lacked Jack's physical vigour.

Springing through the leafy glades of the forest, they soon came upon the scene of the encounter, and easy was it to see that robbery and spoliation was the object of the attack.

Four stalwart young men, wild and dishevelled of aspect, armed with stout cudgels and bows and arrows, had set upon two travellers, whose clothes denoted them to be men of substance. They had been overpowered by their assailants, though plainly not till a severe struggle had taken place. Both were now lying upon the ground, overmastered each by a pair of strong knaves; and in spite of their cries and struggles, it was plain that these sturdy robbers were rifling them of such valuables as they possessed.

Jack took in the situation at a glance. With a yell of defiance he sprang upon the nearest rogue, and hurled him backwards with such right good will that he reeled heavily against a tree trunk, and fell prostrate, half stunned. In a second the traveller had wrenched himself free from the other assailant, and had dealt him such a sounding blow across the pate (he having laid aside his stick in order the better to plunder) that he measured his length upon the turf, and lay motionless; whilst the other pair of bandits, who had been belaboured by Leofric, seeing that they were now overpowered and in no small danger of capture, flung down their booty and made off to the woods, dragging their helpless comrade with them.

It was no part of the travellers' plan to take into custody these knaves, and they made no attempt to detain them, glad enough to see them make off in the darkening forest. But they turned to their preservers with words of warm gratitude, and showed how narrowly they had escaped being mulcted of rather large sums of money; for one had a belt into which many broad gold pieces had been sewn, and the purse of the other was heavy and well plenished.

"We are travelling to Oxford," said he of the belt. "We joined for a time the convoy of one of the 'fetchers,' conveying young lads and poor clerks thither. But as we neared the place we grew impatient at the thought of another night's halt, and thought we would strike across the forest ourselves, and reach our goal soon after sundown. But we missed our way, and these fellows set upon us. It is a trade with some lewd fellows calling themselves clerks, and often pleading benefit of clergy if caught, to infest these woods, and fall upon scholars returning to the University, and rob them of such moneys as they bear upon their persons."

Leofric's eyes were wide with amaze.

"Surely those fellows were not clerks from Oxford?"

"Like enow they were. There be a strange medley of folks calling themselves by that name that frequent the streets and lanes of the city, or congregate without the walls in hovels and booths. Some of these, having neither means to live nor such characters as render them fit subjects to be helped from any of the chests, take to the woods for a livelihood, shooting the King's bucks or falling unawares upon travellers. Some clerks run to the woods for refuge after some wild outbreak of lawlessness. There be many wild, lawless knaves habited in the gown of the clerk and wearing the tonsure. Are ye twain from Oxford yourselves, or bound thither, since ye seem little acquaint with the ways of the place?"

Explanations were quickly made, and the two elder youths, who might have been eighteen and nineteen years old perhaps, suggested that they should finish the journey together on foot, lading themselves with the contents of the canoe, but leaving it behind in the alders, to be fetched away some other time if wanted. They were near to the river by this time, and the lads quickly fetched their goods, glad enough to travel into the city in company with two comrades who plainly knew the place and the life right well.

They were very open about themselves. The name of one was Hugh le Barbier, and he was the son of an esquire who held a post in the house of one of the retainers of the Earl of Leicester – "the great De Montfort," as the youth proudly dubbed him. His companion was Gilbert Barbeck, son of a rich merchant. His home was in the south of England, but he had been travelling with Hugh, during an interlude in their studies. In those days regular vacations were unknown. Men might stay for years at the University, hearing lectures all the time through; or they might betake themselves elsewhere, and return again and resume their studies, without reproof. The collegiate system was as yet unknown, though its infancy dates from a period only a little later. But there was a Chancellor of the University (if such it could be called), and learned men from all lands had congregated there; lectures in Arts and also in the sciences were regularly given, and degrees could be taken by those who could satisfy the authorities that they had been through the appointed courses of lectures, and were competent in their turn to teach.

The religious houses had been the pioneers in this movement, but now there was a reaction in favour of more secular teaching. The monks had some ado to hold their own, and obtain as many privileges as were accorded to others; and friction was constantly arising.

Moreover the recent migration of friars to Oxford had struck another blow at the older monastic system. The personal sanctity of many of these men, their self-denying life, their powers of preaching, the strictness with which they kept their vows, all served to produce a deep impression upon the minds of those who had grown weary of the arrogance of the Priors and Abbots.

The Grey Friars in particular, followers of St. Francis, were universally beloved and esteemed. They went about barefoot; they would scarce receive alms in money; their buildings were of the poorest and roughest, and were situated in the lowest parts of the town. They busied themselves amongst the sick and destitute; they lived lives of self-denial and toil. The favour of princes had not corrupted them, and the highest powers of the land spoke well of them.

Hugh told all this to his comrades as they walked through the darkening forest. He was plainly a youth of good parts and gentle blood, and he seemed taken by Leofric's refined appearance and thoughtful face.

"I would not go to Osney, or live in the Domus Dei there," he said. "Thou hast saved me the loss of all my wealth; it would go hard if thou wouldst not accept the loan of a few gold pieces, enough to establish thyself in some modest lodging in the town, or even in one of the empty niches upon the walls, where clerks have made shift to dwell ere now. Out beyond the walls, shut up on the island of Osney, away from all the bustle and roistering and tumult of the town, it scarce seems life at all; and methinks the monks will get hold of thee, and win thee to be one of themselves. Better, far better, be one of us in the town. Then wilt thou see all that is to be seen, and learn far more, too, than thou wilt in the schools of the monks."

Leofric listened eagerly to this advice.

"Is Osney then without the walls?"

"Ay verily, on one of the many islands that the river makes in its windings. Oxford itself is little more than an island, for that matter, since the city ditch has been dug on the north side of it. But within the city there is life and stir and stress, and all the Halls where the students lodge are there, and the lodgings amongst the townfolks which some prefer. Come and belong to us, not to the monks. So wilt thou learn the more, and enjoy life as thou couldst not do cooped up on yon damp island in the Domus Dei?"

"I would fain do so," answered Leofric readily. "I have no desire for a monkish life. I would see what life is like without the cloister wall. But I have little money; I love not debts – "

"Tush! be not over scrupulous. Thou hast done me one good turn; I claim right to do thee another. Now no more of that. Let us put our best foot forward; for it will be dark ere we reach our destination. Perchance we may yet have to camp once more in the woods; for if the city gates be locked, we may have some trouble in getting admitted. The townsmen, albeit they live and thrive by them, love not the clerks. They will do us a bad turn an they can; yet methinks we are even with them, take one thing with another!"

Hugh showed his teeth in a flashing smile, and Gilbert laughed aloud. Then the party strode on through the darkness, till they paused by common consent to light a fire and camp for the night in company – it being plain by this time that they could not enter Oxford that night.

## CHAPTER III

### *OLD OXFORD*

With glowing cheeks and beating hearts, Leofric Wyvill and Jack Dugdale beheld the walls of Oxford towering above them in the clear morning sunlight.

For many long hours during the previous night had the four travellers sat over their camp fire, listening and telling of the life of the mediaeval University city. Already Leofric and Jack felt a thrill of pride in the thought that they were to be numbered amongst its sons; already they had wellnigh made up their minds that they would set up together in some nook or turret in the city walls, make a sort of eury there for themselves, and live frugally upon the small sum of money they possessed, until they were able to earn something towards their own maintenance, or could borrow from one of the "chests" provided for the benefit of poor students.

Hugh had carried his point, and Leofric's purse now held a few gold pieces as well as his own small store of silver. By the exercise of economy the two friends would be able to live in modest comfort for a considerable time, and Leofric, at least, hoped before long to earn money by his penmanship and talent in illuminating parchments.

They knew by this time where their new comrades lived. Gilbert had a lodging with an honest citizen of the name of Seaton, who kept a shop hard by Carfax, and sold provisions of all sorts to clerks and others. He was one of the burgher class, who contrived to keep on good terms both with the scholars and his fellow-citizens, and in the frequent collisions between "town and gown" – to borrow the modern phrase – he stood good-humouredly aloof, and would not take sides in any dispute.

Hugh lived in one of the many Halls which had sprung up within the city walls. These were not collegiate institutions, but were merely places of abode, hired perhaps by a number of clerks collectively, perhaps by some master, who received inmates as boarders. They lived in these houses, and took their meals there – everything being of the roughest and simplest description – and attended lectures in the different schools according to their own fancy. Some of the richer students enlisted the services of a tutor; but many lived a free and lawless existence, learning almost nothing, frequenting lecture just for the fashion of the thing, but making no progress in scholarship, and spending the best part of the day in amusement or fighting.

In the schools attached to the religious houses there was more order, more comfort, and more decency of life than in these self-constituted Halls; but amongst such clerks as had no leaning towards the religious life there was a strong feeling of preference for simply secular abodes; and there were difficulties between the monks and the University authorities with reference to the course in Arts which held back many from attaching themselves to the monastic schools.

All this Leofric and Jack had been told with more or less of detail, and already Leofric was resolved against settling himself upon Osney Island, in the *Domus Dei* there. He would present his letter to the Abbot, but not until he had made a nook for himself somewhere else. Gilbert declared that he knew of a little turret in the city wall, not far from Smith Gate, in which two students had lived for a considerable time. If it were empty, they could take possession of it, and by the expenditure of a little money and ingenuity could transform it into quite a respectable living-chamber for themselves. Many a poor clerk had inhabited a chamber of that sort before, and Jack and Leofric secretly thought that they should prefer the quiet life on the wall to the noise and confusion which plainly too often reigned in the various Halls.

"We will go in by Smith Gate, and see if the turret be empty," said Gilbert; "if so, these lads can take possession forthwith, and we will show them where they can provide themselves with such things as be needful for them."

They were nearing the city by now. Already there had spread beyond the walls a certain number of Halls and other buildings. The Church of St. Mary Magdalene and the colony of the Austin Friars were without the wall on the northern side, and a few Halls had sprung up along Horsemonger Street, as it was then called, which was on the north side of the city ditch, where Broad Street now runs.

The Austin Friars were only just beginning to appear in Oxford; but the Black, White, and Grey Friars had already obtained a footing in the city. As the travellers approached the gate, they saw the cowed figures flitting about, some with black habits over their long white under-dress, some with a simple gown of grey or brown, bound with a cord at the waist. These latter, who all (save the old and infirm) went barefoot, were the Franciscans or Minorites – the Grey Friars of whom the lads had heard; and they regarded them with curiosity and veneration, believing them to be full of sanctity and virtue.

Out through the gate, just as the youths approached it, came a couple of Masters in their gowns and hoods. Leofric and Jack scanned them curiously, and eagerly inquired of their companions who they were.

"Nay, I know not the names of all the Masters in the city," answered Hugh, laughing; "there be too many for that. Belike they have been lecturing in School Street this forenoon, and are going back to their Halls. Some of these same Masters will like enough come and invite you twain to attend their lectures; but give not too ready an answer to the first who asks. Rather visit several and pick out those who please you most. It is oft the poorest and least learned who are most eager for listeners, the better sort having always their lecture-rooms full."

And now they were actually within the city precincts. Smith Gate being so close to School Street, the eager eyes of the two new-comers were immediately gratified by the sight of many hurrying figures of clerks and Bachelors and Masters, some going this way and some the other, talking earnestly together, disputing with some warmth and eloquence, or singing snatches of songs, like boys released from school.

It was not easy for unaccustomed eyes to distinguish the rank of the various passers-by; for academic dress was still in its infancy, and there were few, if any, statutory rules respecting it. The habit of the clerk was very much what he wore at home, and the black cappa of Bachelor or Master was often the same, though Masters were beginning to wear the square, tufted cap, and had the right to the miniver hood of the nobles and beneficed ecclesiastics. The scarlet gown of the Doctor had just come into use, but was at present seldom seen, as many were unable to purchase so costly a robe. The most common garment for every person in the University was the "tabard" with the girdle, and these tabards might be either red, black, or green; but black was the commonest colour, as being the most serviceable in daily wear.

