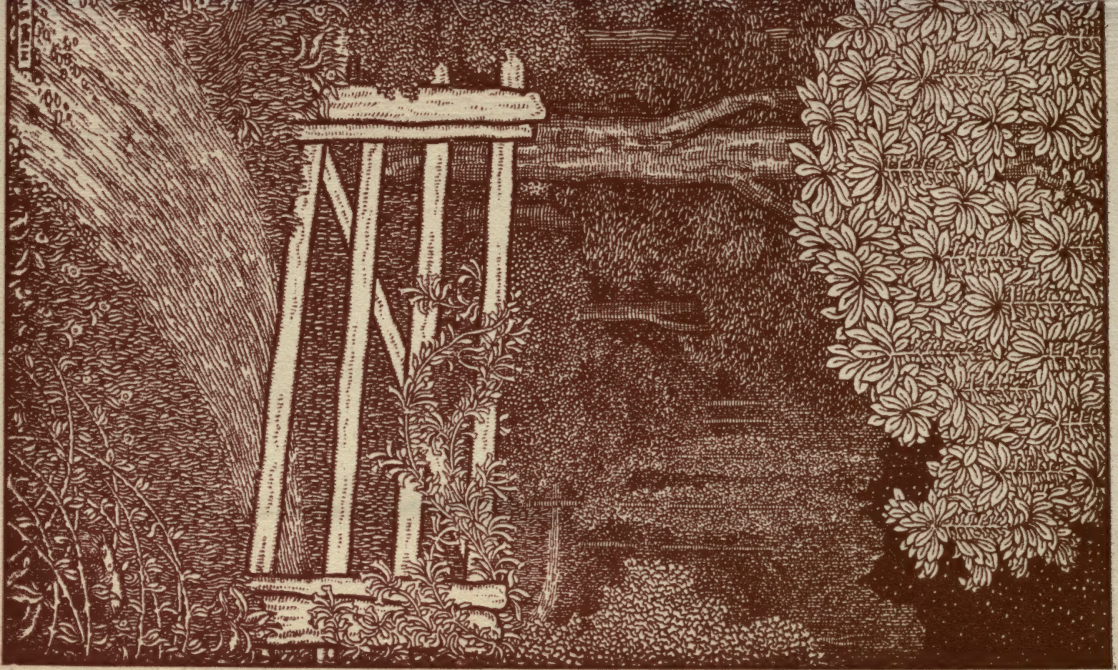
...AGIC CASEMENTS

ARTHUR S. CRIPPS



Magic Casements

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Magic Casements

By

Arthur Shearly Cripps

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To
MY MOTHER
C. C. M. C.

THE casements of these stories are not of those that open

"on the foam
Of perilous seas in faerie lands forlorn,"

their vistas are of certain years in English history, and of certain widths of English soil.

Yet narrow though the vision be that they afford, you may find them in some sense not unmagical. Their outlook is upon a beautiful and restless England, their inlook upon her many-coloured faith. You must blame my dusty and opaque casements if you miss, in either outlook or inlook, charms to lure and spells to bind.

A. S. C.

WRENINGHAM, MASHONALAND.

Contents

Fern-Seed

It was one evening in September, in the last year of King Harry the Sixth, that a Kentish lad went into a Kentish wood to gather fern-seed.

The wood was the great wood that runs up the southern hills from the marshes. The river of division flows in the level there, and you are soon across into Sussex, but should you travel up the road as far as the wood goes, you will be deep in Kent. In a cup of the ground with a rim of oak saplings, that you might call a fairies' lodge or a witches' kitchen, according as the weather were clear or foul, the lad found what he sought. That evening was a clear harvest yellow one; the moon that had been up just an hour before the sun set, was now bright with the glean-

ings he had left her. In the bloom and dew and haze, the fern-harvester groped among the leaves. Soon he stole away with a full pouch.

Out of the wood he came, and down on to the black marsh path among a score of great sheep that a shepherd was fetching home by moonshine. Then across the ford into Sussex, and thence a long trudge, with a-many dykes to leap, to the Anchorage of Udimore. This anchorage was built at the east wall of the church and stood lonely. There is but a scatter of houses in the village and they are poor ones. But the last anchoress, that was the Lady Elizabeth, made the honour of the place and the Lady Anne, that was but five years come to inhabit there, seemed like to cherish it.

Herein was the famous window-curtain, crimson woven with a great cross of white, that came across the sea in the French Wars. Thirty years before, a wrecked Winchelsea crew that fought their way to their friends, robbed it from a heath-chapel in Brittany.

They vowed it to Saint Michael at home, and swearing it had brought them good aid, kept their vow.

