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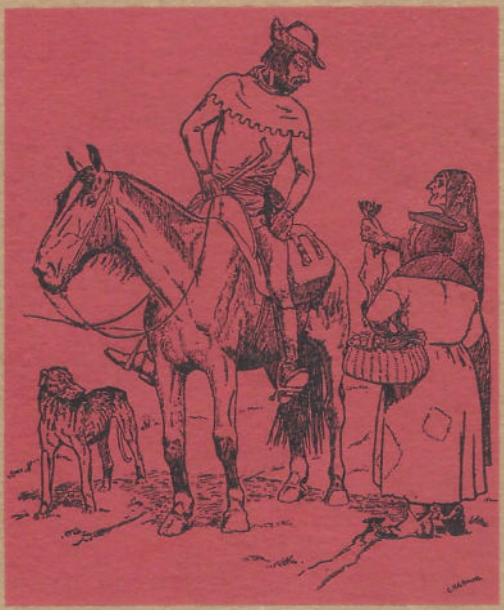
TALES OF A BISHOP... *and* A ROYAL TOWN



J. E. WILLMOTT

Author of the Sutton Pageant and the Play, "Vesey."

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With a Prefatory Sketch of Bishop Vesey's
Life and Work

By

J. E. WILLMOTT

(*Author of the Sutton Pageant and the play "Vesey."*)

Illustrations by G. H. S. DIXON.

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PREFACE

JOHN VESEY (or Harman), statesman and ecclesiastic, sometime Bishop of Exeter, is acknowledged by common consent to be Sutton Coldfield's most distinguished son and benefactor. To his influence and endeavour we owe, among so many other benefits, the Charter of King Henry VIII, which bestowed upon the town the Royal Chase and Park of Sutton Coldfield, a corporate governing body and the title of " Royal Town."

But the mists of time threaten to veil him in obscurity or give him the unreality of a legend. He may be forgotten. The Vesey Garden helps to perpetuate his name, and some years ago a fresh, but fleeting, interest was aroused by pageant and play. It would seem that the time has come to attempt something less transcient than play or spectacle to keep alive the Bishop's memory.

It is thought that a bare chronicle of the facts would not be read by those whom it is most desired to reach and that something expressed in fiction form, a mingling of reality and romance, would make a more popular appeal and better serve the desired purpose. These modest tales have sprung from that idea, and an endeavour has been made to set out in their telling some picture of the man, the work that he accomplished for his native town and the spacious days in which he lived.

Some of the stories are drawn from the author's play " Vesey " ; others are of new invention.

By way of introduction, an outline of the Bishop's life is sketched, and shews the basis of reality on which the stories rest.

J. E. W.

BISHOP VESEY

IN or about the year 1462, there was born to William Harman, a yeoman of Sutton Coldfield, a son, John, who rose to eminence in Church and State, and bestowed immeasurable and lasting benefits on his native place. His birthplace was the picturesque, stone cottage with its spiral staircase in a semi-octagonal tower which, somewhat altered, still stands in the hollow below the present Moor Hall.

In later years, the yeoman's son adopted the name of Vesey. The motive for the change is uncertain and obscure. The most favoured theory is that he followed the example of an Oxfordshire family of Harman, afterwards known by the name of Vesey or some variant of it, who may have been his kinsfolk, and one of whom, it has been claimed on slender evidence, bore the expense of his later education.

It is possible that one reason why John Harman later changed his name, was to avoid confusion with a contemporary court figure of the same name, but with whom no family connection can be traced. This was Edmund Harman, of Burford, Oxfordshire, a barber-surgeon to the King and an attesting witness of his will.

Of Vesey's boyhood, nothing is known. His authentic history begins with his entry into Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1482, where he obtained a fellowship in 1487, and was appointed to the chair of Civil Law. A warm friendship that he formed with a fellow student at Magdalen, Thomas Wolsey, the future Cardinal and Minister, was undoubtedly a factor in promoting Vesey's future progress.

In 1489, he became attached to the household of Queen Elizabeth of York, the consort of Henry VII, and embarked on a remarkable career as courtier and ecclesiastic, a combination that was common to the age.

His first Church appointment, which must have given him peculiar satisfaction, was to the Free Chapel of St. Blaize, which stood within the precincts of the Manor House, on Manor Hill, and was the private chapel of the Lords of the Manor of Sutton Coldfield. It was the beginning of a wide range of church preferments, both lucrative and important, multiple offices arising from the abuse of patronage in pre-Reformation days. He became Vicar of St. Michael's, Coventry, and Vicar General of the Diocese, Prebendary of Salisbury, Dean of St. Peter's Collegiate Church at Wolverhampton, Archdeacon of Chester and Barnstaple, Precentor of Exeter, Domestic Chaplain to the King and Dean of Windsor. He was Registrar of the Order of the Garter.

In 1519 he reached the summit of his ecclesiastical career by being consecrated Bishop of Exeter. As shewing his exalted position in the Church, he took a conspicious part in Wolsey's investiture with the rank of Cardinal by reading the papal bull of creation, and he was one of the consecrators of Cranmer.

Meanwhile, he had acquired a high position at Court. He had many of the qualities of a statesman and all the gifts of a courtier. His contemporary, John Hooker, in his " Common-place Book " in the archives of Exeter, describes him as " a very worldy-wyse man, and in greate credyte wh. the King and counsell . . . He was as courtelyke a man as no man exceeded hym yn courtlyke behaviour."

That he enjoyed the confidence and favour of the King is shewn by his appointment as tutor of Princess Mary, then heiress to the throne, and his employment on important matters of State. He went with the Earl of Devon to meet the King of Denmark, at Dover, in 1523. He attended Henry VIII at the meeting of prodigal splendour with the King of France on the Field of Cloth of Gold, taking with him a personal retinue of four chaplains, six gentlemen, twenty-three servants and twenty horses.

In feudal manner, he sent a party of men-at-arms to aid the King at the seige of Boulogne and a larger force to help in the suppression of Kett's rebellion in Norfolk.

He held the office of Warden of the Marches of Wales, which he filled with credit and distinction, holding a splendid court at Ludlow.

The coming of the Reformation brought a change of fortune. It made his tenure of the See of Exeter difficult and troubled, and it probably reacted on his position at Court. As a prelate, he had to

adapt himself to the new order, and resist as best he could the alienation of the Church's property without losing the favour of the King. The path he had to follow was full of pitfalls. He was growing old, his position had become precarious and irksome, and his thoughts were turning more than ever to his native town, to which his visits had become more frequent and prolonged.

He had obtained from the King a grant of lands called Moorcroft and Heathyards, adjacent to the house in which he was born, and here, in 1527, as Dugdale's "Antiquities of Warwickshire" tells us: "he built from the ground a very fair house (North East near a mile from the Town) where he lived very hospitably, having of his retinue, 140 men in Scarlet Caps and Gowns, his Household expences amounting to £1,500 per an. (which was no small summe at that time)."

His episcopal duties became more and more perfunctory with long periods of non-residence. To the Protestant Party his religious views were suspect. Although he had ordered the canons of his diocese to preach the King's title as Supreme Head of the Church, he was thought to cling to the older faith, and the leaders of the Protestant Party were anxious to get rid of him. Bishop Latimer railed against his non-residence and lack of duty in a sermon preached before King Edward VI. There was good ground for the charge, and the clamour against him gathered force. His position had become uncomfortable, if not dangerous. He resigned his See in 1551, and Miles Coverdale was consecrated in his place.

He retired to Sutton to live in quietude, but, two years later, Queen Mary, who had retained a warm regard for her old friend and tutor, reinstated him to Exeter on her accession to the throne. He was too feeble to undertake the task, and Dr. Moreman was appointed co-adjutor.

He spent his declining days at Moor Hall until, on October 23rd, 1554, he died suddenly "of a pange . . . yn the nigt tyme," as Hooker quaintly tells us, and was buried in the north aisle of Sutton Parish Church.

As a statesman and courtier he had rendered valuable service to the throne, and played no unimportant part in the doings of his time, but as a national figure his fame was transcient, and his name on the roll of history holds no conspicious place. Even in his native town his name is little known, though it is here that, with pride and gratitude, his memory should be kept alive.

Vesey's devotion to his native place was an outstanding feature of his character. It was constantly remarked by his contemporaries, and their testimony is sealed by the permanent and splendid benefits he bestowed upon the town. Memorial inscriptions are apt to magnify the virtues of the departed, but that on Bishop Vesey's tomb states only sober truth when it records : " So great was his affection for his native place that he spared neither cost nor pains to improve it and make it flourish."

Sutton had fallen into poverty and decay when Vesey began his work of restoration. It had suffered with the rest of the country the common ills arising from the tragic struggle between York and Lancaster, and the fall of Warwick the Kingmaker, who had held the Manor, lost the town the benefits it had derived from a great noble and his retainers. Its light soil and exposed position did not favour profitable husbandry, and it had no native industry to employ its people. " The Mercate," states Dugdale, " being utterly forsaken, the town fell much to ruin," and then goes on to say : " In this decayed condition did Sutton continue till that John Harman, *alias* Vesey, Bishop of Exeter, having a great affection thereto," came to its rescue.

The matters with which Vesey set himself to deal were much the same as those which engage the minds of politicians and economists to-day; Local Self Government, Agricultural Aid, Education, Civic Improvements, Roads and Bridges, Housing, Pensions, Unemployment, Public Order and all the rest of it, and he set about his task with amazing energy and a wisdom and foresight far in advance of the Tudor age.

His most distinguished measure for the welfare of his native place was his obtaining from the King, in 1528, a Charter that set up a corporate and elected body (the Warden and Society) for the proper government of the town, granted the Chase and Park (a royal demesne) to the inhabitants, and created Sutton a Royal Town.

Extracts from the Charter, translated from the Latin run :—

" *Henry VIII to our well beloved liege men, inhabitants and residents within our town, manor and lordship of Sutton Coldefeld, otherwise Sutton Colvyle or Coldefylde, grants that henceforth they be one body incorporated of one Warden and Society of the same town, manor and lordship for ever the town and village to be called the Royal Town of Sutton Coldefyld . . . .Know also that we have given and granted to the aforesaid Warden and Society and Men Inhabitants our Chase and Park of Sutton Colfelde and also all and singular messuages, mills, lands, woods, and wastes with the pools and fishes in the same.*"

It would be interesting to know how Vesey secured for the town this great gift and royal favour. It was doubtless due to his pleading and a reward for his loyalty and service, and it is possible that the nobleness in Henry's character was touched by an appeal not dictated by self-interest but to help an impoverished people.

Although the benefits proceeding from the Charter come first on the roll of Vesey's benefactions, they are but a part of the great work he did for the town. It may be interesting to review it under the headings of the subjects already mentioned as those with which he grappled.

LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT. The corporate body (The Warden and Society) which the Charter established was, no doubt, devised by the Bishop himself, and was, in the main, so well adapted to its purpose and agreeable to the inhabitants that it carried on the government of the town for more than 350 years. It was not until 1886 that it was supplanted by a Municipal Council.

AGRICULTURAL AID. The gift of the Park to the inhabitants enabled poor householders, who previously had no chance to keep a horse or cow, to use the Park for pasturage at a fee within their means, a privilege which is still enjoyed to-day. To put the Park to the best use for the community, the Bishop enclosed the coppices, renewed the gates and fences, and stocked the grass lands with mares and horses.

EDUCATION. He built and endowed a Free Grammar School, which still bears his name and counts among its many distinguished scholars the author of " The Anatomy of Melancholy."

CIVIC IMPROVEMENTS. He erected a Moot Hall for official and public gatherings, with a prison under it, and built a Market Place.

ROADS AND BRIDGES. He paved the whole town and built two stone bridges in place of dangerous fords, one at Curdworth and the other at Water Orton. The latter, though damage has been done by heavy motor traffic, still remains much as it was, a splendid tribute to the skill and taste of the men who built it.

HOUSING. He built 51 stone cottages, modelled, apparently, on the one in which he was born, for the better housing of his people. A few of these still stand, and an authority has spoken of them as " those wonderful houses, which cannot be matched, I believe, anywhere in the country."

PENSIONS. He devised to the Warden and Society a piece of land called " Lord's Meadow " to provide pensions for poor widows, and this Charity still carries on its beneficient purpose.

UNEMPLOYMENT. He endeavoured to provide productive work for the inhabitants by setting up looms for the making of kerseys, and brought skilled workers from Devon to teach the trade, but the effort failed. The angry opposition of the Devon people, who regarded this intrusion on their trade as an impious design, may have had something to do with it, or Sutton folk may have found it too alien a task.

PUBLIC ORDER. He dealt effectively with rogues and robbers. On Bassett's Heath, across which ran the rough road from Lichfield to Coleshill and the South, travellers were frequently robbed with violence by a ruffian gang settled at a place near Canwell that was justly named " Ruffians' Den." To check the activities of these marauders, he built a stone house at a spot called Cotty's Moor, and placed an armed servant there to keep watch and guard.

It would also seem that he dealt with the vagrom men, who infested the countryside after the dissolution of the monasteries, in his own particular way. A curious tract published in 1646 relates that " One, Mr. Harman, dwelling about Sutton Colville," gave orders that wandering rogues should be sent to his house where they were set to work to gather loose stones from the highway, giving them " some small relief in meat and drink and a penny a day, and held them hard to work, having lustie stout servants to see to them," with the result that " beggars and rogues durst not come a begging in that parish for fear they should be made to work." It is interesting to note that a map printed in 1765 gives, at the 113th milestone from London, on the road between Coleshill and Lichfield, the " Bishop's heap of stones."

All these were secular purposes, but he did not forget the Parish Church, to which he added two new aisles and an organ, and he arranged for an increase of the public services.

A lesser man than Vesey might well have been content to ease the burden of his poor neighbours by scattering doles, but that was not his way. With the skill of a statesman and the vision of a prophet, he planned to benefit the whole community, to restore prosperity to his unhappy town, and to make his work enduring.

The whole of his vast and comprehensive plan was carried out at his own expense, and involved a heavy outlay. It led to the vicious accusation that " he robbed his See to enrich a beggarly village."

This charge of robbery of his See has been a favourite weapon of his detractors. They complain that, even if he did not profit and abet, he was too compliant in the alienation of the Church's property. There is evidence to refute this charge. There is, for instance, the oft quoted case of the assignment of Crediton Park to Sir Thomas Denys, for which the Bishop has been blamed, but which was entirely due to the pressure of the King. A letter in the Bishop's Register at Exeter, addressed to Vesey by Lord Russell, after stating the King's desire that the assignment should be made, contains the threat that " if there shall apper anye obstinacye unto his highness thereyn in anye behalff . . . the Kyng ys very earnest yn hytt and fully Detmynyd that the said Sir Thoms Dennys shall enioye the same by other lawfull means."

Dr. Oliver, in his " Lives of the Bishops of Exeter," expressly acquits Vesey of all these charges. " It is truth to declare," he writes, " that he alienated no possessions of his See without the express command of his sovereign."

This is not to say that Vesey did not make good provision for himself. He was a product of the Tudor age, and the Tudors were not neglectful of their own interests. He managed to retain considerable emoluments, and it is said that towards the end of his episcopate he disposed of diocesan lands for annuities for himself. From whatever source it sprang, he enjoyed a considerable income during his retirement.

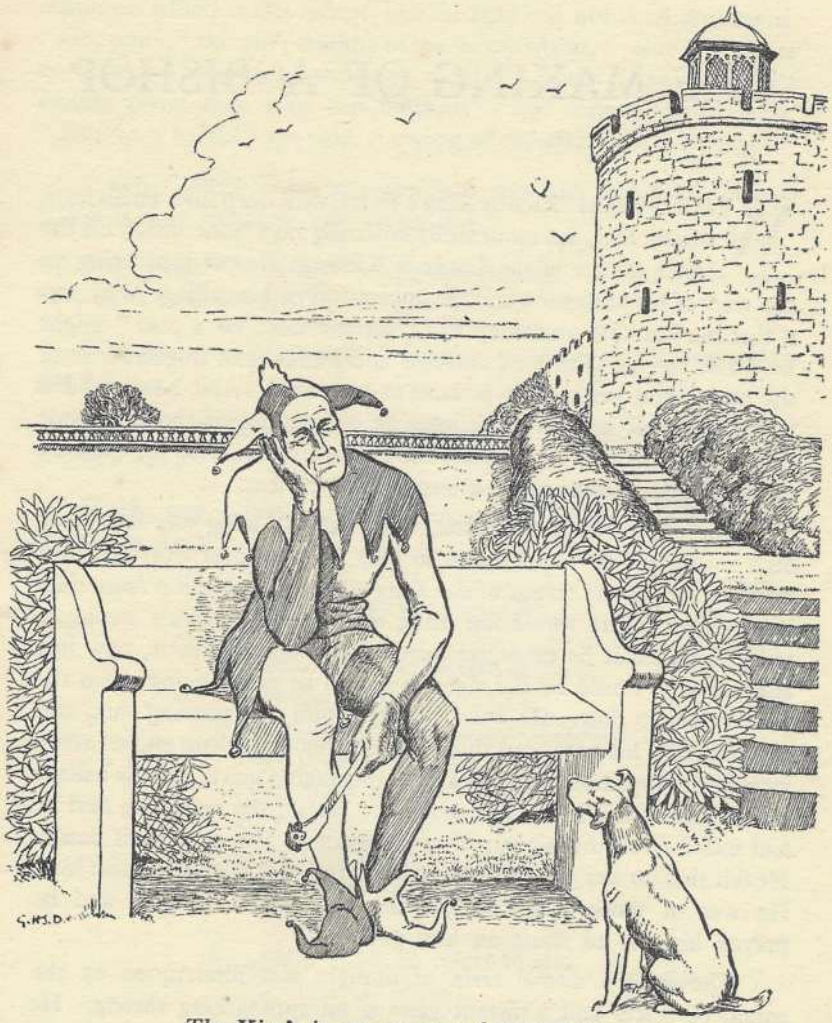
It has been held by some as a weakness in the Bishop's character that he was ready to change his religious doctrine according to circumstance and was content to go with the tide, but it must be remembered that this was the accepted custom of the age and was not in the least regarded as a matter for reproach. In Tudor times, as Dr. G. M. Trevelyan has pointed out in his " English Social History," : " To accept religious services and doctrine because they were ordered by Crown, Parliament and Privy Council, seemed to clergy and people not only expedient but positively right."

Of Vesey's physical appearance there is no authentic record. So prominent a figure at court can hardly have escaped the brush or pencil of Holbein, but no portrait is known to exist. It is claimed that the figure on the Bishop's tomb was executed during his life time, but the head of the effigy hardly corresponds to the skull, " bearing traces of extreme old age " and of " *a remarkably globular figure*" that was found on the opening of the vault, in 1875, in which the Bishop's remains were supposed to be deposited.

A summing-up of Vesey's character is not easy; Mr. A. L. Rowse, in his admirable book "Tudor Cornwall," says of him: "Vesey belonged to the Official class; a man of accomplished manners and business talents .... generous to a fault, cultured, affable, easy going, in fact a spendthrift, a regular Renaissance prelate." This judgment by a skilled historian is entitled to great respect, but it is incomplete. There was another side to the Bishop's character, which the Rev. W. K. R. Bedford aptly put in his paper "The Real Vesey." "He was a man," he said, "in advance in many respects of the age he lived in, a sound political economist, a liberal minded generous promoter of education, and an unselfish benefactor of his poorer neighbours."

Vesey must have had some noble qualities to have enjoyed the high esteem of so fine and rare a character as Sir Thomas More. In a letter to his daughter Margaret, with reference to a small present Vesey had sent her, More wrote: "He is so good that it is a happiness to be able to please him. Write to thank him with the greatest delicacy. You will one day be glad to have given pleasure to such a man." That is a great testimony from one who knew him well, and who in the judgment of Dean Swift was "the person of the greatest virtue this Kingdom hath ever produced."

Though assessments of Vesey's merits as prelate and statesman and judgments of his character may disagree, the immense value of the lasting benefits he rendered to his native town is beyond all cavil or dispute and should make his name for ever honoured in Sutton Coldfield.



The King's jester sat mournfully reflecting.

THE MAKING OF A BISHOP

WILL SUMMERS, the King's jester, with deep lines on his lean, ascetic face, sat mournfully reflecting on a stone bench on the lower terrace of the Castle of Windsor. He was meditating on the woes of his profession and the uncertainty of his calling. Why was it that the jest that yesterday had "set the table on a roar" might be hailed to-day with loud derision and a shower of fragments from the board, and yet receive acclaim to-morrow? And how could a jester assess his wares? The jokes he counted as his choicest goods might fail to raise a smile while the feeble quip reserved for use only in desperation might cause a burst of merriment.

The reason for his agitation was that the King was holding a high revel, and he was anxious to play his own part worthily. He stood so well in the favour of the King—he was something more than jester—that failure would not bring rebuke, but his pride would be sadly humbled if he made no mirth. The opening hour, now just approaching, would be the test; it would be easier going when the wine began to flow. He knew his repertoire was wearing thin, and he doubted if his new born riddle about a hooded falcon and an acorn would win approval. He had a pleasant singing voice, but his ballads had begun to lose their force and wit. Would the new song that he had toiled at all the night win approbation? He was full of doubt. He felt that he was growing old, and that the odds were all against him. He was of those who thought the stars ruled destiny, and he prayed his star to shine on him to-day.

The jester's dismal train of thought was interrupted by the sound of voices and a distant view of an approaching throng. He seized his bauble, danced a step, tried out a comic posture and changed his doleful look into an absurd grimace. The little man was ready to try a fall with Fortune.

It was a gay procession that approached him with bantering and mirth born of high spirits and pleasant expectation. Summers

danced to meet them, and made his first sally at a gay young noble who had often smiled on him. " Why, Sir," said he, " is a hooded falcon like an acorn ? " The young man turned on him with an oath, for he had broken in on an amorous profession to a lady. Summers wilted at this rebuff, but the lady was not at all displeased. " Oh, peace," she said, turning to the angry wooer, " your metaphors are stale and tedious, I have heard them all before. I like the jester's fooling better than your compliments." She turned to Summers. " Sing us a ballad," she said, " a song of chivalry; love is a plague."

" Nay," exclaimed a piquant lady who had joined the group, " love is well suited to this sunny day."

" A plague on both," exclaimed another. " Let us be gay. Give us a song of mirth."

The jester was perplexed. " Fair ladies," he said, " which would you ? "

" Give them a taste of each, good fool. 'Twill test your wit," a man's voice called.

There was something like a moment's quiet, and Summers seized the chance to break into :

The Ballad of the Luckless Knight.

A knight there was of valiant heart
  Likewise a lady fair,
Whose haughty mien and cold disdain
  Nigh drove him to despair.
He overthrew all other knights
  By valour or by guile,
And won his spurs and accolade,
  But not his lady's smile.

By gallant deeds he vainly sought
  Her favour to attain ;
The doughtier his deeds became
  The more she shewed disdain.
He castles razed, he dragons slew,
  He forayed many a mile,
But nought this warrior essayed
  Could win his lady's smile.

And so by gentler skill he sought
The smile that honours fame,
And armed with soft and gentle lute
A troubadour became.
And when he sought her sleepless hours
With music to beguile,
But fell into the castle moat
He gained his lady's smile.