Fain would the lads have lingered to watch the shifting throng of clerks and their preceptors, as they streamed out from the lecture-rooms for the mid-day meal; but Hugh and Gilbert laughed at their eager curiosity, and drew them along to the left down Hammer Hall Lane, pausing suddenly upon reaching a small turret in the wall, which once had been open to the street, but was now closed in by a few mouldering boards.

"Good!" cried Gilbert, as he pulled aside one of the boards; "the place has not been taken. Now look well at it, you two, and see if you think you can make shift to live here till a better place offers."

Pushing their way within the circular recess, the lads saw that a rude stairway led up to some sort of chamber overhead. Mounting the rickety steps with care – for they had become loose and rotten – they found themselves in a small and not unpleasing little chamber, lighted by several long, narrow loopholes, and roofed in securely from the weather overhead.

The flooring was rather decayed, and there was a mouldering smell pervading the place; but its former occupants had done various things to render habitation possible. A fireplace and chimney had been contrived in one corner, and some rude shutters had been affixed to keep out the cold air at night, or in inclement weather. A rickety shelf that would serve as a table still hung drooping from

its nail. Plainly the place had been lived in before, and might well be again. Leofric and Jack looked round it, and smiled at one another.

"We could live here like princes, if there be nothing to hinder," said the latter. "Can we come and fix our abode here without making payment to any one?"

"Marry yes, since nobody uses the place. There be many such nooks along the walls, and poor clerks have settled themselves there again and again, no man saying them nay. In times of war they might post archers or marksmen at these loopholes; but short of a siege, I trow none will disturb you. And from without ye can climb easily upon the wall, and enjoy the air and watch what goes on beneath. Also there be the Fish Ponds just below, and I warrant ye will catch many a good supper from thence when ye be in need of a good meal."

Jack laughed, for he had no small skill as a fisherman; but just now he was all agog to see Oxford and settle into these new quarters.

"Had I but a few tools and some boards, I would fix us up bench and table, mend the stairs and the floor, and make the place as comfortable as heart could wish," he cried.

"And I would gather rushes for the floor, and wood for the fire, and we should feast right royally on the last of the provisions we laid up for the way," added Leofric.

"Then come away to Carfax, where ye can lay in such stores as ye need," cried Gilbert. "I will take you to honest Master Seaton, where I have always lodged. He will tell you where to go for all ye need, and the right price to pay: for there be dealers in the city who seek to mulct clerks and scholars, and charge them more than the fair price for goods; and the Chancellor, and even his Majesty the King, have had to interpose."

"What is Carfax?" asked Leofric, as, after depositing their goods carefully in the turret, they replaced the boards and sallied forth once more.

"Why, the meeting of the four great streets of the town – Quatrevois some folks call it – where High Street, Great Bayly Street, Fish Street, and North Gate Street all meet. St. Martin's Church is there with its great bell, and whenever there be strife 'twixt citizens and clerks, that bell booms out to gather the citizens together; whilst our rallying-point is St. Mary's, whose bell rings to warn us that they are rising against us. At other times Carfax is the chief mart of the city, and the bull-ring stands in the centre. But come, and thou shalt see for thyself; and good Master Seaton will give us all some dinner, I trow."

Gilbert led the way, and the rest followed him willingly. The streets had thinned considerably, the noontide hour having driven in clerks and masters alike to their dinner. Gilbert strode down Cat Street, and pointed out to his comrades several Halls situated there, and sounds of laughter and loud talking and jesting broke upon the ears of the passers-by, plainly indicating the proximity of considerable numbers of inhabitants.

"That was the Hall where I lived last," observed Hugh, as he pointed to a house, somewhat better than the rest, on the left-hand side as they walked down Cat Street. "Corbett's Hall it was then called; and the Master was an excellent man. I heard he was about to go elsewhere; probably I shall find a new head by now. But I will not pause there now; I will wait till the fetcher has brought in my goods and chattels. I will come with you to Carfax, and pay my respects to good Master Seaton first."

So on went the four, the pair who had never before seen a town gazing with wonder at the quaint-timbered houses on either side the street, whose projecting upper floors seemed almost to meet overhead. There was no footpath or paving of any sort; the roadway was but a track, deep in mud in winter, and in dust in summer. St. Mark's Church at the corner, where they turned into High Street, brought Leofric to a standstill, for such edifices were new to him; but his companions laughed and hurried him on, telling him he could drink his fill of churches in Oxford any day he chose, but that Master Seaton's dinner would not wait for his leisure.

On they went along this wider thoroughfare, not pausing to examine anything in detail, but taking in the general effect of a populated city, which was immensely wonderful to the two lads from the country, till Gilbert pointed to a tall tower standing out against the sunny sky, and said, —

"Yon is St. Martin's Church, and this is Carfax."

It was, as he had said before, just a meeting of the ways, but such a sight as it presented Leofric and Jack had never dreamed of. The open place seemed full of people: there were stalls on which merchandise of all sorts was being vended; loud-voiced salesmen were crying their wares, or chaffering over bargains with customers. There were shops, with signs swinging over them, that displayed a better sort of ware; and lads of all ages, from thirteen upwards, in the tabard of clerks, were strolling about, buying or examining goods, or exchanging a rough sort of banter with the townsmen. A few Masters or Bachelors would be seen threading their way through the crowd, but they did not often linger to speak to any; it was the clerks who seemed to have all the leisure, and some of these were playing games or throwing dice, whilst others looked on, encouraging or jibing the players.

"Heed not that rabble rout," said Gilbert, forcing his way towards a rather fine-timbered house at the corner, where Fish and High Streets joined; "come to Master Seaton's house, and let us hear all the news."

Gilbert led the way into a shop, where he was greeted somewhat boisterously by a merry-looking youth behind the counter. He nodded a reply, and pushed open a door which gave access to a steep and narrow staircase, and after ascending this he opened another door, and instantly a number of voices were raised in welcome and greeting.

Gilbert and Hugh pushed into the room from whence these sounds issued, whilst Leofric and Jack stood together just on the threshold, gazing about them with curious eyes.

They saw before them a quaint, pleasant room, rush-strewn, and plainly furnished with table and benches, in which a party of six was gathered, seated round the board, which was hospitably spread with solid viands.

The master of the house was easily distinguished by his air of authority and his general appearance. His wife was a comely dame, ruddy of face and kindly of aspect. On either side of her sat a pretty maiden, one of sixteen, another of fourteen summers; and the good-looking, strapping youth, who was now greeting Gilbert and Hugh right eagerly, was very plainly the son of the house. An apprentice looked on wide-eyed and silent at the apparition of four strangers; yet it was plain that neither Gilbert nor Hugh were so regarded in the Seaton household.

Not only were they joyfully received themselves, but their two comrades quickly shared in the hospitable welcome. They were placed at the table, their trenchers were heaped with good food, and the story of the encounter in the forest was eagerly listened to by all.

"There be many poor rogues who have taken to the forest in these times of scarcity," said Hal Seaton, the son. "The harvests have been bad, and prices have been raised; and the idle and prodigal have had much ado to keep body and soul together. Sometimes they take to theft and pillage, and then flee to the forest for safety; and some go thither in the hope of killing a fine buck unseen by the huntsmen, or to rob unwary travellers, especially those that be coming with full purses to pursue their studies here."

"Ay, and there be some that think there will be fighting ere long 'twixt his Majesty the King and the Barons," added Seaton himself gravely. "Heaven send such a thing come not to pass! It is ill work when brother takes up arms against brother, and city against city."

The youths would willingly have asked more of the state of parties at this stirring season, but just now personal matters were of more pressing importance. So they left politics for another time, and told about the turret hard by Smith Gate, where Leofric and Jack were about to ensconce themselves; and Hal begged a half-holiday from his duties in the shop, that he might take his tools, and some odds and ends of planks lying about in the workshop behind, and help the lads to settle themselves in.

This was willingly accorded, and Master Seaton and his wife both showed great kindness to the would-be clerks. The former unearthed from his stores some strong sacking fashioned into huge bags, that, stuffed with straw or dead leaves, did excellently for bedding; and the latter put up in a basket a liberal supply of food from her well-stocked larder, for her motherly heart went out towards the two lonely lads, coming to settle in a strange city, knowing nothing of the life before them. Leofric's blue eyes and gentle manners won her affections from the first, and no one could help liking honest Jack, who was so merry and so full of hope and courage.

Laden with a number of useful odds and ends, the little party made their way back to the turret chamber; and soon the sound of hammer, chisel, and saw spoke of rapid advance in the necessary work.

Leofric crossed the river again to gather dead leaves and bracken for bedding, wood for firing, and rushes for the floor. By the time he had collected and brought in sufficient stores, the work overhead had rapidly progressed, and he uttered an exclamation of delighted astonishment as he beheld the result of the afternoons toil.

The stairs and flooring were mended, rudely, to be sure, but strongly. Something like a fastening had been contrived to the lower entrance, so that they could use the basement of the turret as a storehouse for wood and other odds and ends. Up above, the little chamber began to look quite comfortable. The holes in the masonry had been filled up with mortar or patched by boards. The window shutters had been mended, and could now be used for keeping out inclement wind. One of the loopholes had actually been glazed by Hal's deft fingers, and he promised to keep his eyes open for any chance of picking up some more glass, so that the others might be served in the same way. To be sure, the glass of those days was none too translucent, and save in very cold weather, it was pleasanter to have the loopholes open to the light of day; but if heavy rain or bitter cold should drive the occupants to close their shutters, it was certainly advantageous if one or two of the narrow slits could be glazed, so that they would not be left in total darkness.

The shelf table against the wall had been mended, and two stools of a suitable height contrived. When the fire was lighted on the hearth, and the smoke had been coaxed to make its way up the chimney, the place wore a really cosy and home-like aspect, which was greatly enhanced after the floor was strewn with rushes, and the two mattresses stuffed and laid side by side in a little recess. The spare habits of the boys were hung against the wall on pegs, and their few worldly possessions laid in order upon the shelf which had been fixed up to receive them.

"I vow," cried Hugh, as he looked around him, "that I would almost sooner have such a lodging as this than spend my days in a Hall. There be Halls where fires are scarce known save in the coldest weather, and where the rushes lie on the floor till they rot, and become charged with so much filth that the stench drives the luckless clerks out into the streets. It hath not been so where I have lodged, 'tis true; but there be Halls wherein I would not set foot for the noisome state they are in."

Leofric and Jack were charmed with their quarters, and when their guests had bid them good-bye, and they had fastened themselves in for the night, they looked at each other with a sense of triumph and joy. Here they were, established as a pair of clerks in a lodging of their own in Oxford, where none was likely to molest them. They had money in their purses enough to last them a considerable time. They had made kind friends who would help them through the difficulties and perplexities of their first days; and surely before long they would find themselves at home in this strange city, and would enter into its busy life (of which they had caught glimpses to-day) with the zeal and energy of true students.

As they sat at their table, partaking with good appetite, though frugally, of the provisions left from the journey, seasoned by some of Mistress Seaton's dainties, they spoke together of their plans for the morrow.

"Methinks I should go to Osney, and present my letter. But I shall have no need to ask for shelter in the Domus Dei, seeing how well we be sheltered here."

"And I would fain see something of the good Grey Friars, of whom so much good is spoken in the town," answered Jack; "and we must seek out such Masters as we would learn from, and find out what fee we must pay to attend their lectures. It is not much, methinks, that each clerk gives, but we must be careful how we part with our money, for we may not find it easy to put silver in our purse when our store has melted away."

"I shall ask the Abbot of Osney if he will give me vellum or parchment to illuminate, for I have some skill that way," said Leofric; "I used to help the monks of St. Michael. I might e'en do the same here; and, perchance, I might teach thee too, good Jack."

Jack looked at his rough, red hands, and shook his head.

"I can make shift to read and write, but I never could do such work as that," he answered. "I will fish in the ponds, and snare rabbits in the woods, and make bread of mystelton for us to eat. My care shall be the larder, and thou shalt have leisure for work if thou canst get it. So will we live right royally in our nook, and learn all that Oxford can teach us!"