From behind that veil, it was the rule of the Udimore anchoress to counsel those that came to her. An you stayed a whole month in the village you would see her face but seldom, in such seemly wise was she enclosed. Through her white cross on crimson, the young sun would look very meekly and the old moon very kindly. Her curtain moved to piety many sea-farers and woodmen that knew little of the saints. It was as a cloud rich with mystery by day and a pillar of sacred fire by night when the shrine lamp within was lighted. When at last Stephen Rule came to it, up the dyke-way through the belt of trees, he dropped on one knee, and crossed himself. Soon he was up, but seemed not yet decided what to do. Thus he waited doubting, an hour or more, till the moon was high indeed. The red lamp was a sight full of cheer as one looked dimly

through the casement from the frosty dusk of September.

Presently the boy ceased gazing stupidly with a frightened face. He dropped once more, and prayed fiercely. Then he rose and went to the window, pausing on his steps and listening as though he feared each foot-fall had been too loud. He put his hands to the outer frame-work of iron. Slowly and painfully they loosened a bar, at last he drew it forth very stilly. Next he fumbled at the fastenings of the curtain. Soon that sacred veil drawn back, he drew himself up through the window.

Once more the night moved not at all without. The moonshine lay wide and cold. In the core of the cross, the small red fire of sleepless charity burnt with stedfastness. But the lamp swayed ever so little and the light flickered, for the veil had brushed it lightly, as he drew it aside to enter.

Within, the scene was not as he had pictured it a hundred times. He had

dreamed of this saint of his own country-side kneeling with a crucifix while the devil cowered in a corner. But that dream was two days old. All this night he had hoped to find her sleeping,—doubtless in white,—haply with a lamb couchant at her feet,—haply with her pillow flanked by two angels with lilies crossed above it. But he had never thought to come upon her as he did, face to face. His heart stood still in its surprise. The window opened eastward and it was to the east she prayed. There was but just standing room where he had entered. In front was the grey slab of marble set here and there with jewels, tokens of the rarer relics of saints that were inurned there.

Above the lamp burned, dazing his eyes. And across the marble bridge she knelt, herself all in white and crimson, her face half-folded in her hands. She was saying Our Lady's last office of the night very intently.

He stood guiltily, forgetful now of the

fern-seed charm, hopeless to escape unseen. But after a while his heart beat more calmly, his face grew less a-tingle. She was so quiet and strong at her prayers, one could scarce help learning calmness.

The office ended, she began to pray, now under her breath, now clearly, for those that should go to the wars, for those that were to die, for the lives that were spent already. As she prayed thus, she shuddered often. Soon she was silent save for a sob at whiles. Then she spoke out clearly.

"Jesu, Lord! What do I know of these? These great meinies of kings and captains that must bleed and die and go to heaven or hell! What can I know in this cell of mine? *Culpa mea*! I took no pains to see those three that went from Iden. They are but dreams, that should be men,—I pray for! Saint Michael is no dream, nor Saint Lucy nor blessed Saint Anne. God that tookest flesh, make me to know mine own flesh in knights and archers, and to love, and pity, and pray!

Mother of Jesus, show me one face to pray for!"

With that she bared her face and looked straight before her. The face gazed from the white hood expectant. It viewed Stephen with no more surprise than a sun new-risen in a mist shows, when he at last discovers the hill before him.

She was but a child still. She had married God as early as Saint Faith in the calendar. She was very hotly flushed, her colour of a passing bright stain. Her eyes were deep grey, and now very full with her trouble.

He stood up before her trembling in all the strength of his eighteen years, his hand gripping at his dagger, his face burning red through the sun's dye. But he was brave to look at with his very bright hair, and the dark scar on his brow made him look manful for all his boy's fright. He had a crimson rose pinned to his worn doublet. They looked on one another, learning all the time

She saw the corrupt flesh without the veil—flesh with a heart to believe and a soul to save. He saw the spirit of the shrine, the pain, the weariness, the fight for breath of faith — yet with all, the dear worthy loveliness.

His eyes laughed goodwill at hers; hers answered at first with pain, then tenderness, then hope, at the last with joy unrestrained. Three minutes in all perchance, they were gazing, but the time seemed long to him. At the last, she lifted up her face to the roof where the moon had found one chink, and began to sing her *Nunc Dimittis* to a feast-day tone. He was singing with her before she had finished the first stave. By the time they were come to the Gloria, the narrow anchorage was loud with triumph.

That ended, she enfolded her face and got to her night prayers, giving thanks first for her good success in her vision. He stayed to swell Amen, then crept forth more noiselessly than he had come. She was beginning

a *De Profundis* for all souls astray. He paused as he slipped the bar back into its place. "I will be her warden to-night," he said, "to-morrow shall Tom Smith make all triply strong. Then not I nor any other man shall enter, were we ever so well-minded!" He knelt down and committed her to Saint Michael's keeping, and to Christ his joy, then stretched himself in his cloak under a yew tree. In the cold before the dawn, he went down to the smith and spoke of having found a day since one bar loose at the anchorage casement. He laid down a gold piece, asking for its renewing with all speed and strength. But the smith would take no money.