A storm of acclamation broke out as the singer finished. The jester was aglow with satisfaction; he had won the first bout with fickle Chance. There were loud cries for another song, but the tumult ceased and on some faces there was something like a shade of fear as two figures appeared on the broad flight of steps that led from the upper terrace.

" Who are these who come to spoil our pleasuring ? " asked a petulant voice.

" 'Tis the Cardinal and Vesey of the Domestic Chapel " someone answered.

" Cardinal ! " exclaimed a young gallant. " An Ipswich butcher's son ! ", and there was subdued laughter.

An elder man seized the speaker by the arm, and whispered " Silence, fool. Ears are open and tongues may wag. Wolsey has but to nod and another head may fall." The youngster flushed; then suddenly grew pale.

Summers, who was a tactful courtier as well as a jester, moved away, dancing an invitation to the crowd to follow him, and in a few moments the terrace was deserted.

As they came with slow dignity down the flight of steps, the Cardinal and Vesey were talking of old times, their early days at Oxford, the clash of youthful wits, the strange enchantment of the river meadows. " Mind you ? " said Vesey, " how you planned the tower of Magdalen, and we watched it rising stone by stone, and every day more beautiful. It is a miracle to seal the fame of any man."

The Cardinal smiled. " It nearly sealed my ruin," he replied. " I planned beyond my means. It left me crippled in estate, but Fortune has restored me."

" You have risen truly to the realm of greatness," Vesey went on, " and will reach a higher pinnacle."

The Cardinal paused in his walk, and turned to face his friend. "That is as God wills," he exclaimed solemnly. "My course is strewn with hidden rocks, and royal favour is a treacherous wind. Then, as he resumed his walk, he turned the talk into another channel. "Let us to our business again," he said, as he led the way to the bench on which the jester had been sitting. "The mission I have disclosed to you is of great import. It is a high stake. We send an embassy. It calls for skill. I have commended you to the King for the endeavour."

Vesey looked up in surprise and with a deprecating gesture.

The Cardinal smiled, and lifted his hand. "Ah! my friend," he said, "you still have much to learn. Modesty is a Christian virtue but Ambition's keenest foe. You have all the art and training for the task, and the King is well inclined towards my plan."

"Will you disclose the matter fully?" Vesey asked.

"You will have full direction," Wolsey answered. "The King is even now with Dr. Fescue, framing the text of your instruction. The King is in happy mood, but Fescue, I fear, will be discomforted. He plans to get the embassy himself."

"What kind of man is he?" Vesey asked, "I have scarce had talk with him."

Wolsey paused a moment, and replied: "He is a man well versed in law and has a subtle brain, but quite unsuited for diplomacy. His person and his manners are unattractive and he is rash and headstrong. He is vain and crafty, and as jealous as a petted hound. He would be ruthless with an enemy. Should he ever rise to power, 'twere well to hold his friendship." The Cardinal placed his hand lightly on the other's arm by way of emphasis.

Vesey had begun another question but Wolsey stayed him with a raised hand. "The Queen is coming," he said, "with Mary, the princess, a child well favoured who may someday colour history."

They rose, and walked towards the Queen and her ladies, and Katherine moved with a smile and courtly grace to meet them.

"Good morrow, Cardinal," she exclaimed. "'Tis a fair morning, and England is as fair as Aragon when the June sun is shining." She turned to the princess. "Mary, greet His Eminence," she said, and the child came forward shyly, looking at Wolsey with solemn eyes, while Katherine gave Vesey a gracious greeting.

The Queen turned to the Cardinal again, and the princess, without waiting for a bidding, ran to Vesey, who bent upon a knee to talk to her. It was clear that they were friends with some bond between them that bordered on affection.

The ladies-in-waiting were bunched together whispering scandal, and the picture of the grave ecclesiastic and the child, in her white gown figured with golden thread, gave them some amusement.

" The Princess has a strange liking for our Dean of Windsor," whispered one of them. " Yet," she added, " I have known maturer ladies cast an approving eye on him. 'Tis pity he is wedded to the Church."

" 'Tis an infirm alliance, and there is ever the remedy of divorce," said another, a sally that brought a quiet trill of laughter. The speaker was Anne Boleyn. She carried herself with almost regal assurance and grace, and although her features were not all perfect, there was witchery in her eyes and smile.

The voice of Wolsey put an end to chatter. " Ladies, the King ! " he cried in a tone that was pleasant though commanding, and all eyes were turned to the broad steps leading from the castle precincts.

Although it could be said no longer that he was " handsomer than any other sovereign in Christendom " and that " nature could not have done more for him," Henry VIII, despite his full body and slightly rolling gait, was a kingly and impressive figure as he came slowly down the steps. The man who accompanied him, Dr. Fescue, a secretary, was in strange contrast. He was richly clad and walked with arrogance, but he was small and mean of body with a thin face of almost parchment colour which, apart from the restlessness of the small dark eyes, lacked all expression. He carried a roll of papers one of which bore the King's great seal.

The Cardinal had spoken truly when he said that the King was in merry mood. He had a jaunty air, and smiled as the ladies made their curtsey. " Ladies," he exclaimed in a bluff voice, " you do well to give our fickle sun a chance of wooing. He is less prodigal of smiles than some you favour."

He turned to Vesey and the little princess standing at his side. " Ho, ho ! " he cried, " there is our princess." " Come," he called, " I have not seen much of thee of late." With a step that was reluctant, though obedient, the child went to her father. The king looked down at her, and smiled. " By the saints," he said, " she grows apace. Our daughter is well favoured. What say you Dean ? "

" Nought ill favoured, Sire, could spring from out thy House," Vesey answered with a bow. Standing astride with his hands upon his hips, the King threw back his head in a gust of laughter. " Cardinal," he said, " thou hast schooled thy pupil well. He flatters almost better than he preaches." He looked down at the princess again, and, seizing her in his hands, lifted her aloft, gazing at her with a strange expression. " Heigho ! " he exclaimed. " Thou art a pretty wench—and will likely grow to be a plague."

As he set the child upon her feet again, his smile had gone, and the deepening colour in his face heralded a sudden change of mood, one of those quick fits of temper that those around him dreaded. He pushed the child from him almost roughly. " Why am I denied a son ? " he cried, his voice rising. " The governance of England is a man's task, not a woman's killtime. A woman would affect the Realm with worse than plagues of Egypt. Had I a prince, I'd teach him how to govern ; how to punish folly, and how to crush malignants. By the High Lord of Heaven, I would . . . . "

The sudden storm of pent-up feeling died as quickly as it had begun. The King stood silent, gazing at the ground, his breast heaving. The frightened princess had run again to Vesey, who was soothing her with an encircling arm. The Queen stood alone and calm, and, but for the fading of the colour in her face, she shewed no outward sign of the torture of her mind. Katherine was a proud and brave woman who bore her trials with a woman's fortitude. The ladies-in-waiting had turned aside save Anne Boleyn who looked on with a flushed cheek and the semblance of a smile.

Slowly the King raised his head, with a slight shrug of his shoulders that might have meant apology or mere dismissal of the matter. There was an air of tense expectancy in those who stood around. No one knew, and all feared, what might happen next. The King smiled, and the tension was relaxed. He was looking at Vesey and the princess, and when he spoke his voice was quiet and restrained. " The child hath judgment in her friends," he said, and he paused for a moment, fingering his curling beard. " Her favour towards thee, Dean," he went on, " disposes of a matter we have had in mind. She will need instruction. She should be versed in Latin and apt in Greek. Learning can do no harm—even to a woman. Thou shalt be her tutor."

" I prize the honour, Sire," Vesey replied with a low bow.

" Then 'tis settled," exclaimed the King. " Use a firm hand, Dean, in your schooling. 'Tis the only way to teach a woman anything."

He turned to Katherine and her attendants. " Ladies," he said, we have State matters to discuss. There are games afoot; they should furnish entertainment," and he waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal.

When they had gone, he moved to a stone seat built into an alcove, and sat down with the Cardinal and Fescue attending him.

" Our Chancellor hath disclosed to you the matter we have in hand ? " he asked, turning to Vesey.

" I have its essence but not your grace's charge," Vesey replied.

" It hath been carefully set out," went on the King. " Give me the script." Fescue handed him the roll. " Here is thy full instruction," he said, as he placed the paper in Vesey's hand. " It is a matter of great import, and it needs a skilled ambassador. I charge thee with the task."

" Your Majesty, reflect, I pray you," Fescue suddenly broke in, in a high-pitched stammering voice. " Have I no claim ? I—I have the matter at my finger tips."

The King cut short the protest. " Thy finger tips ! " he said. " 'Tis not a lute we have to play upon, but fickle humours and hard wits. Thou art too inexperienced for the task—too rash, too headstrong. Here is a courtier shaped by nature for the enterprise. Vesey shall go."

" Your Majesty," Vesey answered, " your favour and your confidence will spur me to the utmost of my strength and wit. I shall not dare to fail."

" 'Tis well; I count on thee," the King went on, " but there is one thing in thee lacking."

The Dean's face shewed anxiety and surprise. " I would repair the lack, your grace," he said in a low voice that shook a little.

" I do not doubt your will," the King replied, " but we think that we can do it better. Our ambassador should be armed with an appropriate rank." He turned to Wolsey. " What have we to offer ? "

The Cardinal paused for a moment in reflection. Then he answered—" There is the See of Exeter, Your Majesty."

" Exeter ! " exclaimed the King, and he slapped his hands upon his knees as though in firm remonstrance. " The ripest apple in the West Country : 'tis not for anyone to pick." He seemed for a moment to reflect, and, though there was a frown upon his face, there was a glint of humour in his eyes. " 'Tis a rich gift indeed," he said, " but when I give I do it with an open hand. We will reward thee, Vesey, in anticipation of thy service. Our ambassador to France shall be—the Bishop of the See of Exeter."

" Your grace," Vesey began, but the King broke in before he could say more. " Withhold thy thanks. Repay us by achievement. You have your brief. Farewell, and Fortune-speed thy-embassy."

" May heaven favour you," the Cardinal added.

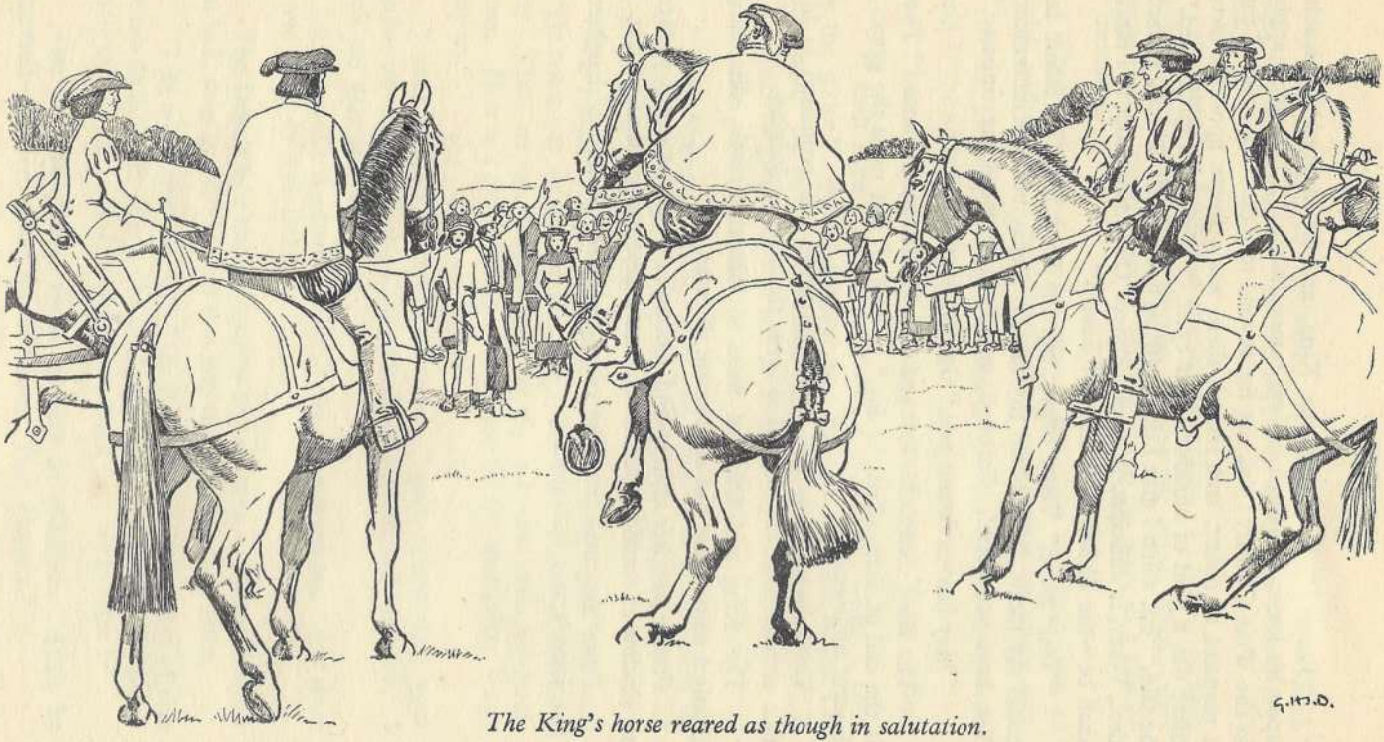
The King rose to his feet and took Wolsey by the arm. " That is the end of State affairs to-day," he said. " Let us to the games ; I scent amusement."

Vesey bowed low, and there was pride and exultation in his face as he turned and walked towards the deanery lodging.

The King and Cardinal went to join the revels, discussing lightly a matter that was no concern of State.

Fescue was left solitary and motionless. His face still shewed no shadow of emotion, but his eyes gave token of a burning anger.

From the castle meadow came the distant sound of laughter. The jester's star was shining.



The King's horse reared as though in salutation.

THE CHARTER

THE little town had been awake and stirring before the dawn, and the countryside for miles around was active and alert. Cows had been milked, horses watered, and such scraps and screenings as could be scraped together scattered to the hens. The children had undergone the ordeal of washing; a frugal breakfast had been hurriedly eaten.

There was bustle and excitement everywhere from the meanest cottage to the houses of the gentles; the people were preparing for the greatest happening in their history. For days past there had been signs of some big event. Rough, heavy wagons had creaked and rumbled through the town, taking the winding road to Moor Hall, and around the mansion tents were springing up like mushrooms after a warm rain.

These were preparations for a great occasion, but its nature none could guess, and the truth when it was known was more astounding than the wild rumours that preceded it. The King was coming to hunt in his domain, the Park and Chase of Sutton Coldfield, that wide enclosed expanse of moorland, swamp and forest that lay within a furlong of the town. From afar the people could see something of its natural splendour, but it was forbidden ground on which they might not tread.

For a long time past the Bishop had used all his wiles to persuade the King to visit his Sutton demesne, but he had only laughed and said: "Thou dost paint so fair a picture that if I visited the scene I might dismiss thee as a perjured prelate." But the Bishop did not easily let go a thing on which his mind was set, and behind his planning was a great secret object. He waited for a favourable moment, and at last it came.

The King was coming northward to visit some of his nobles, and hunt in their parks and forests. That, at least, was the outward

object, but he had grown suspicious of the loyalty of some on whom he counted, and in the guise of social pleasures he was spying out the land. He was lingering near Oxford and in the Cotswold country, and would end his journeying near Coventry. This nearness to Sutton Coldfield was a chance not to be missed, and the Bishop was now ready to give his King appropriate hospitality. Moor Hall, the mansion he had built on lands the King had granted him, was now complete, and a splendid establishment had been set up; he could offer a fitting welcome to his master. The letter that he wrote to Henry was, doubtless, a model of a courtier's skill, a nice blending of flattery, homage and appeal. Whether this missive or some hidden motive influenced the King cannot be known, but he granted the Bishop his request.

He was, indeed, already at Moor Hall. An astonished traveller had brought news of a princely cavalcade and pack-train crossing Bassett's Heath, and its size and splendour lost nothing in the telling of the tale. The townsfolk were in a frenzy of excitement, but their rejoicing was tempered by the thought that, though their King was in their midst, they might not see him. Every approach to Moor Hall was closely guarded, and whichever way of many the King took to the hunting ground the people would be kept at a safe distance. Great, then, was their delight when it was made known that all who chose could come and greet their King before the hunting. They must assemble early at the great gate of the Park.

Now, groups had gathered in the street, and dwellers in the outlands were coming in on every side. The town was more animated than at Trinity Fair; shouts of jest and greeting filled the air. The narrow roadway from the church down to the mill was packed with folk, who squeezed together to make a pathway as splendid horsemen, heads of the neighbouring great families, de Arden, Bracebridge, de Erdington and others, rode with their pages through the town to meet the King.

The sun had risen in a cloudless sky, and a slight haze had begun to lift, as the people trailed across the sloping meadows to the great gate of the Park. They were for the most part a raggle-taggle crowd. Their poverty set short bounds to their wardrobe, and though they had made a brave, pathetic effort for the occasion, their clothes were mainly patches and tatters. Despite it all, they were a joyous and excited crowd, and they were anxious to manifest their loyalty to their King. They had heard of his fine bearing, his manly feats, his splendid court, and they had the feeling that he was

just the man to keep those foreigners across the water in their proper place; he was a real King.

The people talked and jested with rough and childish humour as they trooped along.

"Think you the King will wear his crown?" asked a simple fellow.

"Tush, man, he would lose it in the hunting," answered a woman.

"How, then, shall he be known to us?" persisted the man.

"Why, any fool can tell a King," replied the woman with fine scorn.

"Then you be best to point him out to us," came the quick and unexpected repartee. The irate woman smacked the fellow's face, and the crowd yelled with delight.

"This be a great day," said a portly dame to her neighbour. All the town's afoot."

"All but your goodman, and he's not like to miss a peep-show that costs nothing. Where is he?" was the friend's rejoinder.

"He needs must stay behind the door," came the answer with a head-shake and a sigh. "He's nigh as bare as Father Adam in the garden. He has scarce a clout. Such as he had, poor soul, was worn as thin as cobweb, and yester 'een he left mor'n half o' it on the brambles when the parson's bull chased him through the rough behin't the mill. He's not decent e'en for poor eyes let be the King of England's." There was a burst of laughter and a ribald comment.

A big throng had gathered at the great gate by the time a mounted verderer unbarred it, and they trailed happily behind him as he led the way. A small stream was an early obstacle, but not a check. The more nimble leapt, but the majority were content to wade across. Wet feet held no fears, and for the most part, wear and weather had already played full havoc with their garments. Landed on the other side of the stream, they crossed some gorse-clad rising ground until they stood on the breast of a gentle hill that sloped down to a level clearing backed by a dense woodland. It was a splendid natural amphitheatre, a perfect setting for a great spectacle.

There was already an animated scene; a hundred of the Bishop's servants had arrived, their crimson robes in striking contrast to the green coats of the verderers leading their leashed hounds; a line of men-at-arms stood in brave array. The Bishop himself was there

with the Keeper of the Park, planning the disposition and restraining of the crowd, and giving orders to the men. At the foot of the slope stood a group of gentlefolk in a rough enclosure planned to shield them from the touch and odour of the common people.

The scene was set; soon the pageant would begin. The entrance to the arena from the woodland ran obliquely, shielding an entrant from the view of the people on the hill until he actually emerged.

The excitement of the crowd took a sharp edge as the clear note of a hunting horn came from not far away. All eyes were turned towards the glade; the throng of people swayed; children were hoisted on to shoulders, and the loud murmur rose—"The King! The King is coming." They were keyed to a thunderous welcome, but the figure that appeared caused utter bewilderment. Summers, the King's jester, rode into view, mounted on an ass which he harmlessly belaboured with a bladder. This queer creature was a strange herald of a King; the people gazed at it with mouths agape with wonder.

The jester rode to the middle of the sward, dismounted with mock dignity, and handed the ass's bridle to a page. He then advanced towards the crowd, and bowed with great solemnity. The people's bewilderment increased; should they return the courteous gesture of this strange being? They decided that they should; the women bobbed, the men tugged at their forelocks. The jester then began his fooling. He was a versatile fellow, and knew how to appeal to a simple audience. He bent his arms and flapped them like a pair of wings, stretched out his neck and uttered a loud cock-crow. The crowd responded with a shout of wonderment and laughter. He quacked and waddled like a duck, strutted and hissed like an angry gander; he neighed and bellowed, covering the whole gamut of the farm-yard's noises. The people were entranced, and the King had almost been forgotten when the call of the hunting horn sounded nearer at hand. Summers scuttled away, imitating the yelp and limping of a dog escaping from a horse's feet.

All eyes were turned again to the opening of the glade. There was the sound of hooves, the jangle of accoutrements, and there burst upon the people's view a cavalcade that held them spellbound. It was a procession of knights and nobles, a courtly retinue splendidly arrayed and finely mounted. The horses' coats shone like polished metal, and their accoutrements flashed in the sunlight, Included in the cavalcade was a small group of ladies, one of whom attracted

every eye. She was a slim and graceful girl, riding a white palfrey; she wore a green habit enriched with cloth of gold, and at her slender neck a brilliant jewelled ornament. The crowd were awed and silent. Never had they seen such pageantry and splendour. They had heard ballads of chivalry sung by strolling minstrels at the Fair, but no vision of such wonder had ever come even into their dreams.

There was a break in the cavalcade; the verderers, the red-robed servants and the men-at-arms stiffened, and prepared to hold the sway and impulse of the crowd. The great moment had at last arrived. From the glade rode out two splendid horsemen of the Royal Guard, and behind them, on a coal-black horse, an upright figure of full habit, wearing a slashed doublet, a golden chain about his neck and a feathered, jewelled cap upon his head. There was now no doubt. This was indeed the King; there was in his bearing something that proclaimed him so.

The pent-up feeling of the crowd broke in a roar of welcome that was like the breaking of a wave upon a rock. The King's horse, startled by the sound, plunged and reared. The Bishop, in alarm, held up his hand to quell the shouting, but the King was in no danger. He was an accomplished horseman, sure of his mastery, and not at all averse to shew the people the measure of his skill. Smiling, he wheeled his fretting horse to face the throng, and, as it felt the strong pull on its curb, it reared as though in salutation to the people. As its forefeet came to earth again, two pages seized the bridle, and, with a dignity and grace amazing in so big a man, the King dismounted.

He was in evident good humour, and was laughing as the Bishop came to greet him. "Why?" was the salutation of the King, as he mopped his face with a silken kerchief, "doth man gather substance with the years?"

"'Tis the law of nature, Sire," replied the Bishop.

"Then thou must be outside the law," the King rejoined. "If 'tis Theology hath kept thee lean I would I were a better theologian." He turned towards the people on the hill. "These, then, are thy home flock," he said. "Forsooth, they are close shorn."

"Our town is poor, my liege," the Bishop answered, "and its people are but rough, but nowhere can the King of England find more loyal servants."

"They are full-throated," growled the King.

" And well may they be loud in joy to-day," the Bishop went on. " Your coming, Sire, showers happiness and honour on us all. Even the sun is smiling."

The King laughed. " Ah ! Vesey," he said. " Thy tongue is ready as thy wit. Thou art a prince of courtiers."

" No more ? " asked the Bishop quietly.

" To please thee I will allow that thou art more than that," answered the King. " I do not forget the outcome of they embassies, nor the wise tutorage of our Princess. Thou art wise in council and ready in thy service."