## CHAPTER IV

### *THE FIRST DAY*

The lads slept soundly in their new quarters, but awoke with the first light of day, eager to enter upon the strange life of the city. Making their way first to the top of the wall, they had a good look round them over the still sleeping town; and then finding a place where, by the exercise of a little activity, they could clamber down on the outer side, they refreshed themselves by a plunge in the Fish Ponds, by way of ablutions, and returned through the gate to their lodging.

They had a great curiosity to go forth together and see the city, but they did not intend immediately to decide upon the preceptor they should follow. Just at starting they felt almost too excited to settle to regular study, and the visit to the Abbot of Osney was the first business of the day.

Putting on their better habits, and making themselves as trim and neat as circumstances permitted, the boys sallied forth, and took the way to Carfax as before. They knew that Osney lay to the west of the city wall, beyond the Castle, and they had a great wish to see that building at close quarters; so they pursued their way along Great Bayly Street, till they reached the mound itself, crowned with its frowning walls and battlements.

As they passed along they saw not only numbers of clerks sallying forth to their daily lectures, but great numbers of the Black Friars, who appeared to be exercising considerable activity. Some were wheeling little trucks or carts which held loads of what appeared to be goods and chattels, and they appeared to be very busy, passing to and fro with their loads or their empty trucks, like a colony of industrious ants.

"What are they doing?" asked Jack of a bystander.

"Removing themselves from the Jewry to the new House that the King's Majesty has bestowed upon them without the city walls through Little Gate and down Milk Street," was the answer. "They came and settled in the Jews' quarter, hoping to convert the Hebrew dogs to the true faith; but methinks they have but a sorry record of converts. Anyhow they are going thence, and their new house is all but ready. A few may linger on in the Jewry, but the most part will fare forth to the more commodious building yonder."

Having thus satisfied their curiosity on that score, the boys passed onwards to the Castle, and just as they approached the West Gate, they were in time to prevent something of a catastrophe. As they drew near, they perceived that a young lady, mounted on a fair palfrey, was approaching from the outer side. She was quite young, perhaps fifteen or sixteen, and was very fair to look upon. Her hair was a dusky chestnut colour, and was loosened by the exercise of riding, so that it framed her face like a soft cloud. Her eyes were bright and soft and dark, and her figure was as light and graceful as that of a sylph. As the two lads passed under the gateway, marking her approach, they bared their heads, and glanced at her with honest admiration in their eyes.

The little lady noticed their salutation, and returned it with a gentle dignity of manner; but just at that moment a piece of rag lying in the gutter was suddenly whirled round and up by a gust of wind, right against the face of the spirited little barb she was riding.

The creature suddenly took fright, reared up on its hind legs, and then made a sudden swerve, dashing off along West Gate Street at a headlong pace.

But luckily the girl rider was not borne away too in this reckless fashion. When the creature started and reared so violently, she had been almost unseated; and Leofric, seeing this, had with one quick movement thrown his arm about her; and as soon as the palfrey swerved and made off, the lady was simply lifted from her seat and gently set down by the strong arms of both lads – for Jack had rushed up to give assistance.

She stood now in the roadway, dazed, but safe, looking from one of her preservers to the other, and faltering out broken words of thanks.

Then the servant who had been behind, and who had in vain striven to stop the runaway horse, rode up, lifted the little lady to his saddle, and carried her away, before she had sufficiently recovered her breath to do more than wave her hand to her two deliverers.

The sentry at the gate, who had now come up, looked after them with a laugh.

"Old Ralph is a grim guardian. He will never let his young mistress have speech of any. But I doubt not when it comes to the ears of the Constable, he will seek you out to reward you; for fair Mistress Alys is as the apple of his eye."

"Who was the lady?" asked Jack eagerly.

"Mistress Alys de Kynaston, only daughter of the Constable of the Castle, Sir Humphrey de Kynaston. They say she is the very light of the house, and I can well believe it."

After a little more talk about the Castle and its Custodian, the sentry directed the lads how to find Osney Abbey; and after crossing Bookbinders' Bridge and passing the Almshouses, they quickly approached the gate by which access was had to the Abbey itself.

It was a fine building, inhabited by the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. There were the Chapel, dedicated to St. Nicholas, the fine cloistered refectory, the Dormitory, the Abbot's Lodging, to say nothing of the fine kitchens, and the Domus Dei of which mention has been made.

The present Abbot was Richard de Appelton, and when Leofric presented his letter and asked speech of him, he was ushered into the presence of the great man with very little delay.

Strangers, even youthful strangers, were always received hospitably at the religious houses, and the Abbot, after reading the letter of his friend, spoke kindly to the boys, asking them whether they desired the shelter of the Domus Dei.

Leofric explained what had befallen him since that letter was penned, and how he had met with kind friends, and had already found a lodging within the walls of the town. The Abbot stroked his shaven chin, and looked from Jack to Leofric, letting his eyes rest somewhat longer upon the face of the latter as he said, —

"So thou art not as yet disposed to the religious life? Yet thou hast the face of a godly youth."

"I trust we may yet be godly without the cloister wall," answered Leofric modestly. "It is not for roistering and revelry that we have chosen to live within the town, but we would fain have some small spot that we may call our own, and I had thought that perchance I might turn such skill as I have in penmanship to account, so that I might earn fees for —"

"Ah yes, I know what thou wouldst say. Perchance we can give thee some work of that kind from time to time. But there be other ways of winning money too, open to poor clerks. Thou canst say a prayer or a grace at some rich man's table, or the Chancellor will give thee a licence to beg for thy maintenance. A likely youth, with a face like thine, will not find living hard. And if thou art ever in any trouble, thou canst always come to me. The Domus Dei is open to such as thou, and any son who comes from my good friend the Prior of St. Michael will be welcome for his sake."

Leofric thanked the Abbot gratefully, and received from him a small present in money, and two or three squares of vellum, such as were used in the making of breviaries. This was a very great acquisition for Leofric, as he could now begin some illuminating or transcribing work in his leisure hours, and by the sale of this add to their scanty store of money, and obtain the material for fresh work of a like kind.

This he preferred greatly to begging, notwithstanding that mendicancy had been made respectable, if not honourable, by the friars, and that to give alms to a poor clerk, or reward him for singing a "Salve Regina," or saying a prayer or grace, was one of the regular and esteemed forms of charity.

"And remember, good lads, that there are homes in the city open to such as ye," said the Abbot, as he bid them adieu. "There is Glasson Hall in the High Street, which pious John Pilet gave to Osney

Abbey not long since. We might find room for the pair of you there, if you were disturbed in your nest. There is Spalding Court in Cat Street, which the burgesses of the town have bought for the use of poor clerks; and there be Halls where the poorer clerks serve the wealthier, and earn a pittance thus. Ye will find many ways of living; and pray Heaven we have a good harvest this year, so that the present scarcity may cease."

And with a nod and a word of blessing the Abbot dismissed his young guests.

"Let us take a prowl round the town," said Jack, as they turned their backs upon the stately buildings of the Abbey, "there is so much to see at every turn, and I would fain know the streets and lanes of the city by heart. We must enter by the West Gate that we left, but we will wander round the walls and see what lies in the south ward of the city."

Leofric willingly agreed, and they retraced their steps as far as the gate, where they were at once hailed by the same sentry as had spoken to them before.

"Fortune favours you, honest lads," he said. "The Constable of the Castle has just sent down this purse, to be given to the two clerks who saved the Mistress Alys from hurt when her palfrey took fright," and he put into the hands of Jack a small leathern satchel, in which were a goodly number of silver pieces.

"Now this is luck indeed!" cried the youth, as they took their way onward. "We meet with success at every turn. Methinks that either thou or I must have been born beneath a lucky star."

But they had little time for discussing their good luck, for almost immediately they found themselves in the heart of the Grey Friars' colony, which lay close to the West Gate, just where there was a gap in the city wall, probably owing to the proximity of a marshy tract which rendered the protection of the wall of comparatively little use. Trill Mill Stream wound round the little colony, and formed its southern limit. The parish was that of St. Ebbs, perhaps the poorest in Oxford. This was doubtless why the Minorites, or Grey Friars, had made of it their headquarters. To dwell among the poor, and to live as poorly as any of them, was their principle and practice; and down in these low-lying, swampy districts, fever, ague, even leprosy abounded, and the Friars toiled with might and main amongst the sick.

The boys saw them going forth by twos and threes, or passing in and out of their low, poverty-stricken buildings. It was against the desires of their founder that they should ever possess property or aspire to learning; but the practical inconvenience of the one prohibition, and the thirst for knowledge which was growing up in the hearts of men at this time, militated against the strict code of St. Francis.

The Franciscans made their houses as simple and unpretentious as possible. They lived the most self-denying of lives; but they were beginning to frequent the schools, and to teach in schools of their own, and although there were often drawbacks and difficulties placed in the way of their advancement, they had already many great and notable scholars in their ranks.

The main difficulty was that by statute no one might begin in theology who had not first taken a degree in Arts, whilst the vows and rules of the monks and friars debarred them in many cases from any sort of secular studies. They were so well qualified to lecture in theology that it was often difficult to refuse their plea; and yet the statutes stood in the way.

As the boys reached the corner of Milk Street, they observed a Franciscan Friar of venerable aspect coming towards them, and instinctively Leofric bent the knee as if to ask a blessing.

The old man stood still, and smiled benignly. It was one of the characteristics of the Grey Friars that, in spite of the self-denial and austerity of their lives, they were more uniformly cheerful, kindly, and even merry in their talk and ways than any other of the religious orders. For this reason, perhaps, they were beloved above others; and the great ones of the world, as well as the poor, came to love and venerate them.

"Peace be with you, my children," said the Friar. "Come you as strangers to this city? Methinks you have the air of the country clinging to you yet."

"We did but arrive yesterday," answered Leofric; "and we have scarce the right to call ourselves clerks. But that is what we hope to be soon, so as we can make up our minds where we shall gain the best learning for such fee as our purse will enable us to give."

"You must needs first study the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* of Arts," said the Friar, when he had questioned them a little more as to their intended manner of life; "but since I hold that no learning is complete that doth not embrace the study of the Word of God, come ye both, if it please you and ye have time, to the school of our order, where I strive to impart a few crumbs of knowledge to our clerks and younger brethren. Many lads like ye twain come without fee, and glad shall I be if any poor words of mine can give help or comfort."

The boys would have stammered out some words of thanks, but the Friar put them aside with a smile.

"Nay, nay, lads, we are sent here not for our own but for others' good. Ask for the School of the Franciscans, and for Brother Angelus. Most mornings from nine till eleven I am to be found there. You will be welcome. Go in peace."

"We will of a surety go," said Leofric, as they pursued their way. "He had the face of a saint. I trow that this is a right godly place. We get kindness from all we meet."

"Methinks it is thy face that wins it for us," quoth Jack, with a laugh; "thou hast somewhat the face of a saint thyself."

There was some shrewd truth in this remark. Leofric's was a countenance that could not but attract; and at that time there were such numbers of rude, rough, ill-mannered and ill-living clerks in the place, that favourable notice was often bestowed upon such as appeared of gentler nature and manners. All the religious brotherhoods were more or less on the look-out for likely pupils, and though the more enlightened of their members would not put pressure upon lads to make too early a choice of the cloister life, or of that of the friars, they gladly recruited their ranks from such promising students and clerks as they succeeded in drawing beneath their influence.

As the boys stood looking down Milk Street, they continued to see the Black Friars flitting busily to and fro, fetching and carrying their simple goods and chattels; and prompted by curiosity, they turned into the Jewry, and were soon gazing with the greatest interest at the Jewish denizens of that quarter.