"I will make all fast, for nought," he said; "she is our care. We do give God thanks for her. And is there not a cause?"

Then Stephen shouldered his bill and strode away down the marsh road he had travelled the night before. The September sun looked mirthfully over white-breathing dykes

and silver-mailed sheep pastures. Mirthfully or tearfully, you might take it as you would. When he came to the Church at Iden he stopped to hear a Mass: was it not Saint Michael's own morning? Strange how he had learned to care for a Mass in a single night. It was the same with her in that anchorage towards the Sussex sea, only she had cared a long time, but now how much more wistfully!

The boy had passed behind a veil, the girl had looked out through it. It is good to afforest a faerieland, but it is good for once to pierce through the trees, if only we be heartened by what we see. It would seem that both the anchoress and the Red-Rose soldier were heartened by their one gazing. It is truth doubtless that they never set eyes on one another in Sussex any more. But then neither would seem to have desired a further vision. She died full young, it was said of the marsh fever, but like enough of pure fire of charity, only two years after.

He fought at Towton, but whether he fell there, I can find no record.

As to the properties of fern-seed, it does not appear that it made the bearer invisible. Yet there is no proof that the Lady Anne saw him otherwise than as an unsubstantial vision.

On the Night of the Nativity

When Francis Fortescue married Francesca Ford, he was already fifty years old and the gout had hold of him. He had bought her marriage in fair market—the Saints having prospered him so far; her want of inclination for his addresses did not trouble him at the time of sale. Afterwards when the Convent of Clares kept her heart from him, it seemed to him of more importance. She was ruddy brown of hair and eyes the self-same colour that suits with the aureoles of the virgin martyrs, an ominous colour for household peace, as he learned in due time. But on the day he bought her, the hue pleased him as promising daily cheer. She was headstrong as Saint Catharine, but he could have no heart to beat one who was fragile as Saint

Agnes. She was wilful as Saint Audrey, yet withal as debonnair and queenly. She looked at you with the wistful eyes of Saint Dorothy all the while that she plotted household disobedience with Saint Clare her patroness. One tale that was told of her testified to the home troubles of her harsh and wary husband. One winter's day she was fain to emulate Saint Elizabeth of Hungary by giving flesh doles through the village street. Who then should come by but her husband, in no great charity with certain of her pensioners. "What have ye here?" says he, snatching at her cloak, an angrier and much ruder Lewis. "Roses!" says she, a more flustered and shame-faced Elizabeth. O how she prayed before the blue folds came open, but surely faith had taken a chill in the bleakness of that morning, for the outcome was other than in the tale. True, there were red roses not far above, but under the cloak a great stuffed boar's head gaped and grinned. What followed may be imagined.

The story is but one among many that were told through West Sussex, and all were to the same purport. In the year of our Saviour, 1460, when the call to arms reached the south country, Francis was well content to be off northwards, leaving Francesca's charitable hands tied as tightly as he could tie them. He came safe through Towton snows, but whether his lady's prayers kept him out of Purgatory-pit, 'twere hard to say.

On the Saint Francis' Day after his homecoming, matters were much as of old, but with a difference. Times had now grown hard with Fortescue, since the more worthily he had adventured himself the poorer had he been left in purse and esteem and friendship. He had fought in a lost cause, and the fact came the more nearly home to him, seeing that well-nigh all his own country side wore the rose of the better fortune. His sorrows had nowise sweetened him, indeed his harshness began to give his lady reason to complain, such reason as she never had had before.

On the Night of the Nativity

Strangely gloomy then was the morning of that Saint Francis' feast, albeit the skies were clear enough and the frozen woods drest in true faëry colours of green and golden-brown. The downs had that look on their round faces for which some new word should be framed, compact of bloom and smile. But the master of the house kept his bed late and when he rose had a surly frown for all his narrow world. Most devoutly had his lady set her heart to bring him within hearing of Mass in the village church that morning of mornings when their name saint called. Alas! she went late and lonely, and came back tearful. Without was a quiet morn and tingling autumn weather, within was sultry dusk with a sullen thud of thunder ever and anon and a spear prick of lightning. About noon that day came Father James of Calvary journeying to Saint Mary of the Angels in Ashdown Forest. There was ever a fair welcome from the mistress for any brother minor, but the master of the house

in his cordial hatred of the brown frock, was wont to belie his name. This day he was fain to set his dogs on the priest, but the latter was more than a match for his ill-humour. His tongue was ready, his humility had a twinkling eye. He was grudgingly bidden to bite and sup, his host sitting by to glower at every mouthful. But the meal was hardly done when Fortescue unbent to him, the more graciously from shame for his past gracelessness. Had not the miry wayfarer a tale to tell of Harry the Sixth, the master that had cost the Fortescues dear, only to be the more beloved. The friar could tell how he had sung Mass on Christmas Day of last year somewhere on the northern border. Under his hands there Christ had been, born even as of old in a cow-shed, whither a king came to adore him.