" My life, my liege, is wedded to thy will," affirmed the Bishop.

" Then," laughed the King, " thou hast a hard, unbending spouse, good Bishop. My will hath nothing of a woman's gentleness. But," he added, gruffly, " do not let our conversation drift into the philosophy of marriage. It is slippery ground to traverse." He walked a step or two, and looked around him. " By my faith," he exclaimed, " this is as fair a chase and woodland as I know. 'Tis a hunter's paradise. I wager that my nobles deem it so, and make full use of it."

The Bishop's heart quickened its beat. He had planned a cast of dice with Fate. To win would be his crowning blessing ; to lose would be his fall. Now had come the great chance he had waited for. " Your nobles do esteem it much, your grace," he said, " but there are those who have more need of it."

The King was not slow to detect the changed note in the Bishop's voice.

" What mean you ? " he asked sharply.

" May I speak freely and without offence ? " the Bishop asked.

" I'll stay thee soon enough if thou transgress," the King exclaimed with a shade of anger. " But use plain speech ; I like not riddles on a hunting day."

" I will be plain, my liege," the Bishop said, and there was a tremor in his voice. " Your nobles use this forest for their pleasure ; its bounds are closed to those who fain would use it for their needs. Our commoners are poor ; this chase and forest would relieve their poverty and . . . "

" Where is this leading ? " broke in the King. His ever-changing mood was now one of suspicion. " Bring the matter to its point."

The great moment had come, and the Bishop's voice was firm as he said boldly : " I beseech Your Majesty to grant this chase and forest to the town."

The King stepped back a pace, and a flush of anger surged into his face. " What ! " he exclaimed, " bequeath this wide domain ? "

" That is my petition, Sire," the bishop answered with a bow.

The rising anger and suspicion of the King burst its bounds. " Thou grasping prelate ! Curb thy appetite," he cried. " Wolsey himself would not have dared to ask so much. So thou hast brought us here for thy aggrandisement." He turned as though to go, grinding his foot into the turf and plucking at his beard.

The watching crowd realised that something of grave portent had happened suddenly. The anger of the King was unmistakable ; the Bishop had grown pale. The people looked on the strange scene in a tense silence.

The Bishop feared all had been lost, but he knew the temper of his master and his sense of justice, and was determined to fight on. As the King half turned towards him, after a moment's silence, he launched his defence. " Most Gracious Majesty, you do me wrong," he pleaded. " In Church and State have I not served your cause with all my strength ? Have I grudged service to the throne or ever asked for a reward ? "

There was another silence ; the issue was hanging in the balance. Then the King said gruffly : " I grant so much. Go on."

" My pride," went on the Bishop, " has been to do you honour and to guard your throne. Never have I pestered you for benefactions. I do not ask this favour for myself—I lack for nothing. My plea is for the poor and helpless—the people of this town, whom I have grown to love. My soul is vexed by reason of their misery." It may have been the nature of the plea or the Bishop's moving tone that caused the hard lines on the King's face to soften. He looked up at the Bishop, who went on, speaking with a deep emotion :

" If you would grant them this domain, they would have pasture for their beasts, wood for their empty hearths, and land that they could call their own. I would have it so bound to them that none could ever filch it. Such gracious gift and a charter of good government would give the town prosperity and increase and make its mean, impoverished people happy. It would enthrone in gratitude your memory. By all the love I bear Your Majesty, I beseech this boon."

The King was silent. " If I have offended, I beg for pardon," the Bishop murmured in a voice that broke.

Still there was no response, and the King's expression shewed a mind in conflict. At last he spoke. " I grant thee absolution," he said quietly, and paused as though still unresolved. Then the mental conflict ended. He looked into the Bishop's face, and smiled. " Thou cunning knave ! " he suddenly exclaimed. " Thou pleadest like a lover and with a courtier's guile. Thou hast weapons that 'tis hard to parry." A new note came into his voice. " By Heaven ! " he cried. " thy strange request moves me to a generous fancy. I am weary of the grasping souls that beg for lands or place or power to gratify some personal desire or crown some high ambition. But this petition for they needy friends, this selfless pleading for the common weal, lifts thy supplication to a higher plane. It melts me strangely—though I be not altogether wax." He paused again as though still hovering on the brink of a decision, and then, in a rush of fervour, his voice rising, he declared : " 'Tis a high thing you ask, but it shall be done. Mine enemies declare that I am but a slave to love and avarice. By the High Lord of Heaven they shall know that Henry has a soul that flames when nobleness doth kindle it."

Tears had come into the Bishop's eyes. "Most Gracious Majesty," he began, his voice faltering, but the King checked him. " No more," he said, placing his hand on the Bishop's shoulder, " lest I should weaken in this quick resolve. It thou hast cause for thanks, give honour to the greenwood and the sunshine that have tuned my humour."

The King turned, scanning his courtiers, and in a gentle voice he called : " Mistress Boleyn."

The slim girl of the green habit and white palfrey came tripping with a dainty grace, and curtseyed to the King. " If ever thou hast cause for pleading, enlist John Vesey," he said.

" May I make so bold a claim ? " Anne asked, smiling at the Bishop.

" I am ever at your service, Mistress," he answered, bending over her hand. " Bishop, I may hold you to your pledge," she said softly and with strange earnestness.

" Make use of him," the King exclaimed. " His honey tongue would stay a falcon in its sweep, but have a care. His suasion hath robbed me of this chase and forest. I am pledged to grant it to this hungry rabble. Did'st ever know such folly in a King ? "

" 'Tis wisdom and not folly, good my liege," Anne answered with a coquettish smile, " a kingly deed that doth befit a King."

The King laughed, and shook his head. " Nay," he said, " 'tis but surrender to a ready plea—'tis weakness."

" Such weakness, good my lord, as only strong men shew," Anne protested sweetly.

" Say you so, and with a witching smile," the King exclaimed with a burst of laughter. " Then I am well content. The Bishop hath not robbed me after all ; 'tis only fair exchange. I bestow this forest, and I gain thy favour. 'Tis not a bad beginning to a sunny day. Come roguish mistress, let us join the hunt."

They turned, and had begun to walk away, when the Bishop called in an eager voice : " Your Majesty, I pray you stay a moment longer. Let the King's own lips proclaim his bounty."

The King's face clouded for a moment. Then, " Let them approach," he said.

The Bishop waved the people forward, until they grouped themselves in crescent shape close to the King. They bent their knees in homage. With a gesture, Henry raised them to their feet, and in a ringing voice that could be heard beyond the furthest rank, proclaimed : " Men of this chase and town, my saintly counsellor, thy guardian lord, hath moved me to the granting of a favour. Know then. In token of his service to the throne and to relieve thy needs I grant the Sutton Chase to you and your posterity for ever. Likewise, by charter, I'll bestow a plan of government, and name your town the Royal Town of Sutton Colfelde.

Although their simple minds could hardly grasp the full meaning of this proclamation, the people knew a great thing had befallen, and amid their cheers voices were calling : "God bless Your Majesty," " Long live the King."

" Peace ! that is enough," cried the King. " Here be your thanks," and he pointed to the Bishop standing beside him. Then, as he took a pace to go, he called out to the people : " Do me this service. When evil tongues speak ill of me, point them to this," and he waved his arm towards the heath and woodland. He turned, and walked toward the waiting hunters. " Trumpet the hunting call," he cried. " Away ! "

The horns gave out their strident note; all sprang to horse, and the cavalcade began to move away. The Bishop, riding his staid sorrel mare, went with them.

The people broke into little groups, asking each other what it meant, for the truth seemed past believing. Verderers shepherded the crowd back to the great gate, where their Vicar, Ralph Wendon, his thin furrowed face aglow, awaited them. Eager and questioning, they clustered round, but he smiled and shook his head.

" Come with me," he said, and led the way along the meadow path and up the steep church hill. The people thronged behind him into the church until, in serried ranks, they filled the open floor. When they were assembled, Wendon, standing on the chancel steps, told the people in words that they could understand the meaning of what had gone before. The King's great chase and forest was now theirs, theirs for ever and to use; they would have part in their own governing, and their poor village would bear for all time the proud title of a Royal Town.

When he had finished, the people fell upon their knees on the bare floor, and listened to one of their Church's noblest prayers. They rose and sang a song of praise with a deep, strange fervour they had never felt before. Never had the sculptured figure on the rood screen looked down, even at high festival, on such a scene.

Slowly, and still amazed, the people passed out into the sunlight. From afar came the dim sound of a hunter's horn, the hated and familiar signal of the noble's pleasure. To-day, it sounded like a benediction.

THE BISHOP'S THORN

THE huddle of small hovels known as "Ruffians' Den" did not belie its name, and the rogues and robbers nesting there had grown too bold for the Bishop's liking. It lay to the north-east of the town on the edge of Bassett's Heath near the crossing of two deep-rutted roads, and it menaced every traveller who passed that way.

The Bishop was not wont to suffer outrage lightly, and as the trouble lay not far from his palace of Moor Hall he was spurred to action. On a holding of his own called Cotty's Moor, on rising ground that opened a wide view, he built a stone watch-house, and placed an armed and trusty servant of his own to keep a guard.

Roger Shenstone, who was chosen for the task, was a lusty fellow who had been of that company of men-at-arms the Bishop sent to aid the King at Boulogne. Though of stout heart, he was of simple mind, and an afternoon in late November found him uneasy and perplexed. He was not good at taking thought, and found the process difficult, particularly when trying to resolve three different problems at the same time.

His first perplexity was born of superstition, a master influence of the age. Some years before, a traveller had been murdered on the very spot where the guard-house stood (it was inconsiderate of the Bishop to have built it there) and to-day was an anniversary of the crime. It was firmly held throughout the countryside that on that night a moaning apparition of the victim visited the scene of his dissolution. Many there were who claimed to have seen and heard the unhappy phantom, and their stories did not lack of terrifying detail. Roger was unafraid of anything in mortal shape, but he did not relish an encounter with a ghost, particularly one that groaned. He found it a disturbing situation, for although he had charms to guard against the Evil Eye, ague, the "sweating plague" and all such common ills, he doubted if any of them were strong enough to keep

a spectre at a distance. He wondered whether he should treat the visitant with threat or courtesy, and even if it would be wise to open conversation with a spirit. He decided to leave the matter to chance, and hope for the best.

His second problem was how to rid him of a dense hawthorn bush standing solitary on the edge of Cotty's Moor and close beside the road. It was a tree for which the Bishop had a special liking; it marked the limit of a walk he often took, and he was wont to stay and rest there. People called it " The Bishop's Thorn " and looked on it with something near to reverence. Roger's regard was altogether different. It was too good a hiding place from which to take a traveller unawares to suit his liking, and was a burden on his mind. Time and again he had pleaded with the Bishop for leave to cut it down only to be met with the firm reply " The Bush will stand." He could not openly defy the Bishop's ruling, but he tried to find a way around it. He was minded to consult the Witch of Lyndrich, who had withered stouter things than thorn bushes by an incantation, but there was one objection. The witch's terms of business were fees in advance, not payment by results, and as the bush enjoyed the blessing of the Church there was a risk of a bad bargain, for the spell might fail to work. It was a puzzling problem and he gave it up.

The final matter he had upon his mind called for quick decision. It was his duty at this hour to make a last patrol on Bassett's Heath, but his inclination was to stay beside his fire, and he found good pretexts to support his wish. Since he had taken up his guard the folk of " Ruffians' Den " had either ceased to ply their trade or had gone more afield. Some of them, he knew, were out of action. Black Stephen was already in the Bishop's gaol, Jabez Oldfield nursed a broken head and Big John suffered from a spell an enemy had put upon him. It was true that Daniel Stubble was afoot, but his ambition never rose above the robbing of a hen roost. Another comforting thought was the fact that few travellers were on the road so near to nightfall except in company; one small band had already given him a greeting as it passed. His conscience and his inclination pulled an equal weight until the weather tipped the balance. Dark clouds with a purple underglow had blown up from the north, and a sudden burst of heavy rain gave hint of worse to follow. Roger succumbed; though dutiful as most men go, he had his share of human weakness.

He sank into his hide-seated chair and stretched his legs before the fire. His sole companion, Dirk, a big, grey dog, of unknown

origin, half wolfhound and half mystery, lay down at his master's feet, and poked its nose almost in the embers.

As a sop to his conscience, Roger was determined not to sleep, and for a time he held to his resolution, but his recent mental strain had left him tired, and ease and a warm fire completed his undoing. It was not a quiet sleep, for his latest thoughts wove unpleasant dreams around the spectre and the Bishop's Thorn. He imagined that the ghostly form had sprung on him from out the bush and held him in a cold embrace. From this unpleasant situation he was rescued by the growling of the dog awakening him.

He had no idea how long he had slept, but it had grown dark. The fear begotten of his dream still held him, and he had a strange foreboding of impending harm. All that could be seen in the dim glow of the dying fire was the green glint of Dirk's eyes. Then a log fell, and for a moment a small flame lifted the darkness. The dog was standing stiff and motionless, with his teeth bared and the short hairs between his shoulders bristling. He was aware of something his master did not know.

Rigid with suspense, Roger listened for a sound he dreaded. Dirk whined, and he stilled him with a whisper. Suddenly the tension broke. There was a succession of small sounds like someone groping at the door—and a loud groaning. Roger shivered, and had a feeling that his mop of hair was rising. The thought that beat upon his mind was that "The Thing" had come. For a moment he could not stir, and then his natural courage came back again. Spirit or mortal he would go to meet it. With his hand upon the dagger at his belt, he strode to the door, and flung it open.

To his astonishment no ghostly presence shewed in the gloom, but a hollow groaning came from a shapeless something at his feet. Instantly his terror vanished. This was too solid for a phantom, and he could deal with anything substantial. He dragged the inert figure into the room, and lit a rushlight. It shewed the draggled figure of a smallish man with blood caked upon his face. Here was a happening Roger knew how to deal with. He fetched from a cupboard a flask of cordial, a mixture of Malmsey and herb-brew, kept for the purpose, and held it to the man's lips forcing him to swallow a little. It must be put to the credit of the potion that the stranger at once opened his eyes, and mumbled something between his groans.

Roger was relieved to find that he had not got a corpse on his hands. He carried the small, limp figure to the straw pallet in the corner of the room, washed the blood-stained face, and looked for the cause of all the groaning. There was only a swelling on the fellow's head and a gash across his face, and Roger vaguely wondered why such small hurts should cause such blood and lamentation. He rated the fellow a poor weakling and an easy victim, and tried another application of the flask. This was even more successful than the first, for the fellow stayed his groaning, ceased to babble, and became coherent. He was well enough to tell his tale.

It was a tedious recital, for it roamed and halted, but resolved itself into a simple story. He was, he said, a travelling horse coper named Oake, and had set out from Ashby-de-la-Zouche with a string of horses, which he had sold on the road to Tamworth. He had then set out on foot for Sutton Colfylde. Night was falling as he reached Bassett's Heath, and there was need to look for shelter. Not far away he had seen a small, stone dwelling, close to the road, and hurried on towards it. As he was drawing near, a robber had sprung out from a bush and struck him down. It had grown dark before his senses came again, and he had crawled and stumbled in the direction in which he thought the dwelling lay. By great good fortune he had come upon it, groped for the door, and fallen in collapse. Alas ! he had been robbed of all he had, full five pounds of legal English money.

Roger listened to this likely tale with mixed feelings of pleasure and alarm. His warning of the danger of the Bishop's Thorn had proved well founded, but his failure to have kept his guard filled him with dismay, for the Bishop shewed no tenderness to those who failed him.

These reflections kept him wakeful in his chair. His visitor had grown quiet, and he wondered for a time whether the light in the feeble body had gone out, but he was reassured by a crescendo of deep breathing that ended like a trumpet call ; he argued that a mortal nearing dissolution would never snore like that. Dirk was restless and kept sniffing round the pallet where Oake lay.

At the first sign of dawn, the visitor murmured that he was hungry, and Roger realised that a part of his own distress was due to the same cause. He put his cooking pot on the fire, and halved its contents with his guest although it seemed to him that a division more related to size of body would have been better.

As the light grew, he looked more closely at the injured man and decided that he did not like him. He was pale for an out-of-doors fellow, which might be due to the injuries he had received. Beneath a low forehead, the eyes, set close together, were small and shifty, the nose was sharp, the lips thin and the chin pointed. The image that came first to Roger's mind was of a fox, but he finally decided there was more of semblance to a weazel. He began to feel less pity for the man but, though a good hater, he had a sense of justice. After all, he argued with himself, God made him and must have had a purpose, and there was the stubborn fact that the man had been robbed and injured. It was this unpleasant fact that he had to tell the Bishop, and he knew the news would not be well received.

He was pondering on how to frame the story so as to cloak his breach of duty, when the subject of the trouble, seeming to read his thoughts, suddenly exclaimed: " The fault is all on the accursed bush. Whose is the land that harbours it ? "

" 'Tis my lord the Bishop's bush," Roger replied.

" Then may the blessed saints be praised," Oake said. " 'Tis known throughout the shires I travel that he is rich and bountiful. He will repay my loss and sweep away the bush."

" Perchance," growled Roger, non-committal.

" There is no doubt of it, 'tis sure as sun rising," Oake went on, " Haste you to my lord, good friend. Tell him a christian man has nigh been beaten unto death, and robbed of all he had. Tell him the robber sprang from out the bush. Forget not that, it is the essence of the matter."

Roger was glad to have this charge against the bush ; he wanted the blame for what had happened to be shifted from his shoulders to the Bishop's Thorn. " They say that I be dull of wit," he said, " but be assured I will not forget the bush," and his tone shewed that he meant it.

" Harp well on that," urged Oake, " and my lord will understand. You are a likesome, trusty fellow. Do but bring me my lost gold, and I will reward thee well. Here is something that takes a message to my lord." He drew a slim, stained volume from beneath his jerkin. " This," and he plucked a short straw from the pallet, " will mark the place. There lies the message," and he pointed with his finger to the bottom of a page. " Keep the book well, and bring it to me again. It is full of wisdom and great learning. Let not the Bishop keep a hold on it."

Roger took the book and placed it in the pouch upon his belt.

" Now get you gone," Oake urged. " There is need of haste."

But Roger was not disposed to hurry ; he dreaded his visit to the Bishop, and though the sun was now well risen he still lingered. He sat in his chair, while Oake remonstrated and fumed, rehearsing the tale he had to tell, and trying to put the best complexion on his own default. His thoughts, already wandering, were completely scattered by Dirk's bark. It told of someone coming, and the wagging tail betokened a known visitor.

There was the sound of a soft step, and then, framed in the open door against a sunlit sky, there stood a venerable figure of imposing dignity—a man of rather more than middle height with thin, ascetic face crowned by white hair that shone in the sunshine like a halo. He wore a long, purple cloak fastened at the neck with a gold chain, and he carried a thin oaken staff. It was the Bishop. As he gave Roger a greeting and stepped into the room, Oake uttered a dismal groan.

" What means this ? " asked the Bishop sharply as he crossed to where the man lay.

" 'Tis a traveller with sore hurt," Roger confessed.

" How came he so ? " questioned the Bishop in a tone that kept poor Roger silent.

It was Oake who answered : " A Robber beat me nigh to death, and robbed me of all I had."

The Bishop flushed with anger. " What of my guard ? Did I not set you here to stay the pest ? " he demanded as he turned to Roger, who made no answer, but hung his head.

" Am I to be ever plagued by yonder nest of robbers ? " went on the Bishop. " Lawlessness must cease in my domain. The ruffians mock me, and I will not suffer it. I have sworn to extirpate the vermin, and it shall be done."

The flood of anger ceased as quickly as it had begun. The flush faded from his face and its hard lines softened as he turned to the moaning man. " Friend, I am sorry for your ill estate," he said. " Put curb upon your moaning, and tell me what befell."

Oake's story was now shorter than the one he had told to Roger, for his listener held him close to the thread of it, but its substance was the same. Roger, however, was surprised to learn that the sum

of money which the thief had taken had shrunk to nearly half since the previous telling of the tale.

The Bishop had listened intently to Oake's story with his eyes fixed on the man's face. He asked, when the recital ended : " Have I not seen your face before ? "

" Never, my lord," was the prompt reply.

" And yet you stir in me some recollection."

"It must be of some other, good my lord."

" It may be so, for it is nature's whim sometimes to make a twain of men as like as berries on a bramble. What are your wounds ? "

The man pointed to the swelling on his head and the gash upon his face, and the Bishop bent closely to examine them. " Your limbs are sound ? " he asked. " Straighten them."

Oake stretched his arms and legs. " They are but bruised and stiff," he said.

" That is well. In an hour you will be fit to travel," said the Bishop in a quiet voice.

Oake did not relish this assurance, and shewed it by a groan.

Dirk was still sniffing round the pallet, and Roger with an angry gesture drove him away. " Let be," exclaimed the Bishop. " What the hound is telling me shews we are like minded." He turned to Roger. " Give the traveller some food, and set him on his way."

As the Bishop took a step towards the door, Oake plucked at his cloak. " My lord," he cried, " what of the money that the robber stole from me ? Yesterday I had the means to live, and now I am a beggar. You are a just man, and you will repay. The bush was my undoing, and it grows upon your land close to the highway. I want my recompense. It is the law," and the shrill voice rose.

The Bishop's face darkened. " You threaten ? " he asked sternly.

" I ask for justice," answered Oake.

" And justice you shall have," replied the Bishop in a tone of resolution. " State your plea."

" 'Tis plainly set out in the book your servant has," Oake said. " Give it to my lord," and he turned to Roger, who drew the volume

from his pouch. The Bishop took it, and glanced at the title page. It was printed in fine black letter type, and read :—

" THE BOKE FOR A JUSTYCE OF PEACE ;

neuer soo wel and diligently set forthe."*

" So you traffic with the Law as well as horses," said the Bishop drily.

" Nay, my lord," Oake answered. I do but read the book that I may avoid offence. My trade is full of pitfalls. The book tells me I may not sell a horse to any Scottish man nor take his galyhalfpens, soskyns or dodkyns. It also tells of statues to protect the traveller. Read here, my lord." He opened the book at the place he had marked with a straw, and pointed with his finger to a heading.

The Bishop walked to a small window through which the sun was shining. His eye at once fell on this marginal note :—

" *No brushe to growe by hygh ways.*"

The section to which it pointed read :—

> " *That men shuld not be sodaynly taken by robbers, it is ordeyned by the statute of Wynchester that there shall be no brusshe growe two hundred fote of euery syde of the waye, and if the lorde wyll not suffre theym of the countre to cut downe the shrubbes, yf any persone be robbed, the lord shal answere to the partie robbed : and if there be any murder, then the lorde shal be arented at the kinges wyll : and not withstandynge the countrey shal cut downe the shrubbes by the same statute of Wynchester.*"

The Bishop had a grim smile as he returned the book to its owner, but he said no word and seemed to be deep in thought. It was left to Oake to start the conversation off again. " The import of the statute is clear, my lord," he said. " Your bush was my undoing—it was the cause of all my injury and loss—and the book tells me you must answer for it, and cut down the bush. It was the cause of all my ills. Is it not so, my lord ? "

" That is your charge," replied the Bishop, " but I would not condemn even a bush without fair trial. I would first examine the accuser's testimony. You say the robber sprang from out the bush ? "

" 'Twas so, my lord."