The Jews had had a footing in Oxford from the very early days; they had a synagogue in Fish Street, nearly opposite to St. Aldate's Church. (It may be noted that the old Fish Street is the present St. Aldate's.) They were, of course, the most moneyed class in the city, and they had their own code and manner of life, were exempt from the operation of the common law, and were treated as serfs of the King. Had it not been that the Kings protected them from pillage by their neighbours, in order to plunder them themselves, the Jews would scarcely have continued to exist. The people hated and feared them, even whilst they borrowed from them at a rate of usury limited by statute. But they were too valuable to the Crown to be exterminated, and the Black Friars had settled amongst them in the hope of effecting their conversion.

For many years they had considerable success, so much so that the King established a house called the Guild Hall for the reception of the baptized Hebrews. It was not really their lack of success (although fewer conversions had taken place of late) but lack of room which occasioned the flitting of the Black Friars from the Jewry. They were not all of them leaving immediately, even now; but their new building was almost complete, and a number of the brothers were about to take their departure, hence the excitement prevailing in the locality of the Jewry.

When the lads had gazed their fill at the strange dress and dark faces of the Jews, and had listened to their talk, and their covert jests as they secretly derided the Christian brothers who had dwelt so long amongst them, they turned southward down Fish Street, and then by St. Frideswyde's Street to the great group of beautiful and ancient buildings comprising St. Frideswyde's Church and Abbey – the oldest in Oxford – occupying the site where Christ Church now stands.

Grave, stately looking men walked with slow, meditative steps about the enclosure in which stood those buildings. They were habited in a long white coat of cloth down to the heels, girt about with a leather girdle; over this was a short surplice of linen, and over that again a short black cape that reached to the elbows. On their shaven heads they wore a black square steeped cap. These were the Canons Regular of St. Augustine – the same order as those of Osney.

Here again the walls were broken down, and had crumbled to decay, groves and meadows and fish ponds extending southward to Trill Mill Stream. The boys looked about them in silent wonder, but nobody addressed them; and though they would have liked to steal into the church and see St. Frideswyde's shrine, they did not venture to do so, fearing that they would be regarded as intruders in that sacred place.

"Hugh le Barbier was telling me of notable miracles done at yon shrine," said Leofric, as they turned away at length up St. Frideswyde's Lane. "St. Frideswyde was a daughter of an ancient king, and she built a nunnery here, and was herself a nun. Afterwards it became a place for monks, and now it is an Abbey; but the shrine of St. Frideswyde still remains, and great wonders are wrought there."

"Hark!" suddenly cried Jack, whose ears had been more attentive to some sound in the distance than to his companion's words, "I hear the noise of a tumult. There is something stirring not far off. Let us e'en run and see what it be. Methinks I hear the sound of blows and shouts."

Leofric heard the same sound which had attracted Jack's attention. It seemed to proceed from a short distance off, and they hurried along till they reached the corner of Great Jewry Lane where it joins Shydyard Street (now Oriel Street), where the shouting began to take more articulate form, and the boys heard the words, "North, North! – South, South!" bawled and yelled from scores of throats.

"It is some fray betwixt the clerks," said Jack, who had not listened for naught to Gilbert's tales during the night they camped by the fire in the forest. "Did he not tell us that they were banded into two or more great bodies, North and South, and that they were oftentimes coming to blows together? Haply we had better stand close in this doorway, and let the rout go by. Clerks are killed by their fellows in the open streets every year, if what we hear be true, for nothing worse than belonging to the adverse faction."

Leofric, who though no coward was by nature placable, and adverse to blows, was ready enough to take this counsel, and set his back against the door in the little porch which offered shelter to the pair. The fight seemed to be coming their way, and presently a few clerks scudded by, yelling, laughing, cursing; brandishing their clubs and hurling all manner of foul and derisive epithets at those behind them, from whom, however, they evidently thought it well to flee. Others followed, some having cut heads or bleeding noses, dishevelled, out of breath, angry, yet inclined to make game of themselves and others all the while.

"North! North! North!" they shouted, interlarding their words with many an oath and epithet that need not be transcribed. "Ye coward Southerners, ye only dare to attack when ye be ten to one. We will give you back as good as ye gave! North! North!"

Plainly the pursuers were close behind the flying feet of the last fugitive, when suddenly the rout was brought up short by the appearance of a tall man in a long gown, with a weapon at his side, who came round the corner at a quick pace, and confronted the rioters with stern glances.

"How dare you disturb the peace again, you good-for-nothing brawlers?" he cried in ringing accents. "Let me have such another scene within the week, and I will have some of you to answer for it in the Chancellor's Court. As if it were not enough that you must be fighting the burgesses, fighting the citizens, fighting the Jews, but ye must be fighting one another too, and that in broad daylight, when you should be at your studies. To your Halls and lodgings, every man of you; and if I hear of such another brawl as ye come from lecture, I will deal differently with some of you."

The clerks, who had pulled up suddenly at sight of this stalwart functionary, now began to slink away this way and that. Many of them were mere lads, led on by the boyish instinct of fighting; a few were evilly-disposed rogues, who were always to be found in the streets, ready for any brawl; others,

again, were scholars who had followed in the wake of the crowd, with an idle interest in anything that savoured of a fight rather than with any particular desire to take part in it.

These sorts of frays were of almost daily occurrence in old Oxford, and only when they became too numerous or too severe was any particular notice taken of them. The students for the most part lived and brawled, studied and played, very much as it pleased them, and a fight, with many or with few, was part of the day's work.

Jack espied Gilbert at the edge of the crowd, and made for him quickly.

"What is the matter? and who is he that stayed the fight?" he asked, with eager curiosity; and Gilbert answered, laughing, —

"There is naught the matter; the fight was but a bit of play as the men came out from lecture. We have such almost every day, and they seldom come to more than a few cracked crowns. Yon man of the gown is the Proctor of the South. There be two such in the University, one for the North and one for the South; and I trow they have their hands full to keep order sometimes! But come along, let us to dinner, and ye shall tell your news."

## CHAPTER V

### *THE NEW LIFE*

Before a week had passed away, Leofric and Jack felt as though they had been months at Oxford, so many new experiences had been crowded into that short space.

The more they saw of the strange life of the place, the more glad were they of the chance which had given to them this little private shelter of their own, instead of casting them amongst a number of strange clerks in one of the poorer Halls or lodgings of the city.

For in the days of its infancy the University had enough to do in protecting its own liberties from outside attack. It was therefore unable to exercise individual authority over its heterogeneous members. It provided instruction for them, it guarded their persons jealously from assaults from without, and fought their battle right lustily when jealous townsmen or papal emissaries sought to interfere with liberty or life. But for the rest, the clerks and scholars lived in a state of glorious and almost barbaric liberty, and all that Chancellor or Proctors could hope to attempt was to restrain any serious outbreaks of violence, either between clerks and citizens, or between the various sections of the clerks themselves.

Open rioting in the streets was checked as far as possible; but an immense amount of roistering and disorder could and did prevail without let or hindrance, and there was no certainty from day to day that some bloody collision might not occur in the city which might have a serious termination.

Stories were told of clerks who had been set upon and killed by angry citizens, of citizens who had been slain by clerks, of Masters even who had met with injuries too often fatal in their effects, sometimes from the hands of citizens, sometimes from those of scholars inflamed by passion or drink.

There had been times when the King had had to interfere in order to calm the strife between the contending parties. There had also been times when the Masters and scholars had deserted Oxford by hundreds, if not thousands, and had threatened to establish themselves in other localities. This had been done when the citizens had put upon them some marked indignity and affront, and had generally resulted in the submission and humiliation of the town. For, as was pointed out to the burgesses, the importance and prosperity of Oxford mainly depended upon the presence there of this school of learning, and if they drove away the scholars by their ill-judged enmity, they were signing the death-warrant of their own city.

It was often to these quarrels and their adjudication that the endowments (if such a word can be employed) of the University were owed. The citizens would submit, and agree to pay so many marks a year in token of their penitence, and these moneys were called "chests," and formed a fund from which poor scholars might borrow without interest, leaving a pledge behind; and private individuals would sometimes start a similar chest, from which system gradually developed the scholarships and exhibitions of our own days.

But the life of the infant University was a very strange one as compared with the collegiate system which gradually grew out of it. Thirteen or fourteen was a common age for a youth to commence life as a clerk, and even at that tender age very little supervision was given him.

Originally the University copied to a certain extent the guilds of a city corporation, and as a seven years' apprenticeship was imposed upon lads entering trade guilds, so a seven years' course was expected of a student between the date of his entry as a clerk and the time at which he might take his M.A. degree. In the previous century there were regular University guilds, and as the University was international, and men from all countries came thither, these guilds naturally partook of a national character, men of the same language consorting together, so that different Halls became associated with the names of different nationalities.

Even amongst the inhabitants of the British Isles there were distinctions and race divisions. The Welsh formed a colony of their own, whilst North and South were the two main factions in the place in the thirteenth century, and these brawled terribly at times between themselves.

Even when no actual brawling was going on, the streets of Oxford after dusk were places where it was needful to walk warily. By day studies and games occupied the clerks the best part of their time; but with the setting of the sun a stop was put to these occupations. Candles were dear, firing was often scanty, and the close, ill-smelling Halls, where the rush-strewn floors were often not cleaned for weeks together, became almost intolerable when shut up. Naturally enough, the clerks preferred to sally forth into the streets, some to drink or sing songs at the taverns, others to parade the streets, shouting and joking, and playing any pranks that entered their heads. When it is remembered that almost every person in those days carried arms of some sort, and that the most trifling quarrel provoked blows, it may well be understood that the evening hours in the city were anything but peaceful, and some sympathy can be felt with the citizens in their enmity towards the gownsmen, even though these were a source of profit to them.

Evening by evening Leofric and Jack heard hideous sounds of drunken revelry proceeding from the various streets in the vicinity, and if ever they had the curiosity to parade the town after dark, they were amazed at the disorder and violence which seemed to prevail.

"I had thought," said Leofric, "that Oxford would be full of grave and reverend doctors, whose presence would impose order and gravity upon all. But methinks it is full of wantonness and revelling and fighting. Right glad am I, good Jack, that we have our own little nest on the walls. I should be loth indeed to belong to yonder herd."

Jack was not quite so particular, and a frolic in the streets, so long as things did not go too far, was rather agreeable to him than otherwise. Sometimes he would steal out, whilst Leofric was poring over his illuminating work, and enjoy a stroll with some of the clerks of the better sort with whom he had made acquaintance, and as he grew used to the strange ways of the city, he found much to amuse and interest him.

Leofric had purchased, with the money given him by the Abbot of Osney, some materials to enable him to work at the illumination of his vellum leaves, and was doing some fine and beautiful illumination which was certain to fetch him a good sum at some wealthy man's house. Jack looked on in amaze at his skill, but sometimes felt the time hang a little heavy. On such occasions he would sally forth to do the necessary marketings, or to collect fuel, and so forth; and often Hugh le Barbier would drop in to watch Leofric at his toil and exchange ideas with him on many subjects.

Hugh was of a studious turn, and he had the same sort of refined instinct as Leofric, and shrank from the tumult and rowdiness of the streets. He had not yet succeeded in finding a Hall quite to his mind, and was lodging at present at "Dagville's Inn" (now the Mitre), which belonged in those days to one Philip Pady, a burgess, who had rented it to an Italian of the name of Pedro Balzani, who had lived long in the city, and made an excellent innkeeper, having great skill in culinary matters, and a good English wife who understood the likings of her countrymen.

"Thou must come and sup with me one of these days," said Hugh one day, as he sat with Leofric after Jack had sauntered forth. "I have a comfortable chamber enow, though somewhat chilly when the wind is riotous; but I have found favour in the eyes of mine host, and I take my meals with him and his family. This is not a grace he accords to all who come, nor even to all who stay long in his house, as I am doing. And, in truth, he does right to be cautious; for he has a pair of wonderfully beauteous daughters, twin sisters, and so much alike that it was long before I knew one from the other."

Leofric looked up with a gleam of interest in his eyes.

"Beautiful, thou sayest? I was wondering if perchance I could find in this place a beautiful face; for see thou here, I would fain on this square of vellum portray an angel with a roll in his hands, upon which I shall inscribe, in fine penmanship, certain prayers. I have some small skill in drawing faces. I used to amuse the monks of St. Michael by taking likenesses of them, and they said I did it well.

But it is not easy to find a face for an angel, though there are some pretty lads here and there walking the streets. I wonder if I could find an inspiration in the face of your twin sisters."

"Thou shalt come and see," quoth Hugh eagerly; "methinks it would please them well to be thus portrayed. For my part, I think that Linda's face would be the better; it is oftentimes full of a sweet seriousness and repose, whereas Lotta is all sparkle and fire; and it is by these two expressions that I begin to know them the one from the other, though, should Lotta be pensive and Linda merry, I am at fault again!"

"I should like to see them," said Leofric. "I have heard of such things – sisters so alike that none may distinguish between them – but I have never seen such. It must be something strange."

"Thou shalt come and see; thou and Jack shall sup with me to-morrow. I have spoken to Balzani about you both before now. Thou hast a quick eye and a keen understanding, and I would ask what thou dost think of Tito Balzani, the son of mine host. For my part I like him not, and methinks he has no love for me. He consorts with one Roger de Horn, one of the biggest braggarts and bullies of the place. He calls himself a clerk, but it is little of learning that will ever get into that pate of his. He, too, comes to table with mine host and his family, and methinks he is vexed and jealous because the same grace is accorded to me. He speaks insolent words anent upstarts and fine-gentlemen fops; and it is plain that he seeks a quarrel with me, or else to drive me to other quarters."

Leofric was interested in all that concerned his friend, for he had a sincere liking for Hugh, who had been kind to him in a variety of ways. He gladly promised to visit him on the morrow, and take supper with him, being interested in the thought of seeing these Balzanis.

"I suspect there is some love-jealousy at the bottom of this fellow's dislike for Hugh," remarked Jack, when he heard Leofric's account of the matter; "there be some fellows who must always have a sweetheart, and perchance this bully thinks that the fair ladies will think more of Hugh's open face and gentle bearing than of his own. We will go and see for ourselves; for I would be sorry that any hurt should come to good Hugh. He is a very proper fellow; but in such a city as this any evil-disposed person might seek a quarrel with his rival, and do him a deadly mischief without fear of anything worse than the Chancellor's prison. Benefit of clergy may be source of safety to some, but it can be a source of peril too, when the vilest of the land claim it as a cloak for their worst sins."

The new clerks were beginning to learn many lessons as to the working of the prevailing system, and they heard many things from Brother Angelus, whose lecture-room they sought whenever they could, and who seemed to take a special interest in these two lads. Once they had accompanied him in a round of visits amongst the poor in the parish of St. Ebbs, and had longed to emulate his skill and tenderness with the sick. It seemed strange to them to see one who was so learned in saintly lore, and who was so revered in his own school by the pupils of St. Francis, humbling himself here to perform the most menial office for the poorest person, without a thought for his own dignity or position. But it was alike the theory and the practice of the friars to humble themselves to tend their brethren; nor did they think it shame to ask alms at the doors of the rich, for they might possess nothing of their own, and must needs beg sustenance for themselves and for those whom they desired to help.

Leofric and Jack had by this time settled what lectures to attend and what masters to follow. They had been perplexed for a while at the choice before them, and by the solicitations of their superiors for a hearing in their particular schools. They had visited a considerable number before finally deciding, and were now deeply interested in the daily lectures they heard upon a variety of subjects. Jack declared he had never had such a hard time in his life, and he wanted a good deal of help from Leofric in taking in what he heard. But both lads had sharp wits and a great thirst for information, and they soon attracted the notice of their instructors by their regular attendance, and by the attention they bestowed upon the lecture.

So far they had not made a great many acquaintances amongst their fellow-clerks, the number of whom was quite confusing at the outset. Some amongst them were too rough and uncouth to attract them, whilst others, more gently born, were superior to them in station, and they feared a rebuff

should they attempt to make advances. Life was simpler in its conditions in those days, and friendships easily grow up when the young are thrown together; but pride of race is nowhere absent, and both Leofric and Jack had a great dislike to putting themselves forward in any way.

There was a great deal of talk in the city at that time, and indeed all over the country, as to the condition of affairs betwixt the King and the Barons. Leofric and Jack were only gradually beginning to take any interest in political matters, being sufficiently engrossed just now in their own affairs; but Hugh talked often to Leofric about the great Earl of Leicester, who had married the King's sister, and who was now the head and champion of the Barons' party. He spoke of him with the ardent enthusiasm of youth, called him the greatest and noblest man of the day, would tell long stories of his prowess in Gascony and other places, and of the ill-treatment he had oftentimes received at the hands of the capricious and unstable monarch.

"The King never knows his own mind two days together!" the young man had scornfully declared, "and he makes promises only to break them. He is the tool and dupe of the Pope, and is bleeding his country to death, sending all its wealth across the seas for objects with which we have no concern. And then he breaks every promise whereby he has attained these moneys, and our charters and liberties are trampled underfoot, even when he has most solemnly promised to observe and respect them."

Hugh was an ardent supporter of that party in the kingdom which began to be called the Barons' party, and Leofric and Jack drank in his spirit eagerly. It was, in fact, the prevailing one amongst the members of the University of all grades. The friars, too, were far more in sympathy with the champions of the liberties and rights of the people and the constitution, than with the aggressions and tyrannies of a Pope-ridden monarch. So that Oxford, although divided in some measure upon the burning questions of the day, inclined on the whole very much in favour of that party of which Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, was now the acknowledged head.

When Hugh escorted his two friends through the streets to Dagville's Inn, where they were to sup with him as arranged, he was considerably excited by a rumour which had just reached the city, and which was causing no small stir there.

It was said that Oxford had been chosen as the place where in a short time, perhaps two months hence, a Parliament was to be assembled in which the burning questions of the day were to be discussed, and some settlement of a definite nature arrived at between the King and his nobles. The very idea of this great assembly sent a thrill of excitement through the place. The streets were crowded with knots of clerks and citizens, for once all gathered amicably together, discussing the news which had been brought from London, and wondering whether it were true.

Dagville's Inn presented a lively appearance. Its porch and bar were crowded with guests, and a dark-faced man, who spoke with the accent of a foreigner, was busy serving the guests, as was also a youth with a tousle of frizzy hair and a pair of shifty black eyes, who bore a strong resemblance to mine host, but looked a great deal more crafty and cruel.

Leofric observed his face as he passed in, and noted that he gave an ugly scowl at sight of them. It seemed plain that he had no liking for Hugh, although what was the cause of the grudge he bore him it was less easy to decide.

Hugh pushed his way through the lower room, his guests following; and after mounting to the upper floor, they found themselves in a pleasant room, not unlike that in which they had seen the Seaton family assembled on their first arrival at the city. Its window, which was large and latticed, though the lattice stood wide open to the mild evening air, looked upon the High Street; and upon the window seat lay a lute, and a piece of fine embroidery work such as was seldom seen save in the nunneries or in the houses of fine ladies.

A table in the centre of the room was set for supper, but the apartment itself was empty, and Leofric took up the lute gently, and fingered it with loving touches. But the next moment he put it

hastily down, for the door opened, and a pleasant-looking motherly woman came in bearing a smoking dish, and she was followed by two maidens, each with a dish in her hands.

Hugh stepped forward to relieve one daughter of her load, and Jack did the same by the second. Leofric, who was more shy by nature, stood where he was in the window, looking in a sort of amaze from one girl to the other. Both were dressed exactly alike, in a semi-Italian fashion which he thought most bewitching; but it was the beauty of the two faces, and their extraordinary similarity, which confused and bewildered him. No wonder Hugh had said it was hard to tell one sister from the other; he marvelled that any should learn to know them apart. To his eyes the faces seemed identical, the same rich colouring, the same dark velvet-soft eyes, the same flashing smile and finely-pencilled brows.

Hugh made him known to the sisters, who were girls of about his own age, albeit their southern blood made them appear older than their age. He called one Lotta and one Linda, and asked Leofric if he thought they would do as models for him.

The young artist blushed to the roots of his hair, and knew not what to say; but one of the maidens laughed merrily, and looked archly into his face.

"Methinks if he wants an angel-model, he had best take his own portrait," she said, in clear musical tones; whilst the other sister added in a voice of precisely the same character, —

"Or seek to get a glimpse of lovely Mistress Alys at the Castle. Methinks she has the fairest face of any maid in the city."

Whilst the young people were talking together in the window, and drawing out Leofric to tell them of his art, and even to show them what he could do by means of a bit of charcoal upon a piece of wood, a tall, burly, dark-browed young fellow lounged into the room, and looked across at the group round Leofric with a scowl in his deep-set eyes.

Jack was the only one who noticed his entrance, and he knew the intruder to be Roger de Horn, who had a certain notoriety in the place as being one of its most turbulent spirits.

"Supper, supper, good folks," called the mistress from the head of the table, where she had seated herself before another smoking dish which she had been to fetch. "If the father and Tito are busy for the moment, we must not let the supper spoil. Doubtless they will join us when they smell the viands. — Come, young sir, and let us see if thou canst wield a knife as well as a pen, for I believe not in your starveling clerks. Good victuals make good scholars, as I always say."

The hostess was a cheerful soul, and her calling in life had given her easy, pleasant manners that won her good-will from all. She looked little enough like the mother of the crafty Tito, or even of these beautiful girls. Tito, in truth, was not her son; for Balzani had been married twice, and his first wife had been of his own nationality. Tito was several years older than the twin sisters, and no very great likeness existed between them. Yet the daughters looked far more Italian than English, although they spoke their mother's tongue with perfect fluency, and without any sort of accent. They were both very charming girls. Leofric could not on that occasion decide in the least which was the more charming, for he could not tell them apart. Sometimes he thought he was beginning to know them, but again found himself completely at fault. But he was delighted with the permission accorded to him of drawing their portraits, and the girls' eagerness over this matter amused and gratified him not a little.

Roger seemed in a very ill temper all the while, as Jack was not slow to notice. He sat silent and sullen at the board, nor did it soothe him to observe that nobody seemed to miss him or take note of his ill-humour. All were occupied with Hugh and his guests, chattering and laughing gaily. Nobody appeared to have a word or a look for him, unless it were the hostess, who pressed him sometimes to partake of one or another of the dishes on the table, but always returned to join the chatter of the young folks, which plainly interested her much more than the morose responses of Roger.

When Balzani and his son appeared, they were full of the news which was exciting the place. The innkeeper was pleased with the thought of all the fine company that this meeting would bring to the town. He did not profess to know or to care very much about the rights of the case; he was still

too much the foreigner to enter keenly into English politics. But the local excitement he thoroughly appreciated, and when he got a chance he questioned Hugh closely about the great Earl of Leicester and his household and retinue, wondering whether so great a man would condescend to lodge in his house, and if so, what gain such a thing would bring to him.

When Jack and Leofric took their leave, promising another visit soon, Hugh walked with them part of the way, asking their opinion of his quarters and his friends.

"I'd have a care if I were thee," said Jack, with one of his shrewd glances; "for that braggart Roger de Horn is no friend of thine, and methinks Tito and he are fast friends. In this city it behoves men to walk warily if they have foes abroad. I would have a care if I were thee."

## CHAPTER VI

### A "MAD" PARLIAMENT

"'Twill be a mad Parliament, gentlemen, a mad Parliament," said one reverend doctor, as the news was definitely made known in Oxford that that place had been selected by King and Barons as a neutral spot where the adjourned Parliament should meet.

Great excitement reigned throughout the city and University. Nothing was talked of but the political situation, the weakness of the King, the resolution of the Barons to enforce the terms of the Great Charter upon the tyrannical monarch, and the possibility (only too well grounded) that the Sovereign, advised by his foreign favourites, would seek to call in aid from abroad, and overrun the fair realm of England with foreign mercenaries.