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*Printed in London, 1534. This and other extracts are taken from an original copy in the Library of Ald. W. T. Wiggins-Davies, J.P., to whom the Author tenders his acknowledgements.

" Saw you the man ? "

" He came upon me suddenly, and the light was failing."

" You heard nothing ? "

" Nought but the swish of the blow that felled me."

" Oh ! you heard that ? "

" It was like the hissing of an arrow."

" It should have split your skull in twain."

" It—it must have been a glancing blow."

" In truth it was. The robber was not of these parts. Our ruffians are better marksmen. The bush stood on your left hand as you came ? "

" Yes, my lord."

" How comes it then that the blow fell on the right side of your head ? "

" He—he must have quickly turned behind me."

" An agile fellow ; we must give him his due for that. The wound upon your face ! It came from no bludgeon's blow nor yet the wounding of a dagger, but it bled exceeding much. How came it so ? "

Oake paused in his reply. He moved uneasily and there was an anxious look in his eyes. " My lord," he said at last, " you treat me roughly. In my affright I did not know what happened."

" Let us then step back to the time before you were affrighted ; your memory may hold better. 'Twas at Tamworth that you sold your horses ? "

" Somewhat on the Ashby side."

" Know you the man who bought them, and where he dwells ? "

" I did not ask. He—he was travelling, and not of those parts. He gave me the money and I was content."

" What ! a horse deal without haggling. 'Tis the strangest happening I have known. The town will goggle when they hear of it. Tell me more."

" There is no more to tell."

" 'Tis pity to cut so good a tale, but I have heard your charge against the bush, and now the thorn must answer it. I will learn what it has to tell."

Oake, who had closed his eyes in shew of weariness, opened them wide again. " What mean you ? " he exclaimed. " A thorn-bush has no tongue."

" And yet it tells me many things," replied the Bishop.

" Of what can it speak ? " asked Oake in astonishment.

" It talks most loudly of the weather and the seasons," answered the Bishop. " Its white robe of blossom tells me it is Spring-time, and its berried, crimson cloak says that Winter is at hand. But it sometimes whispers other things. I have a fancy it may whisper something now. I have a mind to walk so far, and put it to the test. Come, Dirk, I like your company, and you may help the thorn bush find its tongue."

Dirk followed at the Bishop's heels into the sunshine. As the Bishop's footsteps died away, Oake broke into an angry tirade. " This is a madhouse," he exclaimed. " Your master has gone crazed. He babbles of dogs and trees that talk. His head is empty."

" Would that mine were half as hollow," murmured Roger, and then fell into a stubborn silence. Cut off from conversation, Oake turned and twisted like a fevered child, muttering complaints and curses.

On the short walk to the thorn, the Bishop was deep in thought. When he reached the tree he found trampled grass that might suggest a struggle, and a little blood-stained patch. Then he pushed aside the tangled mass of bracken that lay like a russett mat at the tree's root. He was looking for something, but the dog forestalled him ; it plunged into the tangle, and in a moment laid at the Bishop's feet the thing he sought. The Bishop's face glowed with satisfaction, and he set out at once on his return, but the puckered lines on his forehead shewed he was still struggling with a perplexity. Suddenly, he stopped, and threw his arms apart in a gesture of delight. A clouded memory of a face had suddenly grown clear.

Dirk heralded the Bishop's coming, and both of the men awaiting him turned their eyes to the door. There was a stern look on the Bishop's face as he walked with slow dignity to the centre of the room and stood silent looking at the man upon the pallet. Not a word was spoken, but Oake's grey face shewed that he understood.

The silence grew more ominous, and Oake was unable to withstand the strain. " What—what ? " he almost screamed, " did the tree tell you ? " There was again a silence, and then the Bishop spoke. " It told me," he said in a firm and quiet voice, " that you are

a rogue and liar. Get you whence you came within an hour. My servant has the means to quicken you. Set foot again within my bounds and you shall be clapt into the stocks and scourged at a cart's tail through our town." Oake was trembling; he covered his face with his hands, and the groan he emitted was the real thing.

The Bishop turned, and without another glance or word walked out of the chamber. As he passed by Roger, standing at the door, and saw the look of wonder on the simple fellow's face, he whispered: "Come with me a pace or two," and walked to a rough bench that stood in the little patch of garden. His servant followed and stood beside him, his face a picture of bewilderment. "You are perplexed, and I will set your mind at rest," the Bishop said.

"My head is mazed; my wits are gone," Roger confessed.

"I will try and make the matter plain," the Bishop went on. "I would not have you deem me harsh or wrong in judgment. When first I saw the fellow, I knew that craft and lying were writ upon his face. I have had traffic with a multitude of men and I have learned to read the signs that good or evil stamps on them."

"I liked not his face," Roger admitted.

"That," said the Bishop, "should have helped you to the truth. It was clear as noon the rogue was lying. He had no hurt to cause much blood or moaning, and when I sought to test his tale he stumbled and was trapped. He vowed his trading was with horses, but when he stretched his legs they were as straight as saplings; the legs of horsemen are as bent as cross-bows, and he said his deal was done without a haggling! He is an imposter and a king of liars."

"But, my lord, truly the man was hurt," protested Roger, I vow there was much blood upon him."

"Not of his own shedding," replied the Bishop. I found the fellow smelled of coney, and the dog by his sniffing shewed a like opinion. I did not doubt a coney had been bled to suit the fellow's purpose, and I guessed the furred body lay somewhere near the bush. I put my guessing to the proof. Dirk found the withered coney in the bracken."

Roger's face still shewed perplexity. He ran his hand through his mop of hair. "But—but I do not understand," he said. "I swear by the rood, my lord, the man was nigh to death; he was all spent, and lay weak and helpless."

"It did but seem so," explained the Bishop patiently. "'Twas all make-believe. The rogue is a mummer, well practised by his

trade to play a part. I had a dim memory of him that took long to clear, but it came at last. He was one of the vagabond players who were at our Fair last Feast of Holy Trinity. He was the rascal I found dicing in the churchyard, and I warrant he has not forgot his buffeting."

Roger pondered for a moment, and then his face lit up. The Bishop had made the matter plain at last. "The rogue!" he exclaimed, "he tried to rob you."

"That," said the Bishop, "was his plan. He is of that company who rob by cunning and not violence. He knew full well that the thorn was mine, and that a traveller robbed by one in hiding there could claim from me his recompense. The statute so decrees, and the rogue had brought his book of Law—stolen, I warrant—to shew me that he knew it. He did not think that he would meet me face to face. That is where his plotting went awry. He judged that, having played his part and left on you the impress of a sorry tale, you would bring to me the tidings, and that, to save the bush and stay all wagging tongues, I would send to him the money that he claimed."

Roger's rising anger, as he grasped the truth, came to the boiling point. "My lord, my lord," he pleaded, "give me leave to deal with him," and his clenched fist and angry flush shewed what he had in mind.

"Nay," replied the Bishop, "let him go in peace. The fellow is a rogue, but he has given me good entertainment. It was a game of wits, a battle I have often fought. In statecraft one has need to know how to unmask a liar. It is an exercise I had begun to lack, and this ill fellow has minded me of nobler foes."

There was a moment's silence, and in the Bishop's eyes there was a look of far-away. "Let him depart within the hour," he said at last.

"My lord, I must needs obey," said Roger ruefully. "But if he come again?" he eagerly asked.

"I have decreed the penalty, and you shall have the handling of it," answered the Bishop with a smile.

Roger's face brightened. "May heaven send him quick return," he said with fervour.

The Bishop rose, and as he walked away his step was almost jaunty. He had spent a pleasant morning.

THE ELECTION

" The inhabitants of the town, manor and lordship, or the greater or more discreet number, of men being of the age of twenty-two at least. shall assemble together on one or more days to be appointed by the said Warden for the time being, and there and then nominate and choose out of themselves twenty-five good and honest men of which the same Warden then be one, and which Warden and men so elected shall be called and named The Warden and Society of the Town, Manor and Lordship of Sutton Coldefylde."

Charter of King Henry VIII, 1528.

IN Tudor times the men of Sutton Coldfield were little stirred by a popular election. It was something new, and was looked on with suspicion. They shewed small interest in the election of their " Warden and Society," and had no desire to take a part in it. They probably held the view that they were no better nor worse off under one set of governors than another, a feeling not quite extinct in modern times. It was also the people's fixed idea that it had been ordained from the beginning that the ordering of things should be left to Providence and the gentry, and that it saved the lesser folk a good deal of trouble.

This was not what the Bishop wished. He wanted the people to take some part in the management of their own affairs, and did his best to rouse their interest. He made it known that all who were entitled to vote must be released from work to do so. He also ordered, so as to get rid of a counter attraction, that the tavern should be closed while the election was taking place. He did not foresee, what the electors quickly grasped, that by loitering outside the hall instead of going into it they stood a better chance in the race to the alehouse when the election was over.

It was true that, although they were willing to take things as they came and make no fuss about it, the poorer cottagers had some vague feeling of uneasiness about the management by the Warden

and Society of the Park the King had given them. They were to have grazing for their beasts at a fee within their reach and could gather fuel for their fires from the broken branches wind and weather strewed in the woodlands. But would they share equally in these benefits with their bigger neighbours ? Might not those with many cattle, who could pay a herd-boy, get the best grazing while the cottager's cow was driven to the barer pastures, and might not some in privileged position use the axe and not the weather to get timber for their barns and fences ?

There was ground for these suspicions, but no one to avert the danger, till Hosea Hodge, the miller's man, heard the murmurings and came to the rescue. Christened Hosea Malachi by a parson who, called on at the font to name the infant out of holy writ, could think of nothing but the minor prophets, he was known to all the town as " Dusty," the nickname for all fellows of his trade. He was, in his way, a local celebrity. In brawn and brain he was outstanding. The weights he lifted were a source of wonder, and on Sundays, at the butts, no one could shoot a straighter arrow. He was also a meditative fellow with ideas about Square Deals and the People's Rights that were novel and peculiar for Tudor times. He was the solitary feather of a local Left Wing, but a plume strong enough to make it flutter.

The cottagers could hardly have found a better champion. He was trusted and well liked, and had an unrivalled source of information in the flood of gossip that flowed into his mother's kitchen. Mother Hodge's aim in life was to know her neighbour's business and broadcast the information. She had in almost every household someone who would tell all the talk they overheard. Most of her news was of no importance whatever, but her faculty for embellishment was remarkable. She could fan a breath of scandal into a full gale, and make a story out of nothing. She was the kind of person who, as a modern journalist, could have written an epic article, with a splash headline, about an altercation between two sparrows. Her faculty for gathering news and her desire to tell the world made her a precursor of the newspaper and the B.B.C., with the advantage over both of them that it was not necessary to buy a news-sheet or turn a knob, but only to " drop in."

Dusty was well able to distinguish in this spate of chatter the substance from the frilling, and there were bits of information that helped him in the forming of his plans. He was a quiet man, and went quietly about his task. What was wanted to guard the interests of the poorer folk was the election of one or two honest men who would

stand against injusrice, and he induced three independent fellows to appear as candidates. They were Jacob Bull, the miller himself, whose family had lived beside the mill for generations and evoked the local adage " As honest as a miller " ; Giles Groom, who called himself a " mercer " but was a general provider in a small way ; and Will the Smith, whose forge lay within the shadow of the church and whose arrow-heads were famed through more than half the county. They were an excellent choice and, as the Charter ordered, " good and honest men." Their appearance as candidates for the new corporation was hailed with delight not only by the poorer folk but by some of ampler means.

There was no secrecy about the matter, and if proof were needed of the people's fears as to misuse of their park it could be found in some agitated minds. Adam Wylde, the cattle dealer of Maney Hill, was the first to spread alarm. He was a crafty and ambitious fellow whose aim was to " get on " and not be over scrupulous about it. He had seen in the gift of the park, cheap grazing for his cattle—and the best of it—and timber for his homestead. He was not far wrong in thinking that the Warden and Society might turn a blind eye to breaches of the Charter so long as there was no one to protest.

This pleasant prospect was now upset, and something must be done about it. There were some other not too honest men who shared Wylde's feelings, and he called them hurriedly together. All looked to him to give a lead, and he was ready. Open warfare, he told them, would only strengthen Dusty's hand ; they must work underground. This seemed to them the wisest course, and it was left to Adam to do the burrowing.

Wylde knew it would be fatal to appear as a candidate himself ; he was too unpopular, and everyone would guess what he was out for. It was also in keeping with his nature to hide in the background and pull the strings that worked the puppets. He had no trouble in finding two candidates to his liking, Dick Alder, a nimble witted fellow, whose business was with horses, and Egbert Quill, a shrivelled little man, who dabbled both in physic and the law, and was professional letter writer to most of the parish. The third place he found hard to fill. What he wanted was a craftsman to set against the maker of the arrow heads. The man best suited to his purpose was Roger Pippin, the saddler, who carried on his business at the bottom of the hill, in a small half-timbered house with a crooked gable, that bore the sign of " The Gilded Bridle," but he was not easy of approach on account of a ticklish matter that concerned his daughter, Joan.

Joan Pippin was a young woman with much force of character, comely and with fine brown eyes, who kept house for her father. She was also a casual helper at the Bishops' mansion of Moor Hall, where she was famed as a maker of mulled spiced ale, an accomplishment she derived from her mother, whose skill in this direction was said to have weighed with Roger in taking him a wife. The lady's skill, however, had gone far beyond spiced ale. She had a remedy for every ill that flesh is heir to as well as those derived from witchcraft. The base of her many potions came mainly from the fields and hedgerows with such added virtues as powdered toad skin or the crushed bone of a carp's head. Her remedies were so prized and varied that had she lived in a later and more commercial age she would have been floated as a public company, and " Pippin's Patent Potions " would have conquered half the world. As it was, her business had died with her, and her secrets were tucked away in a little box that Joan kept for remembrance.

As was to be expected, Joan had many suitors of whom Adam Wylde was the most pressing and most favoured. Their courtship had gone so far that their marriage was regarded as a settled thing. Then, to the surprise and scandal of the town, it was noised abroad, doubtless in a Mother Hodge " stop press edition," that Wylde had secretly wedded a widow of the near village of Yenton, whose thrifty husband had left her well endowed. Adam had found the widow's purse more alluring than Joan's brown eyes.

Joan was too proud to shew her feelings, and her anger burned more fiercely for that. Her father's attitude only served to fan the fire. His comment was that " there were plenty more berries on the bush," which was true enough, but not consoling when someone else has snatched the particular berry you have set your heart on. Joan's feeling for her parent was distinctly cold.

It was little wonder that Wylde expected a rebuff in his approach to Pippin, but his feelings were not delicate, and he had proved in practice that a glib tongue and brazen face can do a lot. He therefore planned a " casual " meeting, and found to his astonishment that the saddler bore no ill will and was easy of persuasion. He did not know that Pippin had long had an ambition to rise above the task of stitching leather and to cut some figure in the town.

Wylde took to electioneering like a duck to water, and had a duck's capacity for delving in the mud. He had found three candidates who would not be suspect, but would dance to any tune he played, and now his business was to get them all elected. Their meagre

popularity would not go far in this direction; some other means must needs be found to stimulate the voters. He decided that oratory was what was wanted; it would cause surprise and be a novelty. It was known that candidates might talk at the election meeting, but most of them would be content merely to look pleasant. Here, then, was a chance to shine. His men should flatter, promise and cajole in flowery speeches that committed them to nothing. Two of them were well equipped. Alder had a ready tongue and lively wit and Quill was a great talker " full of wise saws and modern instances." Pippin, however, was not so well endowed. He was not only a dull dog but a dumb one, but he could, no doubt, be trained to do his tricks. Wylde would compose his speech, and teach him to declaim it; it would be a hard task, but worth the while; for Pippin as an orator would win the town by sheer astonishment.

Roger was so pleased at blooming into public life that he urged that they should use " The Gilded Bridle " as a place where they could put their heads together. Wylde thought it an ideal spot; it was sufficiently remote, and no one could suspect the motive of a man who visited a saddler if he carried a bit of leather in his hand. The fact was overlooked that it was well within the range of Mother Hodge's window.

Wylde was satisfied with the progress of his plot, but he began to doubt if oratory would be enough to win the day. Some other weapon must be found to make quite sure, something that would be certain in its effect. Bribery had worked wonders in high places, and there seemed no reason why a tool that cut the tangles of a king or noble should not serve a lesser purpose just as well. He knew that many voters would be open to a bid, and that his peculiar talents would secure them cheaply.

The meetings at " The Gilded Bridle " were made convivial by their host; spiced ale was there in plenty. The only blight on the proceedings was Pippin's speech; he had no memory and his " platform manner " was something to deride. Wylde did his best, but his patience became exhausted. He delicately hinted that his pupil would be more impressive if, instead of speaking, he endeavoured to look wise; but, like a dog with a bone it means to keep, he growled at the suggestion. " No speech, no Pippin " was his ultimatum, and there was no option but to give way; the dread rehearsals had to go on.

The meeting on the night before the election was cordial and triumphant. Wylde rattled off a list of cheap votes he had got,

and swore they were enough to put the issue beyond doubt. The great point was delivery of the goods. There would be someone at the door to challenge all who came to vote. Age was the thing that mostly mattered, and might be open to dispute. There was the case of Tim Trott, the tiler, who never knew whether he was born on the night the mill-dam broke or the day the lightning struck the church. He explained this strange uncertainty by the fact that his mother's memory was bad, but that she was sure that he came into the world at the time that " something happened."

It was agreed that someone must be posted at the Moot House door to help the suborned voters if dispute arose, and Quill with his quick and crafty mind was entrusted with the task.

Pippin's oration was now the one shadow on the morrow's project. The only thing that could be done was to rehearse his speech again just before the poll in the hope that he would carry in his mind a bit of it for half an hour. It was agreed that Wylde and Alder should drill the faltering orator at " The Gilded Bridle," and rush him to the Moot Hall.

It had been clear from the beginning that Joan must be kept ignorant of what was going on, and Pippin shewed great invention in getting her away whenever the plotters met. But Joan was far too shrewd a damsel not to scent a mystery, and much too feminine not to want to find out all about it. Thus it happened on this last occasion that she stole back to the house, and listened through a crevice in the door to the whole conversation. Alder's voice roused her fury and set her thinking. She had waited long to settle an old score, and here might be the opportunity. There sprang from her pondering a bold idea.

That night she took down her mother's box, and read the contents in excited haste. At first, the dead hand seemed disinclined to help her. Potions to straighten crooked limbs, hasten childbirth, cure the Plague and dim the Evil Eye were not appropriate to the occasion. But her heart leapt as she unrolled the last scrap of faded paper. It was headed " Thes will not faylle ov makenge sleepe." The ingredients were peculiar, but all to hand.

There was a dreary dawn to the election day. The year had reached the threshold of November ; the sky was grey and a bitter wind added to the discomfort of a drizzling rain. But with the hour of triumph close at hand, the spirits of Pippin and his friends were weatherproof, and they were in fine feather when they met to put

the faltering orator through his paces. A large supply of mulled, spiced ale awaited them, and they voted it a marvellous brew; it had a tang, a bite, a something that was new to them. It was agreed that the occasion was being honoured by a masterpiece; in this conclusion they were right, and they did it justice.

Pippin had spent a sleepless night in muttered repetition, and he felt that he had mastered his oration, but when the time came for the rehearsal strange things happened. His friends were silent and unheeding, and they rocked and nodded. He was annoyed; they had come to hear his speech, and he was determined that they should. He struggled to his feet, but his legs were wobbling and his body started to rotate. Other phenomena began to puzzle him; a set of harness hanging on a wooden peg began to dance and jingle, his head throbbed and his eyes were closing. He sank into his chair, and a minute later his snoring told he was asleep.

Up at the Moot Hall, Quill was shepherding his flock; he managed to brush aside all protest by the keeper of the door, and now they all were safely penned. The time was near for the election to begin, but of Wylde and his party there was no sign at all. His anxiety grew into alarm, his fear spread into panic. Something had gone wrong. For a man of slow and placid habits he reached " The Gilded Bridle " in quick time. He hammered on Pippin's door, but there was no response; he lifted the latch to find the door was barred. He rushed to the back of the house, where Joan, despite the weather, was pottering in the garden patch. She shewed becoming symptoms of alarm, and they ran together into the house. The scene that faced them as they burst into the inner room was strange and unattractive; it was a piece of living statuary gone wrong. Pippin had slumped down in his chair, his clothes rucked up in ugly ridges; his mouth was open and he snored. Alder lay sprawled across the table in an unlovely attitude. Wylde had slipped down to the floor, his head against the table and his long legs tucked under him like a sleeping spider. They seemed the victims of a fatal visitation.

Quill was at his wits end. He shouted; not a muscle of the sleepers moved. He shook them roughly, but beyond a change of posture from the handling, nothing happened. Meanwhile, Joan had helpfully produced a pail of icy water from the well. Its liberal use caused some sign of life in two of the sleepers. Pippin muttered, and rolled his head; Alder groaned, and pleaded to be left to die. On Wylde the treatment had no effect at all. Quill looked at Joan in

mute appeal. " Pinch his ear—hard ; 'tis said 'twill wake a sleeper from the dead," she suggested with an expression of sweet innocence. Quill did as he was told—and did it well. The result was startling. The victim launched a string of oaths that were unusual even in a rude age. He sat up, and Quill only just escaped a blow that was meant to knock his head off. The treatment had had effect.

Having restored the sleepers to semi-consciousness, Quill yelled and gesticulated until it dawned on them that they ought to be somewhere else. They allowed themselves to be hauled to their feet, but found it hard to stay there. Now, the problem was to get them to the meeting place. It was clear that they would need a lot of help, but Quill was determined to do it somehow. His bright idea was that they should all link arms, with himself on one flank and Joan on the other to pull and do the steering. He found to his surprise that Joan liked the idea, and as they struggled into the street she was clutching in a needlessly fierce grip the arm of her old lover.

It was an uphill journey, and the rain and fallen leaves had made the Bishop's paving treacherous. The party had gone hardly a dozen steps before disaster met it ; Wylde pitched headlong on his face, and brought all but Joan down with him. It may have been mere accident, but Mother Hodge, who had a front-seat view of what was happening, declared that Joan not only tripped the fellow up but cuffed him heartily as he fell.

This seemed to end the venture, but Quill refused to give it up. If it were impossible to take the party altogether, it might be managed in instalments. He was convinced that if Wylde, the master mind, could only reach the Hall in time he would, despite his ill condition, save the situation. He pulled his draggled leader to his feet, and started him up the hill, bidding Joan to tend the other two until he came to fetch them. With an energy worthy of a better cause, he managed to get Wylde to the Moot Hall, and dumped him among his followers with strict orders to keep him waking at whatever cost.

The obedient voters did as they were told with such unfortunate results that the Warden ordered the disturber to be taken to the cool air outside. By a stroke of justice, Dusty was entrusted with the task, and never did he handle an unruly and awkward burden with more dignity and skill.

Though breathless and exhausted, Quill went down the hill again to fetch the other candidates, but things had happened since

he left them. Joan, with a return of filial feeling, had dragged her father into the house, leaving Alder propped against a wall in the drizzling rain. Mother Hodge, watching from her window, was moved to action, not by a sense of pity but a sporting desire to take part in the proceedings. The active old lady crossed the road, pulled the wet and muddied figure into the shelter of a nearby shed, and left him sleeping on a pile of roots.