"But hiring foreigners must be paid," remarked one citizen grimly, as this danger was mooted, "and until the nation gets its rights and liberties, no more money will his Majesty wring from it. The sinews of war are in our pockets, and there they shall stay unless the King chooses to hear reason."

"Ay, and more than that," cried Gilbert, hurrying up to join the eager crowd; "I have had good news from my father in the south. He tells me that the Barons have garrisoned the Cinque Ports, so that no foreigners may land on our coasts. As the truce with France has just expired, they have good reason for this step, without doing any disloyalty to his Majesty; but all the world knows with what special object it has been done at this moment. Methinks we shall be free from fear of foreign invasion, and that we shall obtain our liberties without bloodshed."

"Heaven grant we may!" cried the older and graver amongst the townsfolks, some of whom remembered, and others had heard from their fathers, the tales of the terrible struggle in John's time, which had led to the granting of the Great Charter. They wanted no repetition of such scenes as those; albeit some of the younger and more ardent spirits, and the lawless and violent ones, would not have been displeased had some open collision occurred which should cause the whole country to fly to arms.

Even as it was, great impetus had been given to the joustings and practices of wars in the meadows around the city. Both clerks and citizens went out afoot or on horseback during the long evenings of summer, and often such a tumult arose, and such a din of arms, that one might well suppose some real battle was going on rather than an imitation of it.

June had come, and all the world was clothed in verdure. Oxford was looking her best and brightest at this season. As the day for the assembling of this Parliament drew near, the excitement became intense. Lectures in some cases were suspended, and discipline of any kind became enforced only with difficulty.

As usual, there were two parties in the city. The very fact that the scholars sided almost to a man with the Barons' party disposed some of the citizens to throw in their sympathies with the King. Henry was no special favourite, but he was personally beloved by those who had at any time had access to his presence. He was not vicious, and he was devout; his defenders could always say many things in his favour. He was not a monarch to inspire respect or personal enthusiasm; but then neither was he one who roused against himself any great outbreak of popular rage. Had he lived in less critical days, or been better advised, he might have passed through life comfortably and easily, and have been regarded as a good and well-meaning monarch.

"We must needs see some of these great sights!" cried Jack excitedly to Leofric, after coming back from a prowl round the city one evening. "They say that to-morrow the Barons will march into the city; and upon the day following the King will arrive at Beaumont Palace. We must go forth to see these brave sights. Marry, what a time it will be for Oxford! Right glad am I to be here at such

a season! Think of it – I might have been following the plough behind my father's horses, knowing naught of the great things that be doing in the world!"

A few minutes later and Hugh burst in, quivering with excitement.

"The great Earl of Leicester with his train comes to-morrow," he cried, "and many others of the Barons as well. Some will lodge here, and some there; but the great De Montfort and his sons will come to Dagville's Inn, and for the nonce all who are there must make way. So I come to beg a lodging with you, my friends; and if fortune favours us, I will seek to get speech with my old playmates, Guy and Amalric, and will present ye both to them."

"Are they the sons of the great Earl?" asked Leofric eagerly.

"Ay; and time was once when I went as a page with my father to Kenilworth, and we played together, we boys. Guy and Amalric are the two youngest sons. The elder pair have won knighthood for themselves beyond the seas. But these be yet lads still, albeit, if report says true, very proper and noble lads. Right well do I hope that they will accompany their father on the morrow. Methinks they will not have forgotten me. Amalric was very friendly in those past days, and we vowed to love each other always."

There was little sleep for the trio in the turret that night. Jack and Leofric made Hugh tell them everything he could remember of the De Montfort family at Kenilworth, when he had been there as page.

They wanted to know, too, the names of the other Barons who would support the Earl of Leicester; and although parties changed with somewhat confusing rapidity, as private jealousies or conflicting interests made the friend of to-day the enemy of to-morrow, yet Hugh knew pretty well who were likely to range themselves upon the side of the liberties of the nation, and could give bits of information to his companions about the great nobles of the day.

The Earls of Gloucester, Hereford, and Norfolk were, he thought, certain to support the Earl of Leicester, and also Hugh le Bigod and Hugh le Despenser, whose names were pretty well known at that time. The King was more likely to be backed by Bishops and Archbishops, especially such as still held themselves subservient to the Pope. Then he was almost certain to be attended by some of the De Lusignans, his half-brothers, and by numbers of other foreign favourites, whose constant presence at Court was such an offence to the nation.

"They eat up everything before them, like so many locusts!" cried Hugh hotly. "So soon as any place becomes vacant, the King, instead of promoting some honest English gentleman to it, who may have served him faithfully for years, throws it to one of his foreign favourites, who may have a dozen such offices already. They drain the life-blood from the country, and we, its sons, are left to take what pickings we can get!"

It was easy to understand how bitterly the English nobles and gentlemen were beginning to resent this kind of thing; and when it was combined with a constant infringement of their liberties, and an equally constant imposition of new and illegal exactions, anger became exasperation, and the sense of a coming crisis was in the very air.

The short night was soon over, and with the first of the sunlight the three lads awoke from their light slumbers.

There was no lingering abed for any that day. Hardly had they returned from their plunge in the pool, and arrayed themselves in their best habits, before sounds in the streets warned them that all the city was up and doing.

Hurrying forth, they saw that the citizens had begun to deck their houses as if for a festival: flags were flying from windows, and bands of clerks paraded up and down the streets, singing songs, cracking jokes, and sometimes striving to make speeches in imitation of those which would be made when the conference should have assembled.

Mummers were pouring into the town, as they always did on any holiday, and at the street corners they were to be seen going through their rough representations or practising some rude sort

of jugglery. It was plain that there would be no lectures that day. The clerks were far too excited to attend, and the masters little less so.

But many hours must of necessity pass before the Barons would be likely to arrive at the city gates. These hours had to be got rid of somehow, and Leofric suggested that they should go and see if Brother Angelus were lecturing in the school of the Friars, since perhaps the excitement had not spread so much into the religious establishments as into the Halls and lodging-houses.

Friar Angelus truly was there, and so were the pupils of his own school, but very few outsiders came in that day; and the lecturer did not keep his hearers very long, dismissing them with a smile, and cautioning them not to get into any mischief or trouble in their excitement.

He looked pleased to see Leofric and Jack, and spoke to them as he passed out. They asked him rather eagerly which side he took – that of the King or that of the Barons. He answered, with one of his thoughtful smiles, that these matters were not given to him to judge of – that he meddled but little in the strife of nations; but if he had to judge of any question, he sought always to discover the teachings of Holy Scripture, and to judge according to the mind of Christ.

By this time messengers had come to report that the Earl of Leicester, together with the Earl of Gloucester, had reached Abingdon, where they had halted to dine, and that they might be expected to arrive at the Grandpont by three o'clock in the afternoon.

All the city seemed in motion towards the South Gate, which led towards the Grandpont (as Folly Bridge was then called), and Gilbert rushing up joined himself to the other three, and urged them to come and see all that was to be seen.

The narrow street was quite blocked with foot passengers – clerks, citizens, masters and doctors all mingling together in one moving mass. It was a good-natured crowd, and there was much laughing and jesting as they had to squeeze through the gateway, and again across the bridge, until in the meadow beyond they had breathing room, and could spread themselves out more at ease. Here, dotted about in picturesque groups, were knots of persons who had come from the surrounding districts – farmers on their stout nags, with wife or daughter perched on a pillion behind; and there, too, were groups of squires and gentlemen from the neighbouring houses or castles, many of these having brought their women folk to watch the procession pass.

One group attracted attention from the fine trappings of the horses, and from the general air of importance it wore. There were two ladies, several horsemen in fine garments, and one tall, commanding personage, who was evidently an official of some sort. He was surrounded by several soldiers, who observed an attitude of watchful attention; and Gilbert said to his comrades in a quick whisper, —

"Yon is the Constable of the Castle. They say he is very favourable to the cause of the Barons, though he calls himself the servant of the King. He is a good man, and well beliked in Oxford, albeit he and the Chancellor sometimes come to loggerheads anent the limits of their jurisdiction; yet they be good friends for all that. There goes the Chancellor to speak with him and join his party."

Leofric looked rather eagerly towards the little group around the Constable, and truly enough there sat Mistress Alys upon her palfrey, her golden hair hanging like a cloud about her face, her eyes gazing round her full of curiosity. Suddenly she met the gaze bent upon her, and started a little. Then a look of recognition flashed into her face. She glanced at her father, but he was engrossed in conversation, and did not see. Failing in getting his attention, she just raised her hand, and waved it for a moment towards Leofric and his companion; then blushing a little as if at her boldness, she drew back behind one of the horsemen in the group.

Leofric bared his head and bowed low at the little lady's salute; but he made no further attempt to attract attention, and the friends passed quickly through the crowd lingering at the head of the bridge, and made their way along the road towards Abingdon, where numbers of the citizens were already straying, in hopes of catching sight of the foremost of the Barons' followers.

Presently they came upon a group gathered beneath the shade of some large oak trees, and heard themselves hailed in tones of welcome. This group consisted of the Seaton family, and the beautiful twins, Lotta and Linda. Pedro Balzani, not desiring that his daughters should remain in the inn when it was like to be crowded from garret to basement by fine gallants in the train of the Earl of Leicester, had asked of his neighbours the Seatons houseroom for them at this season, Joanna Seaton being the great friend of the twin sisters. The whole party had come forth to picnic under the greenwood trees and watch the show go by. And now, as was but natural, these four comrades, who always consorted more or less together, were invited to share in the remains of the repast, and to join the pleasant party.

Nothing loth, they all sat down, and having been too excited to provide themselves with dinner, were glad enough of some of Dame Seaton's excellent fare. By this time all the party were very well acquainted – laughter and fun were the order of the day. By this time Leofric had come to distinguish as a rule between the twin sisters, although he frequently made a mistake which evoked amusement and banter. Hugh never made any mistake now, and always gravitated towards Linda, the gentler of the two girls. Leofric sometimes wondered whether or not he was beginning to love the maiden. She was certainly very sweet and winning, yet she was but the daughter of an innkeeper, and half a foreigner to boot; whilst Hugh was a gentleman's son, and might hope one day to win his spurs.

The sun overhead shone down hotly, though beneath the trees it was pleasant enough. The afternoon was wearing on, and excitement had become intense.

At last the long-awaited-for sounds arose, telling of the approach of a number of riders. Rushing helter-skelter along the dusty road came bands of clerks and others, who had gone on towards Abingdon, and now came pouring back towards the city with the cry on their lips, —

"They come! they come!"

All sprang to their feet. The youths helped the maidens to clamber into good places of observation amid the branches of a gnarled old oak, blasted by lightning, that stood hard by the road. Then they drew themselves up bare-headed beneath, prepared to swell the shout of welcome which arose as soon as the foremost horsemen hove in sight. Leofric strained his eyes to gaze at the oncoming procession, for it was such a sight as his eyes had never looked upon before.

Hugh stood close beside him, his eyes shining with excitement and anticipation. The tramp of horse-hoofs and the ringing sound of armour made itself heard through the still, clear air.

"Come they in arms?" whispered Gilbert with bated breath, for he was not prepared for that. Yet, sure enough, as the first ranks of the horsemen rode up, it was plainly to be seen that they were armed from top to toe – a brave spectacle in truth, yet one that the by-standers had scarcely expected to see.

Row after row, row after row of bravely-trapped horsemen passed by at a gentle trot, and still Hugh made no sign. Then he suddenly grasped the arms of those next to him, and exclaimed, —

"There he is! there he is! Is he not a right royal man?"

Leofric's gaze was instantly fastened upon the eagle-like face of a warrior in a richly-chased coat of mail, with a plumed head-piece on his head – a man who sat erect in his saddle, returning the greetings of the by-standers with a grave dignity of demeanour – a man who looked born to command and born to rule, and who, in spite of his own foreign blood, was at this moment the champion of England's liberties, the enemy of those hordes of foreign aliens who were preying upon the land to her destruction.