Thus it happened that when Quill got back to the spot where he had left his friends, the street was empty; Mother Hodge was gazing through her window with an expression that told him nothing. He cursed in native idiom and in Latin, and bowed to Fate. He slowly struggled up the hill again, stopping from time to time to get his breath. As he reached the Moot Hall at last, he was carried off his feet by the rush of the electors stampeding for the tavern. It was all over.

The next day the whole town was enlivened by Mother Hodge's garnished tale of what had happened at " The Gilded Bridle." The story could not fail to reach the Bishop, and, knowing a good deal about the actors in the comedy, he formed conclusions that were very near the truth. He knew the real secret of the matter lay with Joan, and she was summoned from the kitchen to the Bishop's room.

She came in looking demure and innocent and with a look of wonder in her big brown eyes; she curtsied gravely and stood expectant. The Bishop was cutting a quill, and for a moment did not look up. Then he raised his head, and said in a quiet voice: " Strange things happened yesterday."

" Strange things ? " Joan repeated, and puckered her forehead in a puzzled frown meant to convey that she had no idea what was meant.

" At your father's house," the Bishop prompted.

" He had visitors, my lord," said Joan in a tone that suggested there was nothing strange in that.

" What happened to them ? " asked the Bishop.

" They were drunken," she explained, sighing and shaking her head sadly as though lamenting human folly. " They drank deep."

" Of what ? "

" Of mulled spiced ale," she answered simply.

" Ah ! " exclaimed the Bishop, " a potent drink," and he smiled and nodded gently as if that explained it all.

Joan had an inward glow; she felt she had escaped the danger she had feared.

" Spiced ale," the Bishop said reflectively. " Your mother was famed for such a brew."

" Truly," Joan confirmed with a proper look of pride.

" And for potions not so innocent ? " said the Bishop quietly.

Joan's sense of safety was badly shaken. She nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

The Bishop was watching her intently. " Why did you mix strange potions with the brew ? " he asked her suddenly.

It was drawing a bow at a venture, but the shaft went home. She stammered, and was dumb. Her knees were shaking, and she felt she had grown pale.

" Sit down," the Bishop ordered gently, and pointed to a bench.

For a few moments he went on with the cutting of a quill; then he turned to the girl again.

" Confess the truth," he said. " You have skill at cloaking it, and I want it bare."

Joan knew that nothing else would serve, and told what she had done.

" You have wrought evil," the Bishop said. " What reason moved you to this thing. Tell the whole tale."

The girl had found her tongue, and was eager to put up a defence. She told the story of her eavesdropping and all that she had overheard. As she ended, she turned to the Bishop with an appealing look, but his face was stern, and he reproached her harshly.

" You have done great ill," he said. " You have offended against the King; you have made assault against his subjects," and he quoted glibly from a Westminster statute. " The law demands stern punishment, and I will decree the manner of it. But there is danger in hasty judgment; I must ponder the whole matter."

He rose from his chair with a gesture of dismissal.

Frightened and distressed, Joan made a mournful exit, her mind filled with visions of the stocks, a whipping, or a new use for the ducking-stool. She would have been comforted if she could have seen the entry the Bishop made upon his tablet when the door was closed.

It ran :—" Item : To makke Joan Pippin a goodlie gifte at Christmasse."

He met two women going to the market.

THE BLACK MARKET

> *" Also ye shall enquere of all forestallers. A forestaller is he that where any vitail or corne cometh to the market, lyethe in the waye and byeth it, to thentente to make the vytyale or corne in the market derer, in hurte and preiudyce of the kynges people ; this vitayle and corne, that is forestalled is forfayted to the kinge : and if any of them haue solde it, ye shall enquere of the value, that the kynge may be answered thereof, Statutum An.25 E.3 Ca 3."*

(The Boke for a Justyce of Peace neuer soo wel and diligently set forthe. London, 1534.)

THE journey from Exeter had been long and tedious. Heavy storms in the west country had made the soft roads treacherous and boggy, and had put a heavy strain on the horses.

The Bishop's thoughts had not eased the tedium and discomfort of his travelling, for all the way his mind dwelt on new perplexities. The changes wrought by the Reformation had brought a host of troubles which tested to the full his skill and patience, and a lot of problems still remained unsolved. His recent visitation of his diocese had disclosed conditions that were near to chaos. There was neglect, indiscipline and divided loyalty between the old order and the new, and it needed more than urbanity and tact to straighten out the tangle.

He was particularly concerned about the dwindling revenue of the diocese. The great possessions of the See, which had been one of the richest in the country, were passing into private hands. The process had begun before he came to Exeter, but its pace had quickened and he saw no means to check its course. He wondered if he could have taken with any safety a firmer stand, but it was not easy to resist the pressure brought to bear by the King who had bestowed on him so many honours and who claimed the title of Supreme Head of the Church. It was necessary to walk warily so as both to hold his place and keep his honour. One recent alienation of a valuable

manor had caused him particular stress of mind. It had been a hard fight, and the best that he could do to ease his grave misgiving was to enter in the register of the transaction the saving note: "In obedience to a request made by the King."

It was not only the robbery of the Church but the shrinking income he himself derived that caused him great uneasiness. Accustomed to the lavish splendour of King Henry's court, and finding himself on his enthronement the possessor of a princely stipend, his pride and generosity had led to undertakings that might bring disaster. The mansion of Moor Hall which he had built, where he dispensed rich hospitality, and the splendid projects which he had determined to put in hand for the welfare of his native town were eating into his resources and throwing a dark shadow on the future.

These reflections and the weariness of the journey had brought him to a state of deep depression when, at the close of a warm June day, he at last approached the town. But at the first distant view of Sutton Coldfield church, standing, a stately silhouette against a purple sky, on the hill around which the little town was clustered, his spirits rose and he began to lose his weariness.

By the time the tired horses struggled up the hill from the raised causeway to the church, few townsfolk were still abroad, but those who saw him pass gave token of warm welcome. A sleepy woodman, drowsing at the door of his tiny cottage, sprang to his feet and tugged his forelock, and his broad smile was one of welcome. A bent old woman, returning late from wood gathering, dropped her faggot and made a valiant effort to curtsey. An ill-clad urchin, who should have been abed, made a gesture intended for a bow, gaily waved his hand, and rushed off home to tell the glad news of the Bishop's coming.

Across the gentle valley from the church to the Moor Hall, the weary horses, sensing the nearness of their stables, broke into a brisk trot and kept their quickened pace right up the slope to the Bishop's mansion where a great welcome was awaiting him. Below the terrace, a score of men, whose crimson livery made a brave show even in the failing light, stood ready to receive him. At the foot of the terrace steps, Peter Chase, the Bishop's steward and overseer, greeted his master with a dignity that could not conceal his pleasure. A few minutes later, lights were shining from the windows of the Long Room, and voices, shrill with excitement, sounded in the servants' wing. The Bishop had come home.

On the morrow, the day broke fair and bright, and the sun had run but little of its course before the Bishop was awake and active. The depression of the previous day had gone, and he was feeling like a schoolboy who had flung his books aside. The troubles of Exeter had been packed away, and his thoughts were centred on the schemes he had set in motion for raising his town from its poverty and distress and endowing its people with lasting benefits. This ruling passion drew its urge from many sources. There was his natural love of the place from which he sprang, distraction from the afflicting cares of Church and State, freedom to plan just as his judgment led and, perhaps, a strong desire to crown his life with works of lasting benefaction as a set-off to the years of pomp and pride that were already fading. He may even have foreseen that schemes so wisely planned to stand for all time would be a more vivid and lasting memorial than the most splendid tomb.

So eager was he to begin an inspection of all that was going on and to learn all that had happened while he had been away that, while he took a hurried but hearty breakfast, his steward was summoned to the table. Peter Chase was an active, stocky little man of middle age with the face of a grown up cherub. He had charge of the Bishop's household and estate, and in his master's absence was the Bishop's eyes and ears. He combined in his own person all the functions of a fine " intelligence department," and his memory and observation were remarkable.

Despite his qualifications for the task, Chase was sorely tried in quenching the Bishop's thirst for information. Questions flowed like a torrent. How far had the new town paving gone ?—was the building of the Grammar School begun ?—had the last span of the stone bridge at Curdworth been completed ?—were the new stocks set up in the appointed place ?—had the stone house at Maney got its roof ?—did the market flourish and were its laws obeyed ?—who had ended their mortal journey, and what children had been born ? In particular he enquired if more beasts had been bought to swell the stock that pastured in the people's park, and Peter was glad to tell him of a brood mare and a bull that waited his approval in the Low Meadow.

The Bishop's inquisition was only a preliminary, and he was eager to set out at once to see things for himself. As he stood upon the terrace and looked towards the south, he saw a widespread, shining picture. The land fell gently to a small valley and, beyond the further slope, above the tops of clustered elms, the church tower,

lighted by the morning sun, lifted its head. The grass of the near meadow glistened with dew, each blade a tiny water runnel. It would be wet going underfoot, but the Bishop was not dainty when he went abroad. He wore stout boots of untanned hide and a cloak that was fitted for rough usage. The beauty of the scene, although it suited his uplifted mood, did not hold him long, and soon he and Chase were walking briskly to the Low Meadow.

The mare, a heavy piebald, was grazing close beside the fence, and the Bishop quickly gave his verdict. " I like not its colour," he said. " The creature should have had a settled mind about the tinting of her coat. She has hovered twixt two opinions and become a patchwork. Still, she has substance, a good crest, fair depth of front and good hocks. What of her feet ? "

" They be sound," Chase assured him.

" Then," said the Bishop, " she will pass. Her progeny may shew more decision in their choice of colour."

The bull was lying beneath the elms in a far corner of the meadow, chewing the cud of a meal that had begun at daybreak. The Bishop climbed the fence to make a close inspection though Chase gave warning that the beast was not of easy temper. They had drawn quite near before the bull sensed their coming. He rose quickly and wheeled towards them, at first a little undecided as to the manner of his greeting. The Bishop had time to note the long horns that spread in a great arc above its head, the straight back and the deep flank, but it was soon clear that the animal resented the inspection. It lowered its head and bellowed hoarsely.

" It would be well to make our going," Chase advised, " until we are better placed."

" There is prudence in your council," said the Bishop. " ' Tis clear the fellow has no liking for my person. 'Twould seem that enmity towards the Church is spreading to the lower creation, though the animosity of this angry beast is easier to counter than the veiled enmity of more exalted enemies."

The bellowing of the bull grew louder, and a pawing forefoot threw clods into the air. The Bishop moved calmly towards the fence with a quickened step that lost no dignity, but with a wary glance over his shoulder. Chase would have liked to lead the way, but thought it savoured of disrespect. There were a few paces still to go when the bull made up its mind to speed the visitors by a charge. The Bishop decided on a longer and a quickened step. It was not a run,

but it was a marked acceleration that only got him on the safe side of the fence before the bull reached it.

Chase expressed an opinion of the beast, its manners, shape and ancestry that was only slightly tempered by the presence of a dignitary of the Church, but the Bishop shewed no irritation. " 'Tis but waywardness," he said ; " the fellow has some spirit and he may, perchance, learn better manners. He may be froward, but he is a comely beast. What paid you for him ? "

At the mention of the price, the Bishop raised his eyebrows in an expression of surprise that put the steward on his defence. " There are but a few bulls of quality hereabouts, and one man holds them and can get his price," he said.

" And who is this who pulls so hard upon our purse-strings ? " the Bishop asked.

" 'Tis Ezra Honeybun," Chase answered.

The Bishop so far forgot his dignity and office as to whistle. " Ho ! ho ! " he exclaimed. " I wonder by what alchemy his ducks and geese have been transmuted into cattle. 'Tis not long since his back was bare and his breeches an offence to decency, and now he grows into a man of substance. Methinks he climbs too quickly for an honest man, and that some of the feathers lining Ezra's nest were harshly plucked."

Chase could only murmur " I will keep an eye on him."

Ezra Honeybun, whatever suspicions might attach to him, was not a lie-a-bed. He could have been seen, long before the Bishop had set out, astride a stout pony, two panniers hanging from his saddle, riding along the narrow, rutted road that led to Lichfield. This expedition was a little strange, as it was market-day in Sutton, and he was going in the opposite direction.

He was a tall, lank fellow with reddish, greying hair and a sallow, freckled face which wore a perpetual smile that seemed to spring neither from mirth nor satisfaction. It was, indeed, to use a modern term, " a trade fixture," which helped business.

A mile or two beyond the town he met two old women—all the men and younger women were in the fields—struggling with heavy baskets on their way to market. It was only natural to give them greeting and to talk about the weather and the market. He stressed the prospect of a blazing day, the toil of carrying heavy loads to town and the dullness and uncertainty of trade. Times were hard

and money scarce, and his heart was touched by the thought of poor souls finding none to buy, and having to carry their full baskets home again. He was a tender-hearted man, he said, and out of pity would rid them of their loads as he had easy means to carry them. The women were impressed by this kind offer, but they shook their heads at the price he offered, and began to move away. Ezra checked them, and began to bargain. He stretched his smile and raised his offer. The women hesitated, grumbled, and then gave way; the contents of their baskets went into Ezra's panniers.

A little further on the road there was a similar meeting, a like discussion and the same ending. The fellow's ready tongue went a long way with most of the women, but he had a tough task to get the better of a wizened, rough, old man in the matter of a sack of wheat. The old fellow spat in derision when a price was mentioned, and expressed refusal in language that was broad and biting, but, finally, after much haggling, the sack was loaded on the pony's back. It had cost Ezra twice as much as he had first offered, but no one better understood how short supply and brisk demand affect sale prices, and he was well content as he turned his pony on the homeward way.

As the Bishop continued his walk to the town, his observant eye took in everything, and Chase was overwhelmed with questions and instructions. The little stream that ran down the valley was choked by weed and rushes; it must be cleared at once. The corner of a fence was sagging; let new posts be cut. The trees in the new coppice were crowding one another; the woodmen must see to it. Thus, his alert mind prompted his talk as he passed through his domain and climbed the slope towards the church.

As he reached the highway, he stopped for a moment to look at the pleasant house, standing where the road took its turn and dip down to the mill, in which he had lived while he planned and watched the building of Moor Hall. The mellow tinted walls, the well-proportioned windows with their diamond panes, composed themselves into a charming picture. As he looked on it, he sighed, but whether the deep breath came from his love of beauty or the thought that in the days he lived there he was less burdened than to-day, it was not possible to tell.

He paused again where the open space at the top of the hill marked the centre of the little town, to look at the new stocks. In them, sat a forlorn old man who was purging his offence of tavern brawling. His face was bruised and blood-stained, and at his feet

was a litter of garbage of which he had been the target. " What means this ? " asked the Bishop, to which his steward answered : " 'Tis but the children's mischief." " You call it by a fair name," the Bishop said. " It is wanton cruelty, and it must cease. Let them find some other outlet for their frowardness. The penalty of those who sit here is contumely and public shame, not torture. See that it happens not again." The prisoner lifted his head, and mumbled words of gratitude. " Shew your thanks by mending evil ways," the Bishop said, as he turned to make his way to the lower part of the town where the paving he had ordered was now begun.

On both sides of the narrow street, running down the hill, a broken line of cottages straggled in picturesque disorder. They were of timber framing filled in with wattle and mud plaster. Some shewed the " cruck " form that was the beginning of half-timbered building. On the west side of the way, the little houses lay in shadow that helped to veil their hastening decay, but on the eastern aspect the bright gleam of the summer sun shewed sagging roofs and broken plaster. Most of the cottages were leaning as though neglect and age had made them weary.

Few people were about ; most of them were in the neighbouring market-place beneath the shadow of the church. A few dejected hens pecked hopefully in the roadway, a lean sow sprawled in the sun, a dog yapped mournfully, and an old woman, looking as worn as her tumbling cottage, dozed outside her door.

The paving was in progress at the bottom of the hill, and as the Bishop came near the work a strange sight halted him. Three women, whose backs were turned and who were neither young nor lissom, were walking on the new pavement with a curious dancing step, and a couple of small children pranced in front of them like half-clad fauns. The scene suggested a mystic rite or a novel variation of a folk-dance, but it was only a playful token of delight at having, at long last, some solid ground to walk on.

As they reached the pavement's end and turned about to find the Bishop watching them, their strange performance came to a sudden end. The youngsters bolted like startled hares, but the women, after their first shock of surprise, came slowly forward, bobbing and bowing. Such was the Bishop's greeting that instantly they found their voices and poured out their feelings.

" God bless your lordship."

" Thanks be to you, lord Bishop."

" Heaven reward your lordship's goodness."

they cried out together in a chorus of thanks that was as genuine as it was loud. With the floodgate of their chatter opened, nothing could stop the torrent.

Ann Buggins, blessed with the stoutest frame and loudest voice, was first to gain the Bishop's ear. " We bless your lordship for lifting us out of the mire," she began. " Your pavement be like walking in the streets of heaven after the bogging we have had. We sank like pebbles in a pool. Our petticoats were so mud-caked they rattled when we walked. The cows sank to their udders. Old William's red and white was held so fast they had to milk her where she stood, and when she whisked her tail she slung mud over half the parish. The neighbours had a heavy sweat to get her out. 'Twas mercy she was not there till resurrection day."

She paused for breath, and Susan Duckett, who had waited with ill patience for the chance, added her shrill testimony. " 'Tis wonderful," she exclaimed. " Our dogs and cats can cross the road, and not call to be lifted out. The ducks and hens can go afoot and save their wings. The—"

It was only a moments pause, but Mary Dolphin managed to break in, with a dramatic story of lost shoes, but the Bishop had heard enough and stayed the talk. " 'Tis well your troubles have been eased," he said. " I will see that the good work is pushed on. Now get you to the market before you are too late."

The women all threw up their arms, and sighed. Ann Buggins was again the first to tell her tale. " We come from thence," she said, " but there is nothing such as we can buy. Half the market folk are not to town, and Ezra Honeybun asks for more money than our purses hold. My old mother ails and all her teeth be gone. She can but swallow a pannikin of broth or mumble morsels of a hen if it have grown a breast and it be boiled enough. All my hens be eaten, and Ezra Honeybun asks the price of a small flock for a shrivelled thing all bones and feathers. I wanted but a peck of wheat, and his price should buy a bushel. There be none else to buy from. "

" He thinks his eggs be jewels," exclaimed Susan Duckett.

" And his butter lumps of gold," Mary Dolphin added. " 'Tis sheer contrariness of all the people hereabouts. They will not bring to market. To-day no woman from beyond the Mere Pool has come, and last week no one from beyond the Blabbs pushed a nose into the place, and—"

" That is enough," broke in the Bishop. " It is ill news. Here is a happening not due to chance. Come aside while I consider it." He led them to where the angle of a cottage screened the public view, and pondered for a moment while the women, now silent with wonder, stood around him. " You shall have what you set out to buy," he said at last. " Go back, and pay what Ezra asks. My steward will give you the money that is needed, but the matter must be ordered as I say. Let no one know I sent you nor whence the money comes, but mark well the price you pay. Disobey this charge and you will forfeit everything. Bring your baskets to me at the church porch within the hour. Is my ordering clear ? "

The women nodded their assent; they were too astonished to give tongue. Chase handed them the pence they needed, and they went their way. When the women were out of hearing, the Bishop turned to Chase and asked " What think you of this fellow ? "

" He is a rogue, my lord, and I have failed you not to know it," answered the steward, and his cherubic face looked troubled.

" There are some rascals who could hoodwink the devil," was the Bishop's comment. " He is a forestaller who has robbed our people and defied the market laws, but chance has put him in a net, and he shall pay the penalty. Ere that, there are other things to do. Now let us see the paviours and hurry them with their task."

The little group of men rose from their work with rough tokens of deference and welcome. The Bishop praised their progress, asked what stone they had and its fitness for its purpose. He knew each one of them, and talked about their women and their children. Indeed, he lingered until Chase shewed signs of wanting to be gone. " Peter," he said, as they moved away, " I fear that I grow garrulous, but it is a refreshment to talk to simple men instead of grasping schemers, and to look upon a piece of honest work free from chicanery."

It was a steep climb up the rough, narrow path that was a short cut from the bottom of the hill to the south side of the church, where the Grammar School was now begun, but the Bishop made no halting on his way, for he was as eager to see the work as a child to look on a new toy. He was happy and surprised to find the building already taking shape. Several courses had been laid, and with the plan spread out upon a block of stone he talked to the master mason with an interest that bordered on excitement. Could not a window opening be made wider, a door be raised a little and some simple ornament

be carved on the arch ? Then he began to examine, with a quick eye and stone by stone, the courses already laid, nodding approval as he went along. Suddenly he stopped, and called the master mason to his side.

" Here is a stone," he said, " that does not lie, as I have ordered, on its quarry bed."

" It lies snugly in its place," excused the mason.

" And has saved you labour," went on the Bishop with a note of anger in his voice, " but it is against my orders. Take it out, and fashion another that will lie as nature formed it in the quarry. In my building of the new aisles of the church, I did protest before on the same matter. I care not if a stone lies snugly ; it must lie so as best to face the wind and weather. See to it."

Time was passing, and the Bishop's steward ventured to remind him that the women with their baskets waited in the porch. They had an air of excitement as the Bishop greeted them and bade them to display what they had bought. Ann Buggins held aloft the scraggy hen of which she had spoken.

" What paid you for that ? " the Bishop asked, and he frowned when the woman told him. " I wonder whence this shrivelled carcase comes."

The woman shook her head, but Chase answered in a flash : " From the cottage on Furse Hill beyond Mere Pool."

" What tells you that ? " asked the Bishop in astonishment.

" Its colour, stilted legs and want of flesh," came the ready answer. " The woman has nought with which to feed her cacklers. They forage for themselves and strut a mile without a peck at anything. I warrant the hen's crop be empty."

The Bishop's " Um-m," expressed his doubt. He pointed to the eggs in Susan's basket, and asked what she had paid for them. His frown deepened when she told him. " I wonder where they were laid," he murmured almost to himself.

" At a cot a bow-shot from the other " Chase answered with assurance.

" Whence this gift of divination ? " asked the Bishop sharply. " One egg is very like another, and the layers do not etch their names upon them."

" But in this case they have made it plain," said the steward. " There's not a dirty egg among them, and the woman is the only one who gives her hens clean nests to lay in."

The Bishop shrugged his shoulders. " Now, master magician," he said to Chase, as he lifted some butter from a basket, " tell us whence this came."

Chase took the yellow lump, looked at it, and held it to his nose. " From the widow by the hazel copse on the same road," he answered with decision. " It tells its own tale by the smell of it. The widow's bit of grazing gives a poor bite. There is a stinking herb that grows along the hedgerow, and the hungry cow eats anything."

The Bishop was too astonished to challenge the proof. He merely pointed to the wheat in Ann Buggin's basket and asked : " Now tell us who grew this ? "

Chase took a handful, ran it through his fingers, and promptly answered : " Old Thomas o' the Hill Top. It's full of mustard and wild oats. His land is foul with it, and he is too blind to use much care in winnowing."

The Bishop paused a moment. " Is that hazard ? " he asked sternly. " I want truth to act upon."

" I do not hazard when you question me, my lord," came the steward's answer. " Everything these women have was grown within a mile on the far side of the Mere Pool. The forestaller has been early afoot and gathered a rich harvest."