Close behind him rode in pairs four young men, all of them bearing some sort of likeness to their eagle-faced sire. The faces of the first two did not specially attract Leofric, for there was too much haughtiness in the bearing of the young men, albeit no trace of that passion was to be seen in their great father. But the younger pair were far more attractive, being bright-faced boys, who looked about them with eager eyes, and flashed a quick smile at Hugh as they rode by.

"Those be my young lords, Guy and Amalric," cried Hugh with beaming face, "and they have not forgotten me. Anon I will seek speech of them. And see – see! yonder rides mine own father, amongst the retainers bringing up the rear. Ah! I had scarce thought to see him here. Now, perchance, we shall see something of the great scene when this Parliament, which men call "mad", shall assemble itself. Methinks there will be sound sense found amongst those who gather together to discuss the welfare of the nation."

It was hopeless to try to keep up with the riders; the hot sun and choking dust alike precluded such a thing. The party returned leisurely to Oxford, to find the city half mad with excitement. Nor was there any diminution of excitement possible; for on the morrow there would be a yet grander sight, when the King himself should arrive, and when the Barons should ride forth to meet and welcome him.

This was indeed a very fine spectacle, and Hugh took care that his friends should share it with him. He had managed to borrow steeds from some of his father's servants, who had no need to take part in this ceremony, and upon these horses he mounted his friends and himself. They posted themselves at a certain spot hard by Beaumont Palace, where they were told they would obtain an excellent view of the meeting betwixt King and Barons.

To-day Leofric and Jack were able to obtain a far nearer and better view of the Earl of Leicester, and the more they studied his handsome face, the more admiration did they feel for him. He seemed the soul and centre of that noble assembly. The other Barons appeared to regard him as their natural chieftain, and whenever he spoke they hung upon his words, and appeared to give the utmost respect to them. Although he was habited more plainly than any, he was like a king in their midst. His face was lined by anxiety and care, but the fire in his eyes was unquenched and unquenchable. He looked like one born to rule, and his expression seemed to show that, on this occasion at least, he meant to exercise that faculty to the uttermost.

A blare of trumpets suddenly announced the coming of the King, and a thrill seemed to run through the assembled crowd. The Earl drew himself erect in his saddle, and the other nobles fell into rank around him. The trumpet notes drew nearer and nearer, and at last the cry was raised, —

"The King! the King!"

In gorgeous array, surrounded by courtiers dressed in the extreme of foppery, appeared the procession of the monarch. The nobles bared their heads, as did also the crowd, and all faces were turned expectantly towards the oncoming procession.

Everything that pomp and state could do to add dignity to the King's Majesty was present here; and yet there was so little of true kingly majesty in that weak, handsome face, and in the shifting expression of the uncertain eyes, that Leofric, looking from one face to the other, said in his heart, —

"Is it possible that that is the King and the other the subject? Surely it should be just the other way about."

It did indeed so appear; for the Earl, whilst showing every mark of respect to his sovereign, yet wore himself so lofty and kingly an aspect that Henry seemed unwittingly to shrink before him, but he strove to conceal this by taking a haughty and rebuking tone.

"How, now, my lord of Leicester! is it in arms that you come to meet your King?"

"Sire," replied the Earl, speaking for himself and his companions, "we are on our way to quell the troubles that have arisen in Wales, and therefore come we armed, as indeed needs must be if we are to do there your Majesty's behests. This business once over for which we are met together, and we must to the West to serve your Highness there. Let us hope for a speedy settlement of affairs here, for our presence is needed urgently against the troublers of the peace of the realm."

As he spoke the Earl swept with his eagle eyes the ranks of swarthy faces that surrounded the King, and a murmur went up from the crowd which was sufficiently significant.

It was almost an open challenge of defiance, and Henry knew it as such. This could be seen in the flush upon his face, and in the flash of his eye. Yet he could not meet the calm gaze of the Earl, and he strove to pass the matter off with a laugh.

"Thou wert always something too ready with thy tongue, Simon," he said; "be careful thou art not some day too ready with thy sword likewise."

"My sword can never be too ready, an it be unsheathed in the service of your Majesty's peace and honour, and for the safety and welfare of the fair realm over which it has pleased God to set you," was the steady response.

The King laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Come and ride with me, and tell me of my sister, thy wife," he said, as though willing to let other matters rest for the present. "Thou art as great a tyrant as ever thou wast, Simon; but beshrew me if I can help from liking thee when we meet face to face. Ride by my side and talk to me. Let the people at least see that we bear each other no ill-will."

So King and subject rode side by side to the palace of Beaumont, and the people made the welkin ring with their acclamations.

"Though whether they be shouting for thee or for me," remarked Henry, with a short laugh, "perhaps it would be well not to inquire too closely."

## CHAPTER VII

### *THE CONSTABLE'S CHILDREN*

"Fair Mistress Alys, this is sooth a wondrous city, in the which strange sights are to be seen. Fain would I myself belong to it, and make one of those bands of scholars whom I see passing to and fro through the streets. Fain would I learn more of the life here, and share it for a while. I am awearied of the clash of arms and the strife of tongues. The life of a scholar has more charms for me."

The fair-faced Alys looked up from the frame where was stretched a great piece of tapestry work, upon which her nimble fingers were at work. There was a smile in her eyes as she made reply, —

"And yet, from all I hear and see, there is plenty of strife of tongues and clash of arms even within the walls of this city, and amongst the clerks and scholars themselves. I have not dwelt long enough here to know what it is all about; but methinks those who have the charge of the city have hard work sometimes to keep the peace there."

"That is very true," spoke a second voice, not at all unlike the one which had just ceased, although it belonged to a lad of seventeen summers, who lay full length upon a wide settle, over which a great bearskin rug had been first laid. The face of this youth was thin and hollow, and his hands were white and wasted. But his hazel eyes were liquid and full of brightness, and though the broad brow was often furrowed by pain, the smile which lit up the thin, well-cut features was frequent and full of brightness.

"Yes; Alys speaks no more than the truth," said the youth, as Amalric de Montfort turned to look at him. "We have not been long in this place, as thou dost know. Until our father had been settled here some time as Constable of the Castle, he would not summon us to be with him. We remained with our mother's kindred in the south, and have only been a few short months within these walls. Yet we have learned many strange things during this time, and truly do I think that the city of Oxford can be one of the most turbulent spots upon the face of the earth. I have heard my father and the Chancellor of the University taking counsel together how the peace may be kept, and in sooth it seems no easy matter to decide."

"Ah yes, where many hot-headed youths be pent up together in narrow bounds, there must needs be strife of a kind," answered Amalric; "but that, after all, is a brotherly sort of strife, far removed from this other strife of which I begin to grow strangely weary. If ye twain could know but the half of what my noble father has endured at the hands of the King — how he has spent his substance and his own life-blood away there in Gascony, all to establish the King's royal authority there; and how for all his faithful service he has received naught but hard words and humiliations which would have turned many another into a bitter foe! The tyranny and caprice of the weak King (uncle though he be of mine, I will speak the truth of him) has been heartbreaking. It has aged my lady mother, and embittered my father's life. And now, when he is forced to stand forth as the champion of the nation, to hold the King to his promises, there will be nothing before him but one long, strenuous fight. Oh, I begin to weary of it all! If I could help him, I would be ever at his side; but I can do nothing, and my heart grows sick within me. Would that he would leave me behind in this city of learning, that I might join the ranks of scholars, and gain, perchance, by my pen what I scarce think I shall ever do by my sword! Methinks I was not born for such strenuous days as these."

"Would that I might be in the very thickest of the strife!" cried the lad, Edmund de Kynaston, his eyes dilating with a quick flash. "Methinks were I as others are, I would ever seek out the post of greatest peril, and stand in the foremost of the fight! Yet here am I, a useless log, scarce able to put one foot before the other. Such is the caprice of Dame Fortune!"

Alys rose from her frame, and crossed the room with light steps; she bent over her brother and gently smoothed away the hair from his brow.

"But thou art happy here with me, my brother?" she questioned pleadingly; "and when our father has time to see to the matter, we will study together, and grow learned and wise, even if we cannot go forth into the great world of battles without."

Edmund's smile was bright and eager as he imprisoned his sister's fingers in his own.

"Verily, we will do great things together in one fashion or another, sweet sister. I am always happy with thee at my side; yet I would that I could serve and tend thee, instead of receiving all the service at thy hands."

"I love to tend thee, brother mine," whispered Alys, as she bent over him and kissed his brow, and then tripped lightly back to her frame; for idleness was not permitted to the daughter of the Constable, and her mother required a daily portion of work from those skilful fingers.

This conversation took place in a pleasant upper chamber belonging to one of the many solid buildings enclosed within the walls of what was known as the Castle of Oxford.

There were several buildings within these circling walls – the College and Chapel of St. George, the Constable's quarters, and certain strong towers that were often used as prisons for unruly clerks and scholars. The Chancellor himself, although exercising a wide jurisdiction over the liberties of the members of the University, had no place of durance in which to place offenders, so that they were most often brought into the Castle and lodged there.

Sir Humphrey de Kynaston had not occupied the position of Constable very long, and so far he and the Chancellor had been excellent friends. They were both anxious to maintain the peace of the city, and were agreed to act in concert, instead of in rivalry, as had sometimes been the case between former Governors of Castle and University.

Sir Humphrey had only two children, a boy and a girl. Edmund had always been famed for his daring spirit and sunny temperament, and during his boyhood had been the pride and joy of his father's heart. Two years ago, however, he had received what appeared at the time to be a fatal injury during a boar-hunt in the New Forest, where he was staying with his mother's kinsfolks. The boar had turned to bay, and when some daring huntsman, together with Edmund's uncle, approached to try to give the final blow, the maddened creature sprang at them with such fury that both fell before him, and all thought their lives must pay the forfeit. But Edmund had seized a strong spear, and had made so sudden and fierce a rush that the beast was borne back for a moment, giving the two time to gain their feet once again. When they turned to slay their quarry, however, they found that he had inflicted a terrible wound upon Edmund with his great tusks. The boy was carried home in what was thought to be a dying state, and although his fine constitution had enabled him to pull through the long and dangerous illness, he had remained permanently crippled, unable to do more than trail himself painfully from room to room, or occasionally in warm weather to take a little very gentle exercise on the back of a quiet and well-trained horse, which would be content to pace sedately without prancing or curvetting.

Since that day it had been the chiefest happiness of Alys's life to wait upon her brother, soothe his hours of suffering, which were many, and share with him every simple joy and interest in life. Brother and sister had both been greatly pleased to join their father at the Castle here, and were ready to take a keen interest in all that went on at this seat of learning.

Edmund had been fired with the desire to excel now in learning as he had once excelled in feats of skill and strength. Their father had promised to find for them a tutor with whom they might study; and perhaps some youthful clerk to read to them out of such books as were then obtainable, that they might progress the faster in their studies.

But the present excitement occasioned by the Parliament assembled in the city had for the moment driven everything else out of the minds of those dwelling there, and Sir Humphrey had his hands and mind and house alike full.

The Parliament was sitting in the vacated quarters of the Black Friars in the Jewry. The largest of their buildings there had been hastily fitted up as a Council chamber; and the King and Barons met in daily conclave to discuss the situation, and agree upon some definite plan for the future.

The great De Montfort, who had been accustomed to rough it under all sorts of climates and in all sorts of conditions, would have been content to take up his own quarters at the inn in the town, had not Sir Humphrey insisted that he and his sons should be his guests at the Castle, leaving only the retinue at Dagville's Inn.

Thus it came about that, whilst the Earl and his two elder sons went daily to the meeting-place in the Jewry, the younger sons, Guy and Amalric, were left pretty much to their own devices, and spent their time for the most part either in wandering about the town and learning what they could as to the life there, or with the fair Alys and her brother in this pleasant, airy chamber.

The room was itself very attractive, for it was adorned with tapestry hangings which Alys's skilful fingers had wrought, and upon the stone floor lay the dressed skins of many a wild creature of the woods which Edmund had slain ere he had been laid low. Several stuffed birds and small beasts were to be seen set upon the brackets which Edmund carved in his hours of ease; and a tame falcon upon a perch occupied a little recess, and when released from his chain would fly about the room or perch affectionately on the hand of the master he loved. A great wolf-hound also was generally to be found lying at full length beside his master's couch. He had been Edmund's most faithful follower almost from boyhood, and was now growing old and a little infirm. Therefore his master's ways were little trouble to him, and save when he paced backwards and forwards in the courtyard with his mistress, he seldom cared to move from beside Edmund's couch.

Both Guy and Amalric de Montfort had grown fond of this upper chamber and its inhabitants, and came and went almost at will. Edmund had been keenly interested in all that these lads could tell him of their father's campaigns, and of the battle for constitutional liberty which he was so strenuously fighting now. Edmund knew that his own father was strongly in sympathy with the action that the Barons were now taking, and he listened eagerly to any items of information which he could pick up. But whilst the Parliament was sitting, little was said as to the course the deliberations were taking. There were whispers of stormy scenes, and of outbreaks of fierce and rather impotent anger on the part of the King; but for the most part a discreet silence was observed as to the probable result of the deliberations, though from the King's increasing irritability and fits of gloom it was surmised that he was not best pleased at the course things were taking.

The talk between the De Kynastons and Amalric de Montfort on this particular day was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Guy, who came in eagerly and joyously.

"I have a plan!" he cried. "I was wandering down hard by the Grandpont, when I saw a man in a right comely wherry, and he was pleased to hire it to me for a few pence. He says that it will carry a party well, and that if we lift it over the fall by Iffley Church, we can navigate a great stretch of the river, or if we better like we can go up against the current. Methought thou mightest well go with us, Edmund, for thou canst ride down to the river-bank, and then the boat will carry thee bravely, and we can take with us that bear's skin and make a couch for thee along the bottom."

Alys clapped her hands in delight at the thought. Somehow it had never occurred to them that the river might open up a new source of amusement for the invalid.

Quickly was the matter settled. Dame Kynaston, though rather a martinet in her household, as a managing housewife in those days had some need to be, was a loving mother also, and was only too glad to forward any plan whereby Edmund might benefit in health or spirits. Very soon the little party was on its way to the wherry lying by the bridge, eagerly planning the day's pleasuring, and finally settling that the navigation of the Cherwell would afford the most amusement and novelty.

"What is yon tower hard by the bridge?" asked Amalric of Alys, by whose side he was walking, a little in advance of the other pair.

"They call it Friar Bacon's study," answered Alys. "You may have heard of Friar Bacon. They say he was a great and a good man, and he joined himself to the Minorite Friars. But he grew too learned in what men call the black arts – in astrology and astronomy; and he built himself yon tower, that he might the better study the stars. So men got frightened at him and his learning, and he was banished the city and the realm. I have heard that he went to Paris, but I know not if that be true. They say that if a greater or more learned man should ever pass beneath the tower, its walls will crumble away, and it will fall to the ground. But it has not fallen yet!"

"I have heard of Friar Bacon and his learning in very truth," answered Amalric. "I call it shame that such a man should be banished the realm. I believe not that any learning hurts the soul of man, so it be gotten in the fear of God and the love of man."

Just at that moment a youth in the dress of a clerk turned a corner, and came face to face with Alys and her companion.

"Hugh!" cried Amalric joyfully. "If I have not been looking for another sight of thy face ever since we first entered the city, and I caught sight of thee in the crowd! Now this is well met, for we are bent on a days pleasuring on the water, and I am very sure that fair Mistress Alys will give me leave to ask thee to join our company."

Alys bent her head with ready assent. She was interested in all clerks; and the pleasant, open face of Hugh was attractive, besides the guarantee of his being known to Amalric. Guy also gave him a friendly greeting when the palfrey was led down to the waters edge, and before long the whole party had embarked, and were rowing gently down the stream to the point where the Cherwell made its junction with the Isis.

Hugh was called upon to tell his experiences as a scholar in the city, and was nothing loth to do so. Amalric listened with all his ears, and Edmund likewise. The youngest son of the warlike Earl of Leicester had more of the scholar than the soldier in his composition, and was already deeply bitten by the idea of remaining in Oxford and becoming a scholar there. It was not likely that his father would oppose the wish if strongly urged, and Amalric thus lost no opportunity of obtaining information as to the life there.

Edmund lay along the bottom of the boat, delighted with the easy motion, with the tree-crowned banks between which they were gliding, and the beauty of all they saw in wood and meadow. The waterway was so narrow in places that Alys could hardly believe they could force their way through it at all; but this they always managed to do, and pushed on and on until the sound of falling water told them that they would find an obstruction to further progress.

"Never mind," cried Hugh; "it is but the fall. We must disembark and carry the boat a few yards, and launch it afresh on the upper stream. There we shall have a wider highway and more water. Ha! and here, as happy chance wills it, are two good friends who will lend us a hand."

They had come in sight of the fall now, and also of a little canoe drawn up near to the bank, in which a pair of lads were seated, one diligently fishing in the pool, the other poring over a small volume which he held in his hands; and so intent did this latter appear over his task, that it was not until hailed in a loud voice by Hugh that he lifted his face.

When he did so, however, Alys gave a little cry, and bending over Edmund, she said eagerly, —

"Brother, yonder is the clerk who saved me when the palfrey went nigh to hurting me that day in the spring-tide. I am sure it is he; and it was he I saw in the meadows the day when the Barons made their entry into the city. Prithce may I speak to him? he seems to be known to Master Hugh."

"I will speak him first," answered Edmund; and then with a good deal of confusion of tongues the boat was drawn ashore, and all the party disembarked – Alys giving her shoulder to her brother to lean upon whilst the wherry was carried to the upper waters close above the fall.

"May I not help you, sir?" asked Leofric, coming up with a shy smile in his eyes. The other four youths – for Jack had taken his part there – were carrying the boat, and Leofric had been sent

back to help Edmund up the narrow path. "I am very strong, and the way is not long. Lean upon me, and I will take you there gently."

"Thanks, good lad," answered Edmund, availing himself of the strong arm extended to him. "I was wanting a word with thee, for my sister here tells me that thou didst do her a good turn one day some while back, when her horse took fright, and might have thrown her from its back."

Leofric blushed and disclaimed, declaring that Jack had done more than himself; but Alys was of another opinion, and both brother and sister fell into conversation with their new acquaintance, whose face, as usual, won him favour at once.

"Thou wert reading when we came up," said Edmund; "art thou a scholar of this place?"

Leofric told of himself, who and what he was, and admitted that he was able to read Latin fairly well and understand it too, and that Brother Angelus had given him several books to study, to help him to a greater proficiency.

"These are the 'Sentences' they think so much of in the schools," said Leofric, drawing the little volume from his pouch; "but Brother Angelus prefers to go straight to the Scriptures themselves for learning, and loves not the Sentences very greatly. But it is well for a clerk to be versed in them. I have begun to study the philosophy of Aristotle too, for all men talk much of him now, though some say that his learning is dangerous to the soul. How-beit all men are eager to learn it."

"And where dost thou dwell?" asked Edmund eagerly; "and if thou be poor, as thou sayest, how dost thou live?"

"Our wants are but few, and we live in a little turret on the walls, where we have made a chamber for ourselves, no man forbidding us. My comrade, Jack Dugdale, fishes, and snares rabbits in the woods; and I gain small sums of money by painting on vellum, which I learned from the good monks of St. Michael. We have enough for our needs, and can pay our fees to the masters we seek after. Your father, sir, gave us money that day of which you spoke. It was very welcome to us then, for we had but come into the city, and scarce knew then how we should live."

By this time the boat was launched again, and the whole party assisted Edmund to regain his former position along the bottom. Guy de Montfort had taken an immense fancy to the canoe he had seen, and nothing would serve him but that Jack should bring it up and give him a lesson in the management of the craft. When he heard how the two lads had travelled in it from a region not so very far from his own home of Kenilworth, he was very much astonished; and getting Leofric to take his place in the boat, he and Jack set off together up the stream, and were soon lost to sight of the others.

This left Amalric, Hugh, and Leofric to navigate the larger boat, and to talk together of those matters which interested them and Edmund so much. It was natural that Amalric and Hugh should consort together, having been friends and comrades in old days. This left Leofric free to answer the many eager questions put to him by Edmund, whilst Alys sat by with eager face and shining eyes, not losing a word of the conversation, and sometimes taking a share in it herself.

"I can get books," said Edmund, "but they be nearly all in Latin. I can neither read them easily nor understand what I read. I want to find somebody who will come and read with me; for soon my eyes grow weary, and my back aches if I try to hold up the volume myself, and I am wellnigh ashamed to ask my father for a tutor, when perchance I might so soon get weary of his teachings. What I want rather, to begin with, is a tutor for perhaps a few hours in the week, and for the rest a youth like myself, himself a clerk, but with more learning than I, who would come and read to me and with me till I could get the mastery myself over the Latin tongue."

Leofric's eyes were bright with interest. He was too modest to speak the words that trembled on his tongue; but the thought of having access to books was strangely tempting, and there was something about Edmund and Alys which attracted him greatly. The gentle refinement of their manners and speech was in such pleasing contrast to the *brusquerie* of the bulk of his associates. When Alys said timidly, —

"Would Leofric Wyvill come to us if our father approved?" his face burned with gratification and joy at being thus singled out; and Edmund looked at him, saying, —

"I had scarce liked to ask, in case thou mightest have other work more important; but I trow my father would approve, and would pay thee for thy time and labour."

"O sir, to have books to read would be payment enough!" cried Leofric eagerly. "I have longed to see more, but there be all too few in the city for the needs of scholars and clerks; and but for the kindness of Brother Angelus, I should never have aught to study save what I can write down of the things we hear. I am but a learner myself; but if I can help you, it will make me glad and proud to do so. I could at least strive to remember all I hear, and repeat it to you. That is what I have to do for Jack, who is not used to learning. He forgets all too soon, and then we go over each lecture together, and I write upon the walls such things as we most desire to remember, and there they are to remind us if we want information another day."

Before the boat and its occupants made their way back to the town, Amalric de Montfort had made up his mind to ask of his father grace to remain behind and enter himself as a clerk in some Hall at Oxford; whilst Edmund had fully resolved to beg his parents to engage Leofric Wyvill to come to him several times in the week, to read with him, and instruct him in brother-like fashion in those things which he was learning for himself.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *STORMY SCENES*

"Have a care how thou dost answer me, Mistress; I am not one who brooks trifling!"

"I have never trifled with thee, Roger de Horn," answered the maiden addressed, speaking firmly though gently. "Methinks thou dost forget thyself in speaking such words to me to-day."

The dark face of Roger was deeply flushed. He looked as though he had been drinking – as indeed was probably the case; at any rate he was very angry, and his words came hissing from between his teeth in a fashion not pleasant to hear.

"Not trifled with me, quotha? Canst thou look me in the face and say that? – whilst the love-token that thou didst give me lies now upon my heart!"

The face of Linda Balzani flushed deeply, partly with anger, partly with maiden modesty. She drew herself away with a gesture full of simple dignity.

"I have given thee no token," she said. "If thou hast received aught, it must be from the hands of my sister. I know nothing of any token."

"What!" cried the young man, the flush mounting even to his brow, "wilt thou deny the kiss that thou didst bestow upon me out in the greenwood on Midsummer Eve, and the token thou didst give me as proof of thy love?"

Linda drew away yet a little farther, and glanced round the room as though seeking some way of exit. The excitement in Rogers manner was unpleasant, and the claim he was making upon her was revolting. She had always disliked this braggart, even though treating him with civility as her brother's friend. Of late she had come to dislike him more and more, and to shrink from his approach as one shrinks from the proximity of some noisome reptile. She had fancied that her sister had of late been seeking the society of Roger with pleasure; which thing rather perplexed her, because in private Lotta never masked her dislike and contempt for the bully and swaggerer, and of late had been more severe in her strictures than ever.

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