" I am convinced," the Bishop said, and it needs no hazard to tell the rascal's name. Forestalling is an enmity against the King, and they who practise it are subject to the King's decree. It is my will and duty to enforce it. Come with me."

It was a strange procession that filed out of the porch. The Bishop led the way with solemn dignity, his steward by his side. The women with an air of great importance walked behind carrying their baskets. As they came down the short, steep path from the church to the market place, the chatter of the people gathered there suddenly ceased. The appearance of the Bishop was a surprise, and the manner of his coming a perplexity. He walked straight to the spot where Ezra Honeybun stood beside his stall, and the market-folk gathered round in a wide circle intent on finding out what was afoot. They stood at a respectful distance but took good care to get within hearing.

Ezra greeted the Bishop with a cringing bow and his unchanging smile, but his eyes betrayed his anxiety. The Bishop, as was his way, lost no time in coming to the point. "What did you on the Shenstone road this morning," he asked.

"I did but ride that way to see how neighbours fared," Ezra said.

"And you met the folk coming to the market."

"Yes, my lord."

"And took what they were bringing?"

"I paid them fair prices, and saved them the toil of coming to the town. It seemed but charity, for the day was hot and wearying."

The Bishop's face hardened. "Add not to your toll of evil a false claim to pity," he said sternly. "You set out to forestall, and to enrich yourself by plundering honest folk and selling at a usurer's profit. What paid you for this hen; this butter and this wheat?" and he pointed to the women's baskets.

It was not aversion to the sin of lying but the conviction that the Bishop either knew, or would find out, that made Ezra tell the truth.

"Your price was more than doubled when you sold," went on the Bishop, "and as there were few others from whom to buy, these women needs must pay your price or go home with their baskets empty. Had you not forestalled, the cottage folk would have come to town and gladly sold at half your price." He turned to Chase. "The statute against forestallers is regularly proclaimed?" he asked.

"At the first market in each month," was the reply.

"Then ignorance is not the cause of this wrongdoing."

"I—I did not understand," Ezra stammered.

"Be not forsworn." The Bishop's voice rose angrily. "You understood. Though the devil has endowed you with cupidity you were not born a fool. The penalty of forestalling is that the goods are forfeit to the King, but he will be pleased enough, I warrant, if they be given to honest lieges who go hungry. These are my orders—in the King's name. Give to the woman who bought that feathered skeleton the price she paid you."

Ezra still smiled as he handed back the money.

" Now give her a hen that has a picking on it—that white one there."

The man obeyed, and though his smile still held, it had a twisted look.

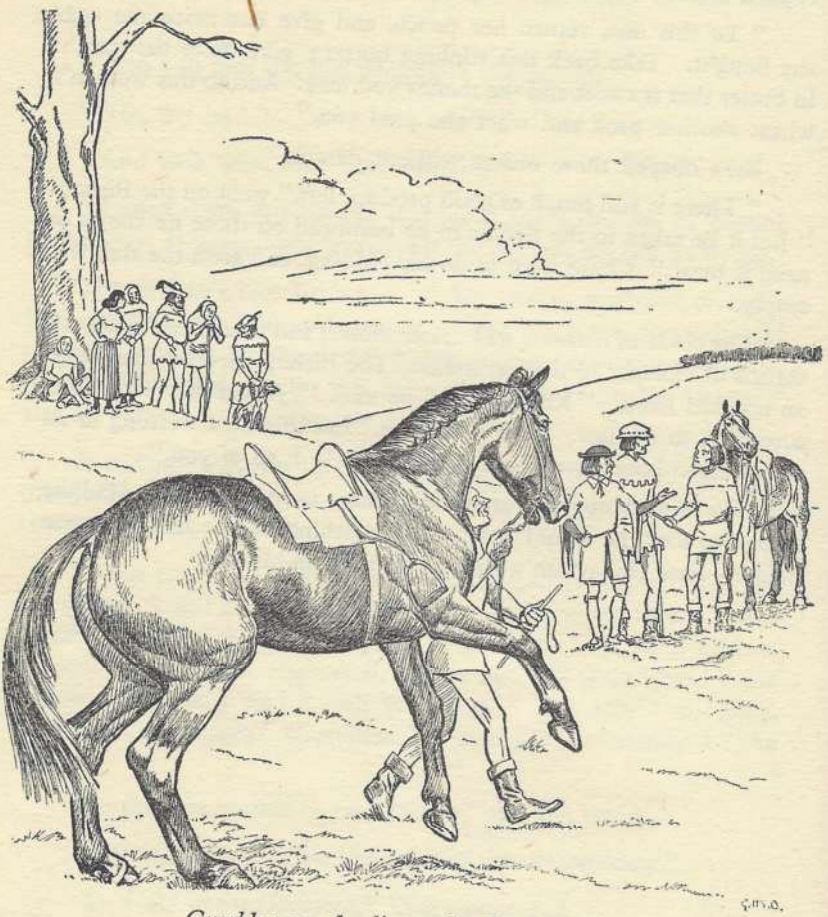
" To this one, return her pence, and give her twice the eggs she bought. Take back this stinking butter ; give twice the weight in butter that is sweet and the money you took. Add to this woman's wheat another peck and what she paid you."

Ezra obeyed these orders without demur.

" There is still much of good produce left," went on the Bishop. " Let it be taken to the Rector to be bestowed on those he knows to need it most." Chase went to do his bidding, and soon the stall was empty.

The circle of listeners had drawn closer, and there were muttered threats of violence to the forestaller. The Bishop silenced them with an uplifted hand. " Keep peace," he said. " Justice has been done according to the law. That is enough. Let this be a warning to all who seek to break from honest dealing. Go ! all of you."

The crowd obeyed, and the Bishop went his way. Had he turned to look, he would have seen something no one had ever seen before—Ezra Honeybun without a smile upon his face.



Gumbley was leading a big, black horse.

THE WHITE BAT

MAN'S first need being a shelter from the elements, the housing question, in some form or other, has been a major problem throughout the ages. It is not unlikely that in prehistoric times the number of caves available was occasionally not enough to meet the demand, and that possession was gained neither by gift nor suasion, but by cracking a skull with a stone axe.

This recurring problem of an excess of families over dwellings was one the Bishop had to face when he set about the task of rescuing his native place from the ill condition into which it had fallen. Neglect, enforced by poverty, had made many of the poorer dwellings uninhabitable. They had given up the struggle against rain and tempest, and settled into ruins that were not even picturesque.

There was added to the housing difficulty another perennial problem, that of finding profitable work for people living in enforced idleness. While Warwick the Kingmaker held the manor and a body of retainers was established in the town, there was work for all, but since Warwick had fallen and his retinue had scattered the people had felt the scourge of unemployment. The depression was heavy and widespread. The woodmen had been discharged, and, beyond an occasional repair, masons, carpenters and tilers found nothing for their hands to do. Even the smith, who had never known an idle hour before, knew one now. The well-known mark upon his arrow heads brought no custom. His skill as an armourer was of no avail, for the armour wearers had departed. Tools were no longer mended; they were cast aside.

The Bishop looked upon a gloomy picture as he planned the restoration of the town, and there was no easy way to carry out his purpose. Doles would only demean the people further and sever the last shred of independence. Work alone could meet the case, and even then it must be useful labour in which the workman could feel a pride. Help to a drooping agriculture might do something,

but only a bold and comprehensive plan could solve the dual problem of housing and want of work. Thus resolved, the Bishop lost no time in getting into action. He would house his people decently, and dignify the town. There was need for a Moot Hall and a Market-place, and there was the housing of the School that he planned. It called for a heavy toll of money, but the end in view was worth the sacrifice. The more he dwelt on them, the more his plans fired his zeal; the difficulties in the way were but a challenge to his skill and patience.

The number of dwellings needed, their sites, their structure, all called for study and enquiry. There were few who could help him in the task, but he brought to counsel Ralph Wendon, the Rector, who knew more about his flock than most pastors, Peter Chase, his steward, who knew even more about the people than the Rector did, Hogg, the master mason, and Crabbe, the carpenter. These willing helpers all took fire from the Bishop's tinder, and things moved on apace. A plan was made of the whole parish, the tumbling dwellings were inspected, and a census of the homeless or ill housed families was taken.

A few cottages were found not to be beyond repair, but a big task lay ahead if decent shelter were to be provided for all who needed it. The Bishop had set out with the idea that a score of dwellings would meet the case, but it was soon made clear that twice that number would not suffice when he had carried out his purpose of bringing to the town from Devon weavers who would teach the trade of making kerseys.

The siting of the houses for the different purposes they had to serve was in itself a task. There were, for instance, in the outlying parts of the wide parish, tracts of rough, uncultivated land that could be turned to farmsteads if there were a place to dwell, and these cottages, if fitly placed, could serve as guards against marauders, and, with lighted window, be a beacon to lost travellers at nightfall.

For weeks, the Bishop, on his small and sober sorrel mare, rode around the countryside with his faithful steward, far better mounted, looking for the best locations, and there was often wordy conflict before they reached decision.

The question of materials was easily decided. Jerry building would have served immediate needs, but the Bishop meant the houses that he built to last for centuries, as indeed they did. Stone

alone would meet his purpose. Well laid, it would withstand both time and weather, and it could be drawn from quarries not far away.

Skilled labour was not abundant, for many of the best craftsmen had gone afield in search of work. They must be drawn back and new recruits added to the service. The bait of better wages and shorter hours could not be dangled; they were fixed by law. By a statute passed in the seventh year of Henry's reign, it was decreed—

> *" That none artifycer nor labourer hereafter named, take no more nor greater wages than hereafter is lymitted, vpon peyn sessed as wel to the giuer as to the taker, that is to saye, a free mason, mayster carpenter, rough mason, bryklayer, mayster tyler, plommer, glasyer, keruer, nor ioyner, from Easter to Myghelmas euery of theym six pence for the day, without meate and drynke, and with meate and drinke four pence. And from Myghelmas to Easter five pence without meate and drynke, and with meate and drynke three pens. And euery artificer and labourer muste be at work betwene the myddest of the month of Marche and the middest of the moneth of September before five of the cloke in the mornyng. And frome the myddest of Septembre to the myddest of March, euery artifycer and labourer must be at worke in the spryng of the day, and shall not depart afore night."*

The Bishop had no wish to go beyond the letter of the law, but if the letter were a little blurred he saw no reason why he should not read it as he chose. " Meate and drynke," " the spryng of the day " and such like were elastic terms, and could be stretched to suit his purpose. His liberal interpretations had the desired effect, and there was soon a goodly band of workmen waiting on his orders.

It was natural that the house in which he had been born should suggest the type of the new dwellings, but the builders had wide scope to follow their own bent and find an interest and pride in what they did. One serious obstacle to the Bishop's plans arose. The houses for the kersey makers must needs have wide, low windows for the proper lighting of their looms. To the local craftsmen this was rank heresy. They had never heard of such a thing; it was foreign and ridiculous, an insult to ancient usage and tradition. The small, square windows of their fathers were good enough for anyone. They resented change in any case, and to break the local custom to oblige mere strangers could not be thought of. The Bishop argued and explained, but it made no difference. The men were firm, but cloaked their flat refusal with the plea that the new construction was beyond their skill.

It was not the Bishop's habit to be thwarted, and he decided to bring masons from Devon, who understood the weaver's needs, to do what was wanted. It was, in some respects, a bold decision; though they would not dare to offer violence, the local men might not deal kindly with the invaders.

By good luck or rare judgment, the Bishop was fortunate in his selection of the men who came upon his mission—Nathan Gumbley, a master mason of good repute, and David his son. Nathan was an amiable widower of middle age, and David, like the one of old, was "goodly to look to." The natives were, at first, a little distant, but father and son soon gained a measure of esteem; even the masons regarded them as worthy members of their craft. David, indeed, sprang into popularity. He was a knowing and amusing fellow; where women were concerned, he had a roving eye, and at the tavern he was open-handed. With the maids, he set the dovecotes in a flutter, and the local swains fell into eclipse. The ladies used all their wiles, and not content with trying to improve such natural charms as nature had bestowed, they sought the help of magic. A vendor of love spells who came to Trinity Fair sold out her stock within an hour.

The building plans now went smoothly and apace; the Bishop's eager spirit urged the workers on. He was his own clerk of works, and seldom missed a day without seeing all the work in progress. His staid, old mare grew so accustomed to the round that any change of circuit caused a show of temper; unlike the humans of her sex, she hated change.

The Bishop's next task was to fit the people into the houses, and it was not easy to sift the claims of all who clamoured for a new dwelling. In many cases the need was obvious, but the motive of some applicants was not necessity; the ancient vice of snobbery had a lot to do with it. Jane Boffin thought it would be a step-up in the social scale to exchange a house half-timbered for one of stone, and Myra Filkin sought by getting a superior dwelling to humble Sarah Froggatt's pride in her new dresser, oak settle and armchair. These were not the pleas they made, but the Bishop's knowledge of the human race unveiled the real motive, and his refusal in such cases was definite and blunt. He cared not that the ladies should be piqued, and the remedy they might have had of writing to the newspapers was reserved for a more favoured age.

Philip Bower, whose mind was set on Ruth Longland, who served as maid to Eleanor, the Bishop's niece, was plain enough in

his petition. His answer to the Bishop's question : " What need you of housing ? " was simply, " To take a wife." " Your reason," said the Bishop, "needs no commendation, but I would test your ardour—you must wait awhile. I would not have Ruth wedded to an inconstant fellow."

Philip felt angry disappointment, but he had not long to wait. More then forty houses had been built and the more pressing needs disposed of, when a cottage with a special purpose, on the winding track to Walmley, " the dreary, lonely place," was ready. It stood within a bowshot of a crossing of the Ebrook, a treacherous stream to those who did not know the secrets of its crumbling banks and bogging sands. A horseman, an active fellow, dwelling there, would guide or rescue travellers who made the crossing in times of flood. It was not a job for anyone, and of those who clamoured for the place only two were outstanding, Philip and the lively lad from Devon. They were young and active, and both of them had useful horses for the work in hand. Gumbley, like Philip, was on matrimony bent, for after nibbling at many baits he had been hooked by the tavern-keeper's daughter, whose robust charms out-weighed the harass of a bitter tongue.

The choice between them was an uneasy problem for Peter Chase, the Bishop's steward, his master being in his distant diocese. In fitness for the job there was not a pin to choose, and there was a disturbing factor. If Gumbley were selected, many of the townsfolk would resent this preference of a stranger; on the other hand, the Bishop might feel that the man he brought from Devon had a better claim. In Chase's mind the pendulum swung to and fro until in desperation he told the rivals they must decide the matter in their own way.

The news caused a stirring in the town. It promised some excitement, for youngsters did not settle things by drawing lots or throwing dice, and there seemed good sport in prospect. Soon there were two rival groups. The older people and the disappointed damsels favoured Philip ; the tavern customers and young bloods were solid for the Devon lad.

Dick Alder, the horse dealer, who lived beyond Mere Pool, just short of Shenstone, and was the sports leader of the crowd, called a meeting at the tavern, and asked the two men to come and talk things over. Philip at once suggested shooting twenty arrows or three throws at a wrestling. Gumbley shook his head, pleading a strained muscle caused by heavy lifting ; it was the first that had

been heard of it. No one else had anything to say, and there seemed a deadlock. They all sat there like brooding hens till Alder seemed suddenly to hatch a bright idea. Both men had horses; why not a race between them? The company shouted their approval, and Gumbley was enthusiastic. Philip was not quite so ready; he wanted to weigh the odds. Gumbley's horse, he reflected, was younger than his own and would be faster on a short burst but not so likely to stay a distance. It all depended on the course, and they willingly agreed that he should set it. He chose, appropriately enough, a start from the Ebrook cottage and a finish at the Bishop's mansion by way of the rough and marshy lane through the low-land known as "Little Holland" to the causeway that led to Lichfield; thence up the Church Hill and across the fields to the Moor Hall. It was a testing course, which was what he wanted. He wondered at their quick agreement and the ready way they filled his cup.

"And now," said Alder, "to make it clear, we'll set it out in writing." Egbert Quill, a crafty fellow who knew something about Law, was given the task. He wrote at Alder's slow dictation that the men must "ride from the Ebrook to the Bishop' mansion," the race to be run two days hence an hour after sunrise. To this paper both men set their marks.

Philip's walk on his way home was not as steady as it might have been—he had drunk more ale than was his custom—and the friendly and obliging manner of the company he had left aroused a faint suspicion. He found comfort in the thought that, as a lawyer had done the writing, all must be well, which shewed he was a simple fellow.

Within an hour or two, news of the race had spread throughout the town, and wagering had begun. It looked an even chance, which gave a spicing to the contest. It was an event that caused excitement in the quiet town.

Philip's sleep was usually untroubled, but on the night before the race, he had a curious dream. He was chasing, in imagination, a big black creature, but was trailing far behind when his mare became a Pegasus and carried him on easy wings to where the Bishop in full vestments stood holding the key of the Ebrook cottage in his hand. To Philip, dreams were writings in the Book of Fate, and though the writing in the present case was not too clear it seemed a happy omen. He whistled cheerfully as he rubbed down the grey mare at the first gleam of light, and, anxious to keep her fresh, led her all the way to the starting point.

When he reached the Ebrook ford, Quill and Alder were whispering with their heads together. There was no sign of Gumbley's cob, but he was walking a big, black horse, the pride of Alder's stable.

Philip was puzzled and alarmed. " What does he with that horse ? " he asked. " Ride it," said Alder with a laugh.

" But we ride our own," Philip protested.

" There is nothing of that in the writing," Alder replied. " To ride " is all it says.

Philip turned to Quill, who smiled by twisting the corner of his mouth and shook his head. " The testament to which you're pledged is clear enough," he said, " it names no horses, but the hour if fixed. Get you to saddle or you default."

Philip saw that he was caught in a trap. His mare was no match for the big black ; it could not be a race at all. But he was a stubborn fighter, and his dream upheld him. " Give the signal, I'm ready," he shouted, and got into his saddle.

The rascals were taken by surprise ; things were not going as they expected, and they felt uneasy. Alder shrugged his shoulders ; Quill made a grimace.

The unequal race began at a slow pace, the grey at a trot and the black at a canter on a tight rein, for the track was broken, rough and heavy. As the going got a little better, the black tried to stretch into a gallop, pulling hard and fighting for his head. At the causeway the riders were not far apart, but once on solid ground and easier rein, the black, with a racer's action, drew right away.

The whole town had gathered by the church at the place where the road turned sharply left to the Mere Pool and Shenstone. It was a good spot from which to view the race. The riders could be seen for half a mile away and for some distance down the slope to the Moor Hall.

As the horses came into view, the bewildered crowd yelled with excitement. What had happened ? Why was Gumbley riding Alder's horse, while Philip plodded on his own grey mare ? The Gumbley faction cheered ; Philip's friends groaned or were silent.

But the surprises were not over. To the general amazement, the big horse was going all out and taking the short hill at a full gallop. If not checked before the turn, anything might happen. The crowd scattered and there was a chorus of warning shouts, but Gumbley had no say in the matter ; the horse had taken full control.

Irked by its strange rider and frightened by the crowd, its impulse was to bolt for home. At the top of the hill it swerved so sharply that Gumbley was thrown from the saddle almost into his lady's arms, and the horse, rid of its burden, galloped madly down the narrow lane that led to Shenstone.

In the hubbub and excitement, Philip was nigh forgot. He was riding the grey mare up the hill at a walk. For him the race was over ; he knew nothing of what had happened at the turn. As he reached the crossing at the hilltop, he was puzzled to hear his friends urging him on, and it was only Ruth's excited cry " Ride, Philip, ride on ! " that sent him in bewilderment down the path to the Moor Hall.

As he came into view of the big house, no other horseman was in sight, and Peter Chase was waiting on the terrace steps to tell him he could claim the cottage by the Ebrook.

Alder and his friends affected to regard the changing of the horses as a practical joke, and said that they had always wanted the cottage to go to one who was Sutton born. There were few who believed this tale and many who wondered what would follow.

Philip and Ruth settled happily into the Ebrook cottage, but their peace was soon ended. Strange tales, the origin of which some might have guessed, began to spread abroad. The cottage, it was said, was haunted by an evil spirit. It was whispered among the tittle-tattle of the town that a traveller had seen in the moonlight a phantom shape hovering above the roof-top, and had fled in terror ; that in the sunshine, strange shadows danced and that every horse and dog trembled with fear when urged to pass the place. Hardly a day passed without some new, fantastic tale.

The gossips claimed to know the secret of the haunting. While the house was building, a mason sheltering there had been killed by lightning, and it was clear that his spirit lingered round the place. It was said that there had been found on the dead man's body, etched by the lightning, the pattern of a flittermouse.

These stories could not fail to reach Philip and his wife, and they were gravely troubled. It was a credulous and superstitious age, and fable and imagination could easily create a horror.

As they sat together in the evenings, the wind around the eaves became the wailing of a troubled soul and the creak of settling timbers the mutterings of an evil spirit.

Philip, in his working hours, could throw off his fears, but Ruth was in constant torment. As she went about the cottage, she

fancied eyes were watching, and the shadows the sunlight threw upon the walls took the shape of mocking figures. She had screamed when an ousel, frightened by the shadow of a hawk upon the grass, fled with a cry into the sanctuary of the cottage. It was more than she could bear; she grew thin and pale, and her mind was near to breaking point. She pleaded with Philip to leave the place, but he hated to give up something on which his heart was set.

Friends and neighbours gave no solace, and in their extremity they decided to take counsel with a woman practiced in strange arts, and who escaped the charge of witchcraft by never offering to cast a spell but ever ready to banish any evil thing away. No one could object to that.

It was a straw in their sea of trouble, and they grasped it. They paid a stealthy visit to the " wise woman " at her hovel in the woods, and told her the whole tale. She confirmed the common story of a haunting spirit, and the mention of the figure of a flittermouse on the dead man gave her a quick idea. She said that the spirit was angry because it was bound to the fatal spot, and that the man had left behind a sign that only a bat could give it liberation. Not any bat would do. It must be a church bat taken on the wing uninjured It must be hung from the ceiling boards in a fair linen bag with a small, white stone, marked with scratched symbols, that she gave them. The restless spirit, she declared, would take refuge in the small body, and, liberated at dusk, the bat would take away the thing that had tormented them.

Ruth begged for a sure sign that the spirit would be gone. The old lady hesitated, but the awkward questions she had to answer in the course of trade had made her quick witted. " Light a candle and sit quiet," she said, " and a flittermouse from the unknown will come to tell you all is well. It will be *white* and so ghostlike that you may not see it." It was an ingenious deceit.

A church bat was easy enough to find. The belfry of the parish church housed lots of them, but to take one on the wing was not a simple matter; a flying bat is a master of evasive action. With a wide bag at the end of a long willow pole, Philip at last succeeded. He carried the small creature home with gentle care, placed it and the white stone in a linen bag, and hung it from the ceiling boards to await release next nightfall.

The Bishop had now returned from Exeter, and had heard the story of the letting of the cottage. He was angry at the way of it and

furious with Gumbley and his friends for their trickery. He looked on Philip as a safe and honest fellow and for Ruth, his niece's quiet little maid, he had a warm regard. He was anxious for their welfare, and set out one morning to see things for himself.

He was alarmed to find Ruth pale and woebegone and with eyes no longer bright. He was kind and tactful in his questioning; her halting answers told him nothing of what was wrong. As he waited for the truth he happened to look up, and saw suspended from the ceiling the little bag that held the sleeping flittermouse.

"What is that?" he asked quietly.

The girl was too honest and too spent to lie. "'Tis a flittermouse," she answered simply.

The Bishop nodded, as though this strange answer were no matter of surprise. "Tell me the whole story," he said, "and by God's grace I will help you."

She slowly told her tale from its beginning to its end, leaving nothing out, and the Bishop listened to the fantastic story with no sign of anger or astonishment. He knew too well it was an age of ignorance and confusion, when Christian faith and pagan superstition were strangely mingled in men's minds.

When the tale was ended, he sighed softly. "Poor child," he said, "you have suffered much and are endangering your soul." He motioned her to kneel, and recited with a fine solemnity a prayer for deliverance from the Powers of Darkness.

"You are happier now?" he said as the girl rose to her feet. "Yes," she answered, and her voice was hesitant, "but—"

There was a moment's silence. "But—," the Bishop prompted. "What is it that follows?"

"I want the white flittermouse to come," she answered, and she raised her eyes with almost a defiant look.

"Out of this foolishness you ask a miracle," the Bishop said.

"God maketh miracles," she replied solemnly. There was a pause, and then she went on in a voice that quivered: "I have felt the pains of hell, and am a castaway—my Faith is lost. But if the white flittermouse come 'twill be a sign that He has heard my prayers and taken me from torment. If no sign there be, I'll know that I am lost, forsaken—" Her voice broke and she sobbed.

The Bishop was at a loss; there was nothing he could do. In the girl's distress of mind neither reasoning nor homily would help.

He waited till the sobbing ceased, and then walked slowly from the room with a softly spoken *Pax Vobiscum.*

He was gravely troubled and perplexed as he went homeward. How could he straighten out the tangle in the girl's mind ? He felt that she had made a challenge to the Faith, and that on the answer there would hang the loss or saving of a human soul. The task was his, and it was the end, and not the means, that counted.

That evening, Ruth and her husband were impatient for the fading of the light, and when dusk fell they opened, at the door, the little linen bag, and the bat fluttered into the gloom. Then, with hearts fast beating and nerves on stretch, they waited for what might happen, longing for the white bat to come.

The door had been left ajar, and a slender rushlight on the table cast a pale gleam on the whitewashed wall. They sat close together, Ruth clutching her husband's hand, and both were silent. Each faint sound quickened the beating of their hearts, and they were almost too intent to breathe. Once, there was something like a soft footfall, and Philip half glanced towards the door, which by some trick of light seemed to be closed. A moment or two later, the girl tightened her grip upon her husband's hand and uttered a faint cry. There had come a soft sound of fluttering and such a faint puff of air as might be made by beating wings. As they waited in strained silence, nothing could be seen, but the fluttering went on, now clear, now fading. Then, suddenly, there came across the patch of light upon the wall the shade of something winged, though nothing had been seen to pass. Ruth had grown icy cold, yet beads of sweat were trickling down Philip's face. They were in an agony of suspense. Again the winged shadow passed, then halted, fluttering. The rushlight flared a little and threw a light that made a small, pale object visible. It was a white bat.

Ruth fell upon her knees, and Philip laid a hand on her shoulder and wiped away the beads of sweat upon his face. When the girl rose slowly to her feet, even the dim rushlight shewed the radiance on her face. " Now must heaven's messenger go forth," she said.

Philip walked to the door and found to his amazement that it was closed. How had the little creature found its way in ? It was indeed a miracle. He threw the door wide open, and as he stood upon the threshold he saw beyond mistaking a pale flittermouse pass into the night.

The next morning the Bishop sat early, as was his custom, at his breakfast, but his appetite had gone and his thoughts were far away. A servant came into the room. " The girl from the Ebrook cottage is here, my lord," he said. Too excited and impatient to wait a bidding, Ruth followed into the room. Her feet were bare and her petticoat was draggled by the dew on the long grass. Her face was glowing, and with an almost breathless gasp she cried : " It came."

The Bishop felt a surge of pleasure and content, but with an air of seeming ignorance he asked : " What came ? "

" The white flittermouse," she cried. " It came although the door was closed ; we saw it plainly. It was God's messenger in answer to my prayer. I am freed from fear and torment."

" Then," said the Bishop, " Give God the praise, and honour to His Church."

" My lord, I promise by the rood. I put my trust in God and Holy Church," she answered, and fell upon her knees.

The Bishop with raised hand gave her the Church's blessing.

When the girl had gone, the Bishop returned to his table with his usual appetite. A little later, he crossed the stable-yard, and unlocked the room that housed his saddlery. From a corner of the chamber he took a pail of limewash that had changed the colour of a flittermouse.

THE DELIVERANCE

I. The Hovel.

AMONG the n'er-do-wells of the royal town, the Stubble family held high place. Their poverty and misdemeanors were chiefly due to a dislike of hard or honest work. They lived by their wits, and as these were not acute it was never easy for them to tell where the next meal would come from. To-day they were hungrier than usual and their mood more sullen.

Their squalid dwelling, an outlier of " Ruffians' Den," stood in a small clearing in a beech coppice, sufficiently hidden and apart to suit their peculiar habits.

The family gathering, as they waited for a scanty meal, did not make a pleasant picture. Reuben, the father, stood at the half-open door as though looking for a visitor. He was a tall, thin, swarthy fellow, whose face was disfigured by the ugly scar of a wound received on an unlawful occasion. His wife, Hannah, squatted by a wood fire, only moving now and then to stir the pot hanging from a tripod. She was as ill-favoured as her husband. Her wizened face, bent shoulders and lank grey hair accorded with the common notion of a witch but, to do her justice, traffic in the black art was not among her falls from grace. Simeon, the elder son, a big ill-tempered fellow, sat sullen and silent on a wooden bench. His brother, Daniel, lay on a bed of bracken, groaning miserably.

Simeon, who was whittling a stick to ease his temper, suddenly flung an angry question at his mother. " How long have we to wait ? " he asked. " Mine is a gnawing hunger."

The woman turned on him in a flash. " Then you should help to stay it," she snarled. " You have brought nought to the pot these three days."

" Nought is to be got," the man protested. " The Bishop's men have eyes like hawks. The red hounds scent us miles away."

" Their arms are like a windmill's," Daniel added. " I am near flayed to death."

" 'Twill serve you for a lesson, you clumsy thief," was Hannah's comment.

" We must seek some other burrow to hide ourselves," Simeon murmured. " There be no rest for such as we since this Church's spawn came to rule over us."

" Wait awhile," said Reuben quietly. " We may soon be rid of him."

The others looked at one another with a question in their eyes, but said nothing. There was silence again till Simeon's stomach urged him to another question. " What's i' the pot ? " he asked dismally.

" Roots ! " snapped Hannah. " We have no meat nor like to have."

" Nurse your hunger for a while," Reuben broke in. " Before the day be out we may fare better. The man we wait for should not be a niggard."

Hannah got to her feet, and faced her husband. " Why comes this prying fox ? " she asked.

Reuben hesitated to make an answer. " He comes to meet a messenger from one of the Bishop's household," he said at last. " It is some secret business. We have but to hold our tongues and we shall be well paid."

" Who is it that comes poking in this thieves-earth ? "

" He holds some office of the King."

" The King ! You gadding fool to meddle in such matters. Stick to thieving—it's the trade you know. Your lack of wit will mean the halter for us all. I'll none of it—I warn ye. I'll die natural."

The man's anger blazed up ; " Cease croaking," he shouted, " or I'll sit you in the faggots with the pot. 'Tis safe enough. I know my lesson. Learn yours. 'Tis this—when he comes, bow and scrape at him, and call him by high names. It may split his purse."

" Should groaning do it, I'll ope it quick enough," moaned Daniel.

" If our luck turns not soon, we needs must eat young Pudsey's cloak and use his dagger for to pick our teeth," said Hannah with a shrill laugh in which her sons joined.

Reuben did not share the mirth. " What means this foolery ? " he asked.

" Tell him," the woman said by way of answer. " A merry tale may grease his temper."

It was Simeon's story. He shuffled, hesitated, and slowly began. " It happened yesterday," he said. " I was in Langley Wood to set a snare. I was 'neath the bank along the open ride when I heard loud voices. 'Twas Robert Pudsey and young Ashford threatening damnation to each other. They were quarrelling about a wench—the Bishop's niece, I reckon. They were bellowing and blowing like a pair o' bulls."

He was warming to his subject, and rose to give some mimicry and action to his tale.

" ' Resolve the matter now,' says Pudsey, shouting like a lord," he went on. " ' With all my heart,' bellows the other bull-calf. Wi' that, Pudsey casts his cloak within a pace o' me. ' Loose your dagger,' says young Ashford, ' I'll not trust you.' ' Tss,' says Robert, spitting like a toad. ' I would not tarnish it on such as you,' and he casts his belt and dagger by the cloak. Then they joined. 'Twas as good a match as I ever see. They fought and wrestled like they fellows at the Fair. In a trice both heads were bloody, and they pitched together into the bracken, heads down, feet up'ards. 'Twas hard to see they trappings on the bank wi' the owner standing on his head. I grabbed 'em, and then legged it through the wood till I was blown. They're nought to eat, but they're pretty baubles." He stooped, and dragged the cloak and dagger from beneath the bench.

Reuben smiled during the recital, but now his face grew stern again. " They're dangerous to hold," he said. " We'd best be rid of 'em."

The bundle had hardly been pushed back again before Reuben's quick ear caught a faint sound of footsteps. " Hark ! " he whispered, " our man is coming." He seized Daniel by the arm, and pulled him to his feet despite his groaning. " Up ! " he said, " you may not greet the King's man on your belly."

There was a timid knocking. Reuben in dumb action shewed the others how to grovel before the visitor. Then he opened the

door, and all were so bent in reverence that not an eye was raised until the newcomer spoke.

" Make no obeisance to me," said a quiet, solemn voice. "Genuflections are for the Lord of Hosts."

All looked up in wonder. The speaker was a friar whose habit was torn and mud-stained and whose sandalled feet were bleeding. His face, though that of a young man, was lined and wasted. He stood rigid, gazing upward with a wild look in his eyes. Reuben was the first to recover from surprise. " Who are you ? " he demanded. " I am a miserable sinner," the quiet voice replied.

" Which one ? " asked Reuben with a coarse laugh.

" My name is Gregory, a friar of Exeter," the visitor said. " Our monastery is seized—its sons dispersed. We wander homeless, begging our bread."

" What is that to us ! " Reuben broke in. " Why come you here ? Tell quickly. We have bigger things afoot."

The friar stood for a moment trancelike. Then the solemn voice proclaimed : " I seek the vengeance of the Most High. Our house is desolate ; the vessels of its altar pillaged. 'Tis the king's work, but Vesey could have stayed it. Had he but raised his hand . . ."

" The King would have had his head," Hannah interjected.

The stranger seemed not to have heard. He went on—" The night ere we were driven out I lay tossing as in a fever. Suddenly a silver light flooded my cell, and I beheld a figure with a flashing sword. It was St. Michael, and a voice spake—' Vengeance is the Lord's, and thou shalt be His instrument. Seek His enemy, and destroy him. Thou shalt see a sign.' My tongue was fettered, and ere it was unloosed the vision vanished. At dawn we went our ways like Israel's children in the wilderness. Alone I wandered seeking for the sign. My way lay past the vicarage of Colleton in goodly Devon. I stood for a moment on its threshold." The strange look in the speaker's eyes grew more intense, and his voice changed to a ringing tone. " A sudden beam of sunlight lit the portal, and there I saw, as graved in gold, the arms of Vesey and in the Latin tongue the motto ' The more thou walkest the deeper shalt thou think.' And as I walked the thought grew—' 'Tis the sign ! ' until it sounded like a matin bell ' Ves-ey, Ves-ey, Ves-ey.' 'Twas he I must destroy. I come to do St. Michael's bidding. Shew me the way." The friar stretched out his arms in an imploring gesture.

The fervour of this strange recital had held the listeners silent, and as the story ended they looked in bewilderment at each other.

In a tone that had lost some of its coarseness, Reuben answered the stranger's question. " It is not easy to shew a way, good friar," he said. " Vesey is well guarded. Unless you can outwit his crimson vermin he will lie safe."

" Let me not fail to do St. Michael's bidding," implored the friar. " Shew me where Vesey dwells, mask me in some disguise, and I will take him unawares."

" Disguise ! " exclaimed Reuben. " Look at us ! All we have is on our backs, and our clouts would set the dogs a-barking. We can do nought."

Simeon, who had been restlessly alert, suddenly pulled from beneath the bench, Pudsey's cloak and belt, and drew his father's eyes to them by an excited gesture.

Reuben was not slow to grasp his son's suggestion. Simeon brought the things, and placed them in his father's hands. He held them up before the friar. The cloak was of bright green slashed with crimson, the swagger-mantle of a youthful gallant. " See ! " he cried. " This is what St. Michael sends you. Here is the cloak of one well placed, a lover who prowls around the Bishop's house. He stands well with Vesey's men. Wait till the sun drops. Then, wrapped in this, you may safely wander where you will, and you but play the lover. And mark ! " He spoke with slow emphasis. " In the belt is—a sharp dagger. You will know the Bishop by his purple cloak."

Hannah sprang to her feet with a frightened cry. " Be it murder, I'll have none of it," she shrieked.

Her husband turned upon her in a fury, and his gesture silenced her.

The friar was standing trembling and fascinated, gazing at the cloak and dagger with a kind of mad elation. He made to snatch the bundle, but Reuben tossed it to his son. " Take the man away," he said, pointing to an inner chamber which had a bolt-hole of its own. " Teach him what he has to do. Hurry, there is no time to waste."

The friar needed no persuasion to follow Simeon and the things he carried.

There was an expectant silence as they waited for Simeon's return, and when he came there was no time for him to speak of what had happened before a loud summons sounded on the door. " 'Tis the King's man—shew him reverence," Reuben whispered, and they fell at once into respectful pantomime.

The door opened, and a striking figure stalked into the room with bold assurance. He was a slim man, past middle age, finely dressed and with a short, embroidered cloak about his shoulders. His thin face had an unhealthy pallor, and there were deep hollows beneath the high cheek bones. He had a short, grey beard cut in a foreign fashion, and his hair was brushed straight back from his forehead. His small, dark eyes ranged restlessly. It was a hard and cruel face. On his slender fingers were jewelled rings, and the handle of his dagger was finely chased. He was clearly a person of importance, and his sharp, metallic voice with a strange accent seemed to add to his authority.

He made no effort to return the family's grovelled greeting. " Who is master here ? " he demanded.

Reuben inclined his head, and the visitor beckoned him aside. " What is the message ? " he asked sharply.

Reuben handed him a scrap of paper on which he read the single word " Diabolus." " Where is he I come to meet ? " he questioned.

" He is not here yet," was the answer. " He must needs walk warily."

" I am not wont to be kept waiting no matter how a man must walk. Watch for him."

Reuben went to the door. The stranger stood silent without even a look at Hannah and her sons. His attitude did not encourage conversation, but as the family were bent on loosing his purse-strings something had to be done. Daniel did it ; he groaned loudly.

" What ails you, fellow ? " asked the man in his strange, hard voice.

" I am beaten nigh to death," Daniel moaned.

" Whose work is that ? "

" The Bishop's, your good worship. I did but stand near his hen-roost to—to meet a kitchen wench, and I was flayed."

The questioner began to shew an interest. " Uses he the King's poor subjects so ? " he said.

This gave all of them an opening. " He treats us like the swine. We are nigh dead with misery and hunger," Daniel exclaimed.

" We dare not go abroad lest we be taken by his crimson hounds, savage servants dressed in scarlet, a hundred of them," Simeon added.

" Five hundred," corrected Daniel, who liked a lie to be a good one.

" He lives in a great palace, gorges on capon and swills flagons of wine," Hannah broke in.

What other evils they would have laid to the Bishop's charge cannot be told, for at that moment Reuben called from the door— " The servant comes, my lord."

The babel ceased a little, and with a gesture the visitor bade them be gone. Instantly they broke into a whining chorus of practised beggars.

" Lord, we are hungry—give us bread."

" There is nothing in our bellies, your good grace."

" We be too weak to crawl, most noble gentleman."

They clustered round with outstretched hands.

" Hold ! you brood of vultures," cried the man. " Here is something for the woman. He put a coin in Hannah's palm, and with a look and gesture sent them scuttling.

The messenger Reuben had heralded came timidly into the room. Though the air was close, he was wrapped in a long cloak, and looked about him like an animal that scents a trap.

" This be the man, your grace," Reuben announced.

" I will assure myself of that," was the sharp comment.

He turned to Reuben. " If you have served me well, you shall be well rewarded," he said. " Now go, and keep your brood from prying until after I am gone." He watched while Reuben crept away.

Then he turned to the messenger again. " Give me what you bring," he ordered.

The man took from beneath his cloak a packet that was heavily sealed. In his eagerness, the other almost snatched it from him. " Go, quickly," he said, and pointed to the door. The servant did not linger in his going.

The man of authority waited till the messenger was out of sight. Then, with a hand that shook with excitement, he broke open the sealed packet, and took out the letters it contained. As he glanced them over quickly, both doubt and elation shewed in his face, but as he slowly read two of them again, doubt departed and there was only exultation. " More ! Fisher ! The net is drawn," he murmured, and his thin lips stretched into a cruel smile.

II. The Hall.

At the moment when the scene at the Stubble's hovel had reached its end, the Bishop was walking the Long Room at Moor Hall, deep in thought and with anxiety shewing in his face.

The room was narrow in relation to its length, and was low ceiled. A double door gave entrance from the spacious hall, and at the further end, above a large open fireplace built of stone, the Bishop's arms were carved and coloured. The pilasters of the panelled walls were richly carved in the Italian style that had just become the vogue. The room was lighted by four tall, narrow windows, the sills but slightly raised above the floor. It was normally a pleasant room, but now, in the rather eerie light of sunshine filtering through a veil of cloud, it had a sombre look that was almost sinister.

The Bishop's mind was gravely vexed as he paced the oaken floor. The times were troubled. The King's sullen temper, charged with suspicion, threatened danger to all he might distrust. He was shewing fierce, unreasoned enmity to those of eminence whose acceptance of his claim to the Supremacy was half-hearted or who threw a doubt on the validity of Katherine's divorce. He was incensed at the growing cult of Elizabeth Barton, the " Holy Maid of Kent," a mystic charlatan whose prophetic visions he had good reason to dislike, and whose followers he deemed guilty of high treason. So deep were the misgivings of his tortured mind that he suspected treachery everywhere, and was ruthless in his determination to stamp out every trace of it. Thomas Cromwell, his Secretary of State, had been given the task of this suppression, and he brought to its discharge a persistence and ferocity that had no regard for truth or justice. His spies were spread throughout the land, and they were cunning, subtle and unscrupulous. Words and actions innocent in intent were being " tortured into treason."

" The Terror of Cromwell " lay like a thundercloud across the land, and none could tell where the lightning would strike next.

Already, the Bishop's beloved friend Sir Thomas More and Dr. Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, had died on the scaffold, and it was plain that a long procession of distinguished men would soon be passing from The Tower dungeons to the block. The Bishop knew that he himself was in the zone of danger. Although he had been circumspect and trodden softly, Cromwell's snares were so well hidden as to be a constant peril. There were already portents he could not ignore although their meaning and direction were still obscure.

At the moment, his forebodings were increased by thoughts that had come unbidden of one who bore him a deep hatred, a Dr. Fescue, a lawyer-secretary in the service of the King. Since the old days at the Court, the Bishop had lost sight of his old adversary; he had, indeed, passed out of mind, and now, suddenly, he had sprung to memory and become a vivid image, an unseen presence that refused to be dismissed.

The effect upon the Bishop's mind was oppressive and disturbing, and he paused at an open window for a breath of air. The day had been close and sultry, and now all life seemed still and hushed. A heavy mass of purple cloud hung in the western sky, and where the rays of the setting sun shone beneath the canopy the landscape had a vivid glow. The green of the meadows was startlingly bright, and intensified the shadows of the trees. Not a leaf stirred. Then, suddenly, there was a rustling, and the trees began to wave their branches in fantastic motion. Eddies of dust sprang up from the gravelled terrace. The storm that had been brooding for so long was about to break.

The Bishop's troubled thoughts so held his mind that he had failed to realise that the discomfort of the stifling heat was made worse by the cloak he had put on from force of habit. He took it from his shoulders, and laid it on a bench beside the open window.

Before he could resume his pacing, a servant entered to tell of the arrival of the Rector and the Warden. They had come in answer to an urgent summons, and stepped forward eagerly to greet the Bishop. The two men were in strange contrast in mind and in appearance. The Rector was a brisk, slight little man with the stooping shoulders of the scholar, who looked more fragile than he was. His blue eyes conformed to his pink complexion, and he had an enchanting smile. He was a ready talker with a soft and pleasant voice. The Warden was the Rector's opposite, a tall and lusty yeoman with

a sun-tanned face, whose voice was loud and ringing and whose talk was terse and halting. In one thing they were steadfastly alike—in their affection for the Bishop and their loyalty to him.

The Bishop led his visitors to seats beside his table. The Rector reclined comfortably in his chair, his hands folded in his lap; the Warden sat stiffly upright clutching his knees.

" I thank you for your coming," the Bishop began, " There are matters of great import I would discuss with you."

" We are happy to be called to council," said the Rector, and the Warden nodded his agreement.

" Then let us to our task," went on the Bishop. " There are plans I have set in motion to help our people. I want your aid." He turned to the Rector. " The new aisles I have builded to our church are finished. They have grace and good proportions, but some things are lacking to make our church more fitting for devotion. I would you should consider this. I will furnish what is needed."

" I am honoured by your charge and confidence," replied the Rector with a courtly bow.

" The looms for making kersies should be here before a week is out. I have called from Devon a master weaver for the teaching. See him well bestowed."

" I will house him," said the Warden simply.

The Bishop smiled his thanks, and then went on—" The building of our Grammar School is well begun. Hasten the work. What is wanted, my estate will furnish. Knowledge is the road to happiness, and I would have it open."

The Rector's eyes shone with enthusiasm, and he started an eloquent discourse on the subject of the New Learning and the dream of More's " Utopia." He was only stayed by a heavy peal of thunder, and the Bishop broke in quickly as the rumbling died away. " There is one other matter I would discuss with you," he said. " There are poor widows in our town who suffer want because they are bereaved. I would relieve them." He unrolled a plan that lay upon the table and pointed with his finger. " This parcel of land," he went on, " is called ' Lord's Meadow.' I would devise it to the town that these poor women may be relieved from out its revenue."

" A noble benefaction," exclaimed the Rector raising his hands in evident delight.

" A goodlie piece," said the Warden, viewing the gift with a farmer's eye.

The Bishop smiled an acknowledgment of their approval. " Now," he said, " I have declared the toll of my desires. They are set out in a testament I have written. I lay these matters on you as a solemn charge."

It was with something near emotion that the two men pledged themselves to the task, but they were puzzled as to what it meant.

The Bishop lay back in his chair with a sigh that spoke of great content. " It is good to know," he murmured softly as though speaking to himself, " that my work will be accomplished even if I be taken."

" Taken ! my lord " exclaimed the Rector anxiously. " You are not ill ? "

" Only in spirit," replied the Bishop, but life is a bubble that a thorn-prick or a puff of wind may break."

" Your mood is melancholy," the Rector said. " 'Tis the brooding of the storm."

" Maybe, but not the storm without. The bolts of heaven are not so ruthless as the shafts of men."

" My lord, what should you fear ? "

" I do not know. I am perplexed. Strange things are happening."

" If we but knew the peril we might stay its course."

" No more than you can stay the lightning." The Bishop paused a moment as though uncertain as to whether to say more. Then his mind became resolved. He leaned forward on the table, and looked earnestly at his friends. " Knowing your loyalty and discretion," he said, " I will uncloak my fears. Thomas Cromwell has served on me an inquisition touching my estate. It has the warrant of the King, and smacks of enmity."

" You may misjudge, my lord."

" It does not stand alone. Rumour has reached me that my views are suspect as regards the King's divorce and the Royal Supremacy. It is even whispered that I am an adherent of the Maid of Kent."

" Tut, tut," exclaimed the Rector. " 'Tis but the idle talk of moonstruck gossips," and he waved his small hands airily as though wafting the whole thing away.

The Bishop shook his head. " I wish it were so," he went on, " but there are portents of a plot against me. Letters I have received from Sir Thomas More, a Latin script from his daughter Margaret and a pamphlet inscribed by Dr. Fisher have disappeared. I grow forgetful, and must have left my chest unlocked. These papers are all of innocent intent, but there may be words that could be twisted to ill meaning. They may be made to point the way to Tower Hill."

" My lord ! " exclaimed the listeners together, with a gasp of horror, and then were stunned to silence broken at last by the Rector's quiet voice. " My lord," he said," I know your danger, but am not afraid. Our destinies are guided by a higher power than the will of princes. I hold to the sure faith that the Divine Providence will send you rescue from your peril by Deliverance."

" Amen," murmured the Warden with quiet fervour.

The Bishop's face was suddenly illumined by a radiant smile, and he rose to grasp the hands of his friends. As they stood thus for a moment, silent, a servant knocked at the door and entered. He came to the Bishop, bowed, and said " A stranger waits on you, my lord."

" Who, and on what business ? " asked the Bishop quietly.

" He bade me say," replied the servant, " that he comes on business of State, and that he is—Dr. Fescue."

The Bishop shewed no sign beyond a slight stiffening of his body that passed unnoticed in the gloom that had fallen with the storm. " Bring lights," he said to the servant, and the man went on his errand.

Although the Bishop had shewn no emotion, his friends were conscious of some coming danger, and were uneasy and embarrassed as they said " Farewell " and turned to go. The Rector could not withhold the question that was on his lips. " Is this a friend ? " he asked, and there was a tremor in the soft voice.

" Who can tell ? " answered the Bishop with a smile. " In these unhappy days, friends and foes change their liveries so often.

Your friend of yesterday may be your enemy to-day, and the man who bears you enmity now may fawn on you to-morrow. 'Tis an uncertain world."

It was not an assuring answer, and the friends felt great relief when the Bishop bade them stay until the storm was over. " There are in my library books new come from London; they may interest you," he said. " I will see you again when this intrusion is at an end."

The Bishop was looking out of the window when the servant brought lighted candles and placed them on the table, but he was too deep in thought to heed his coming or to notice the vivid, wavy lines the lightning etched on the dark clouds. It was only when the man spoke that he was conscious of his presence, and bade him to bring Dr. Fescue in.

As the visitor came into the room, the Bishop advanced to meet him with a courteous greeting on his lips, which found no utterance when he saw the insolence and hatred in the other's face. In silence he placed a chair opposite his own, and motioned Fescue to it. The man sat down, folded his arms, and stared insolently across the table. " We are well met," he said at last in a harsh thin voice. " 'Tis long since we had speech together, and now I come to close our reckoning."

" Reckoning ! Do I owe you aught ? " the Bishop asked.

" More than you can pay except in coin of my own choosing."

" Pray disclose the debt."

" 'Tis briefly said, my lord. Since first we met you have thwarted my ambitions and robbed me of my rewards."

" I am innocent of any such intent."

" Cease your hypocrisy and drop the mask."

" I am but groping for your meaning," said the Bishop with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

Fescue, his clenched hands laid upon the table, thrust his head forward. The candles cast high lights upon the sharp features, and dark shadows in the hollow cheeks. It was that, perhaps, that made the face seem saturnine, " I'll make my meaning plain as Windsor Tower," he said, the shrill voice rising higher than before. " You stole my honours. Wrapped in the cloak of Wolsey's favour, you rose to affluence by pushing me aside. Honours that were mine by right, you stole by subtlety. By guile of tongue you robbed the

King of Sutton Chase. If I had asked for such a gift it would have meant dismissal. At the Field of Cloth of Gold, you stood beside the King. That place was mine."

"A King may choose what friend he honours," said the Bishop quietly.

"His mind was poisoned by disparagement."

"I cannot call to mind I ever used your name."

"That in itself was a disparagement."

"Strange logic! Make clear your business."

"I will. I have come to tell you that the hour of reckoning is here." Fescue rose to his feet, his small, dark eyes fastened on the Bishop's face to catch a glimpse of some emotion.

"Proceed," said the Bishop calmly. "You have my full attention."

"I have proved you thief and traitor, and I carry testimony to the King."

"That is a grave charge," said the Bishop with slow emphasis. "Would you be more precise?"

"You have cheated your sovereign of the spoils of Exeter."

"Will you be pleased to give your warrant."

"The records of Crediton; your rich estate; this lordly house; your crimson retinue; your broadcast benefactions."

"What I have is all my honest due."

Fescue took a quick step to the table, and there was a threat about the movement. "You lie," he shrieked. "The Commissioners shall judge of that. And you are traitor. You are disloyal in the matter of the King's divorce. You are in the camp of the King's enemies. You march with Thomas More and the Bishop of Rochester. Trafficking with traitors is the worst of treachery."

"What evidence have you to shew?"

"Your letters. They have come into my hands."

For the first time the Bishop moved. He sprang to his feet, and there was anger in his look. "So 'tis you who have seduced my household. Now I know you for that man of mystery the master spy of Cromwell," he said sternly.

" I have the honour to direct his secret business," replied Fescue with a mocking bow. " In the matter of John Vesey I have had peculiar success," he added with a smile on his thin lips.

" There is no warrant for your charge," said the Bishop firmly.

" Warrant ! " Fescue exclaimed in a voice that was like a yelp. " The evidence I have will satisfy the King. He is tortured by suspicions. His malady is worse when he suspects his friends. The testimony I have he'll swallow like a hungry pike. I have you in a snare you cannot break." He paused for a moment before he almost shrieked " You know the penalty."

The Bishop's voice was steady as he answered " My head may roll on Tower Hill."

" It shall, my lord. You walk with More and Fisher through the Traitor's Gate." The words were almost hissed. Then, as though gripped by cruel exultation, Fescue threw up his arms and took a few quick backward steps. The candles threw on the wainscote the shadow of the moving figure in grotesque distortion. It was like a danse macabre.

" I do not grudge you your exalted mood," the Bishop said in a steady voice, " and I only beg one favour—your going."

" At my own pleasure," Fescue answered with studied insolence. " I have not finished. I have more to tell."

" What more ? You can but kill my body. You can do no worse."

" Be not so sure. I can destroy your work as well."

" That is impossible," replied the Bishop in a tone of grave assurance.

Fescue took a step forward. His hands were clenched, enmity and anger gave a twisted look to his face, and when he spoke his voice had the harsh shrillness of a scream. " It shall be done," he said. " 'Tis the pinnacle of my revenge. I know that you could walk the scaffold with high courage if you thought your work for this accursed royal town would stand. That consolation is destroyed. Your work shall be undone. The Sutton Chase shall go back to the King. The town shall once again become the nest of rabble that you found it. The King has promised to revoke the charter."

This was a mortal shaft. For a moment the Bishop was silent ; he could not trust himself to speak. " The King would never do so base a thing," he said at last.

Fescue laughed, and it was not a pleasant sound. " He has sworn to do it if I bring him proofs. What I have is ample to convince a tortured mind. I can feed his ill suspicion to the full."

The Bishop knew this to be true, and the courage that had so far upheld him was near to breaking. He found it hard to check an impulse to kneel at Fescue's feet in imploration. He was trembling, and his voice was difficult to control. " Let not the King do such dishonour," he said in a voice that wavered. " It is—infamy. I beg you stay your hand."

" You grow humble minded, my lord Bishop. I like your chastened speech. I would have more of it."

" I beg you hear my plea," went on the Bishop. " Do with me what you will, but spare my people. They have not offended you. Leave them the gift the King bestowed. It has relieved their penury. I pray you by your hope of heaven to grant me this release."

Fescue laughed again, and his hatred blazed afresh. " I would not grant you such reprieve to save my soul from hell," he shouted. " Waste no more breath; no power can move me. You thought yourself well fortified with honour and estate. Where stand you now ? "

" In—God's—hand," replied the Bishop quietly. A vivid flash of lightning gave the words dramatic emphasis.

" No, my lord, in mine," Fescue shouted in the brief interval before the crash of thunder, and as the rumbling died away he added " and I will crush you as I would an insect that had stung me."

There was a pause; the Bishop made no reply. " Now," said Fescue mockingly, " to shew that I am not all harshness I will grant one of the requests you made me—I will go." He stepped towards the door.

The Bishop held up his hand. " Wait," he said. " I would have no ill befall even an enemy in my domain. In darkness our byeways are not safe. I will send a servant to guard your going, and set you on the pathway to the town." With a firm step and his head erect he walked out of the room.

As the door closed, Fescue's mind was in a turmoil. He could not credit magnaminity in a stricken foe. It must be a trap. Escape was easy by the open window, but he might be seized making a way out. As he looked quickly around, nervously alert, he saw the Bishop's discarded cloak lying on the bench beside the window. The sight

dispelled his doubts. In the Bishop's cloak he would pass unchallenged. He placed it around his shoulders, but feared lest eyes should be upon the lighted room. It would be wise to leave in darkness.

As he bent to blow out the candles, a bare-footed, monkish figure, unseemly clad in a vivid cloak of green and crimson, stepped through the window and crept towards the stooping man with the stealth and softness of a hunting animal.

When the last candle was extinguished, and Fescue turned to go, he saw by a flicker of distant lightning a gaunt figure with blazing eyes and an uplifted arm within a pace of him. Astonishment and horror left him powerless, and before he could seize his weapon or cry out, a dagger, plunged at random and in frenzy, flung him back across the table. There was a moment of convulsive twitching, and then the lifeless body slithered to the floor.

The Deliverance had come.

THE QUEEN REMEMBERS

HENRY VIII, the "magnificent monarch," had died, the feeble flame of Edward, the boy king, had flickered out, and Mary Tudor sat upon the throne of England.

Two years had passed since the Bishop had found it prudent to resign the See of Exeter to Miles Coverdale, and he was living in seclusion at his mansion of Moor Hall at Sutton Coldfield. He had grown old and feeble; even a will and frame as strong as his could not resist the assault of time, and he knew his journey was drawing to an end. He was living mainly in the past, and the tale of his lost opportunities, negligencies and errors weighed heavily on a mind that now was set not on worldly things but those of the spirit. He had dreams of the reparation he might make should Mary restore him to his bishopric.

In the afternoon of a day in early June, when a fitful sun failed to warm a chilly air, the Bishop sat before a log fire in the Long Room. The watery sun, shining through the tall windows, lit a venerable, fragile figure whose thin, pale face was canopied by snowy hair. Eleanor, his ward and niece, for whom he had a great affection, sat on a low stool at his feet, and her husband, Robert Pudsey, at an oaken table a few feet away, read aloud from a book the Bishop's eyes were far too weak to scan. It was the story of the wanderings of a fabled king. "And when the king escaped from his bondage," Robert read in his clear but quiet voice, "and returned to his own people to finish the task to which his hand was set, none did bid him welcome. He was forgotten."

The Bishop raised his head with a suddenness that was startling in one who seemed unheeding. "That is true, Robert," he exclaimed, "he would be forgotten. I am in like case. I have been cast like an outworn garment. I have faded from the memory of my people—and my Queen."

" Nay, Sir," Pudsey answered as he rose and stood beside the Bishop's chair, " you do ill justice. The townsfolk often speak your name with gratitude and reverence."

" They come not nigh," the Bishop said in a tone of resignation that had no touch of bitterness. " 'Tis the Eve of Holy Trinity and they make their festival without a thought of me—and the Queen has sent no message." He sighed, and stretched his long thin hands towards the fire.

" The Queen is doubtless harassed by many state affairs ; we must be patient," Eleanor said softly.

" 'Tis hard to bear," the Bishop went on. " I was Princess Mary's tutor. We spent many happy hours together, for she was a gracious pupil, and shewed me much esteem and favour. But that was long time since, and she has grown unmindful." He sighed again, and Eleanor arranged the cushions for his comfort as he lay back in his chair, and bade him rest.

But a chain of thoughts that would not be checked was running in his mind. " I do not complain," he murmured, " we cannot alter nature's law. New stars arise, and some do suffer an eclipse. The memory of faded glories is all that's left to me." There was a moment's silence in which there came a sudden change of mood. Clutching the arms of his chair, he pulled himself erect, and a new light shone in the faded eyes. " I once stood high in the favour of my King," he cried in a voice that had a note of exultation. " At the meeting with the King of France on what men call the Field of Gold I was a foremost courtier. I mind me that as far as eye could see the scene was one vast splendour. The golden dazzle blurred the vision . . . " The voice was growing shrill with excitement, a warm flush of colour shewed in his face. He was living again one of the great moments of his life, but it was an outburst that took toll upon his strength. Eleanor sprang to her feet, and with a soothing hand laid him back against the cushions in his chair. " Yes, yes," she said, " they were brave days, Uncle. 'Twere better now to let them rest."

The sudden surge of excitement had passed, and the Bishop's voice was calm and quiet as he spoke again. " 'Tis true," he went on, " for the visions I recall are dreams of vanity. I would let them go, and serve my Church again. I have been an unprofitable servant, and left my task unfinished. The sword I should have wielded for God and Holy Church has rusted in my hand. I fain would serve the cause of Holiness. Were I but restored to Exeter—but she has for-

gotten, she has forgotten." The voice died on a note of pathos. Robert and Eleanor were silent. There was nothing they could say.

As they watched the frail figure sink into repose again, there came the sound of footsteps on the gravelled terrace and a murmur of voices. Instantly, the Bishop turned his head, and there was a look of strained expectancy on his face. " What is that ? " he asked.

" I will see," Robert answered, and he started on his quest, but before he had reached the door, a red-robed servant entered and announced : " The townsfolk come to give his lordship greeting."

The Bishop had not grasped the servant's message. He turned to Eleanor with an eager, questioning look. " The townsfolk come to greet you," she said with slow deliberation. The Bishop's drooping figure became suddenly alert, and his hands trembled with excitement. " Bid them enter," he called to the servant. He turned to Eleanor. " Is my apparel seemly ? " he asked. " I should be fittingly dressed. Take away those cordials," he ordered, pointing to a flask and phials that stood upon the table. " They may think that I am ailing." Eleanor smoothed the folds of his robe and hid the offending medicines, and as she and Robert turned his chair towards the door, the Warden and members of the Corporation led an eager, motley crowd into the room.

The visitors were of all ranks and callings, and they covered nearly all the span of man's seven ages. Their faces glowed with pleasure and excitement. The men bowed clumsily, the women and the children bobbed and curtsied. Without a wait or begging leave, three ancient dames, who thought by reason of their age that no occasion was complete without them and fought an unending battle for first place, pushed to the front, and made a hobbling sprint towards the Bishop's chair. Anne Buggins arrived at a respectful distance first or was the quickest to regain her breath. " God grant you be well, Lord Bishop," she said in a thin and quavering voice, " but ye look shrivelled "—the old lady caught a warning look from Eleanor, and hastened to add—" or my eyes deceive me. Sometimes I see things big, and sometimes they be little. There is a mist like . . ."

As Anne paused for a simile, Mary Dolphin cut in—" And I hear but little, good my lord. The church bells are no better than a tinkle. My goodman has to bellow so that neighbours hear all—and the things he says . . . " She shook her head to shew " the things " would not bear telling, and Susan Duckett had a chance to launch her own particular plaint—" I too, my lord, be ailing. My

back be bended like a sapling in a gale. My knees crick-crack, and my elbows creak like rusty hinges." The other two had recovered breath, and the three old crones all started talking at the same time. Smiling, the Bishop threw up his hands in mock despair, and the garrulous old ladies were pushed into a corner of the room like naughty children.

When this diversion was at an end, the Warden stepped forward. " Lord Bishop," he said in a voice that made his statement sound like a royal proclamation, " we do come to pay our duty on our festival. I have here a dutiful address. Would your lordship give me leave to speak it ? " The Bishop was all eagerness. " Proceed, good Warden, proceed," he answered.

The Warden unrolled a script, cleared his throat, and assuming an air of great importance, read :—

> " *We, the Warden and Corporation and other the inhabitants of this royal town, with duty and respect, do give your lordship greeting at the opening of our fair and festival. We make your lordship good assurance that we have ever in remembrance your noble gifts and benefactions that have relieved our need and prospered all our town. We proffer thanks, and pray that Heaven may grant thee happiness and many years to see the fruits of all thy love and bounty.*"

As the reading came to an end, there was a surge of cheering that was a greater testimony than the words that had been read. The Bishop was greatly moved ; there were tears in his eyes. " I thank you, friends, I thank you," he said, and his voice broke.

The crowd were just as deeply touched, and there fell a silence till the Warden spoke again. " My lord," he said, " the children have a dance to shew, and our people have prepared a song to honour you. Would your lordship give us leave to do them ? " The Bishop looked up, smiling and animated again. " Yes, yes," he answered. Let the children dance."

Six small girls, slim and rosy-faced, came shyly forward. They were dressed, by a community effort, in simple gaily coloured frocks, and carried nosegays of wild flowers. A half-blind fiddler scraped a jigging tune, and the children's bare feet pattered on the oaken floor in an old folk-dance. The Bishop watched the movements of the little dancers with evident delight, and as the dance was ended the children came and kneeled before him, and laid their posies at his feet. He stretched out his arms, and blessed them. " May God

bless you," he said softly. " May you grow in happiness and virtue, and make our royal town of good repute." He was filled with a sense of great peace and happiness by the people's tribute of remembrance. If only the Queen had not forgotten !

As the children rose to their feet, the crowd ranged themselves in a semi-circle for their song. The Warden had begun a speech of introduction when loud hoof beats and the scrunching sound of a horse checked suddenly on the curb set the people agape. It was a portent of something urgent and of consequence. A servant, with unusual haste and lack of dignity, burst into the room. " A royal messenger is here, my lord," he proclaimed.

The Bishop pulled himself upright in his chair, but was too overwhelmed to speak. It was left to Robert to give the order : " Bring him in."

The crowd opened a pathway for the messenger as he strode into the room with an easy bearing that was almost a swagger. He was a weather-beaten, tall young man, whose riding boots were caked with mud and whose bespattered coat bore the Arms of England. " I bring a message for the Bishop Vesey from Her Majesty the Queen," he said as he halted in the middle of the room and looked around him.

Robert pointed to the frail figure in the chair. The horseman advanced, and, bending on one knee, placed a document in a sealed wrapping in the Bishop's hand. Then he rose, turned, and followed the servant from the room.

Trembling with nervous haste, the Bishop strove to break the seals, but his fingers were unequal to the simple task, and he handed the writing to Robert with the quavering plea : " Tell me its tenor—quickly."

As Robert broke the seals and opened out the paper, there was a feeling of dramatic tension in all the lookers-on. Was the message guarded by the crimson seals something evil or of goodwill ? The Bishop's eyes were fixed on Pudsey like one who strives to read a judge's sentence in his face. Robert scanned a line or two—and smiled. A sound like the sighing of a soft wind told that tension had yielded to relief. " It is a gracious message," said Pudsey softly.

A new light shone in the Bishop's eyes and his voice had a new ring as he exclaimed : " Read it that all may hear." Smoothing the folds of the paper with has hand, Robert read :—

" To our Trusty and Well-beloved John Vesey, Greeting and Remembrance. Being ever mindful of thy early guidance in both Faith and Learning, and of thy constant Loyal Service to our Throne, we do, by our decree, restore thee in full honour to the See of Exeter. Signed, Mary Regina."

As he listened, the Bishop's face was suddenly transformed; age and weariness seemed to have been swept away. " She—has—remembered," he said in exultation, almost to himself. To the general amaze, he drew himself to his feet. Turning to Eleanor, he cried: " Robe me in the vestments of my office," and his voice had the firmness of a command.

Eleanor and Robert helped him to cross the room and open an inner door. As it closed, the pent-up feelings of the Townsfolk broke in a torrent of excited talk silenced by the Warden's uplifted hand. " Friends," he said, " this is great news and great occasion. The song we have rehearsed shall be our tribute. Michael Thumby is the master of our music, and will give you orders."

A brisk little man bustled forward, and standing on a stool addressed his motley choir. " Listen all to my instructions," he said, eyeing the singers sternly. "Sing you heartily, but not too loud. Melody let it be and lusty notes be stayed. Give your voices proper modulation. All must be in unison. Tom the tenor, mind you that; give your high notes a holiday." Tom, a sturdy red-faced fellow, nodded gloomily. " And no bass, Master Andrew, we'll have no rumbling," Michael went on, glaring at a tall, thin, melancholy man. " William Thickbroom, you shall give the pitch. Look to your note, Willie, or you may set too big a task. Be ready all, and I will give the signal. If any need to clear his throat, let it be done now—no barking and we once begin, and . . . "

The speaker stopped suddenly. The door of the Bishop's room had opened, and the bent and tottering form that had just left them, came in, upright and unaided, transformed into the picture of a virile and impressive prelate. He wore, above an alb and amice, a heavy crimson cope enriched with cloth of gold and brilliant orphery. In his hand he carried his pastoral staff, and his mitre was upon his head. The people stood silent and motionless, awed and wondering.

Michael, intent upon his task, was first to gain composure. By a motion of his hand he gained attention from the singers. He gave

the signal, and they sang their hymn of praise :—

" Hail ! to Sutton's noble son,
Our homage let us pay,
Ere our festival's begun,
On eve of holy day.
May thy memory abide,
Thy honour and renown.
May thy example stand to guide
Thy loved and royal town."

The people sang as though inspired by the splendid figure that stood before them. Beginning softly, the voices rose to a ringing tone that had a note of triumph.

When the song had ended, the Bishop raised his arm. The people sank upon their knees to receive the Church's blessing. Then, the crowd arose, and melted quietly away.

As the last of the throng departed, the Bishop swayed a little, and he shivered slightly. The strength new born of pride and exultation was ebbing quickly. Eleanor and Robert led him gently to his chair, and turned it to the fire. He sank back on the cushions with a radiant look upon his face, gazing steadfastly in front of him. It was not the sculptured Coat of Arms, symbol of earthly pride, above the hearth, on which his eyes were fixed, but a silver crucifix that hung there. His lips moved silently as, in his heart, he chanted the *Nunc Dimittis*.

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