"Our lord the king," said James, "served my Mass that Nativity morning, kneeling in the straw. With all gentleness and humility he bore himself as digne page of the King of

Jewry. But when the time of the oblation of alms was come, those who knelt behind tell me that he stood as one mazed, his eyes filling with tears. There were but two or three woodmen and neatherds there beside the queen and the prince. But these when they saw their king's trouble were alike moved to sobbing, yet wist they not how to help him. Then I turned from the altar at the sound and perceived how the matter stood with him. So I said to the people "Hath any man a broad gold piece to lend our lord the king?" With that, one hurried out, whilst his fellows stared blankly. Back he came, breathless, with a ragged sleeve wherefrom he shook out in the king's hand a shining piece louting low on bended knee. And the king caught him up and kissed him, ere he made oblation of gold to Christ—Mary's Child and our Father. Thus all went joyously."

This tale moved Francis Fortescue to strange tenderness. All that night, long

after Francesca's beads were told and the Portiuncula was visited in her blissful dreams, he sat with the friar, asking and hearing many things. Yet must it not be thought that this good Father neglected the spiritual cravings of the mistress for the master's hospitality. After the Mass of the morrow, he and she talked long and eagerly of the Order and most especially of the great house in Ashdown Forest. Nought would content Francesca but that she should keep the coming Christmas there. She must adore at the great Crib. There straw and bare rafters consorted in amity with a thousand pilgrims' profferings to set forth the joyous mystery. Father James must entreat her husband for her, who "might be a Dominican for his ill-will to Saint Francis." Her guest was willing he would urge his host, what time he walked beside him those first three miles of downland according to his promise

Wonderful to tell when Fortescue came

back at noon his consent was gruffly given. What glad eyes he won and what gentle services for seven days at the least! Thereafter certain of the old estrangements were renewed, but it may be said with certitude that the household weather was calmer afterwards even till that week before Christmas, when the day of delicious expectation severed them.

Saint Thomas' Feast and a wet west wind morning! The tiny cavalcade of four, the lady, two men-servants and a waiting-woman, took the way of the eastern downs. The road was broken and grossly miry in the valley after the six smooth miles of chalky ridge were left behind. The wayside shrines —of Saint Wilfred and Saint Richard, honest Sussex saints—refreshed the mistress, a couple of ale-houses the men, the admiration of three clerks at the second of the shrines was solace to the maid. Near sunset they drew over the brow of the last long hill past the meeting of the roads, within a bow-

shot of Minting village, where they should sleep the night. Two horsemen were to be seen riding far down in the valley road beneath them. The sun for the last half hour had been thrusting a fiery face through streaming clouds. Now his light struck the steel of the one horseman and the yellow and red badge of the other. Fortescue's man exclaimed and pointed. "What d'ye see?" said the maid. "O nought, nought," said one, "only a badge we know." Afterwards by the fire at night in Minting Inn kitchen they spoke again of the matter when neither mistress or maid were near. "Nay, the badge might be another's!" said one. We were too far to tell man or horse." "I told the one chestnut horse," said the other, "and I know what I know." They muttered together awhile ere they fell asleep.

How can I tell the holy glee of that Christmas Vigil at the church of the Franciscans built so lonely among the heather moors and the fir woods! The

whole countryside for twenty miles seemed gathered round the Crib ere midnight. Afterwards came the first Mass of Christmas in the great echoing church. Then out into the frosty starlight once more! Rich folk as well as poor folk, men as well as women knelt around the stable in the flare of the pine torches. There in sweet-smelling hay from some meadow by Rotherstream lay the Babe with a red Sussex steer nosing at him. His robe was gay with diamond and ruby chequerings, with golden roses and silver fleurs-de-lys. Over Him bent Our Lady "Stella Maris" all in sea-blue sown thick with milky ways and pleiades of pearls. Around Him adored the cherry-cheeked angels in flashing cloth of silver. How the people rejoiced and laughed and well-wished one another in their Christmas adoration. Anon they were hushed as Father James sprang forward and preached them to this tune or that, as though he were King David and they psaltery strings. He made them

cry for their sins that drave Christ and Mary out into the cold. He made them fierce and furious against the arch-foe Sathanas that hunted Jesu of old with Herod for hound, and now hunts him with full pack of England's sinners. He made them chuckle with merriment at the blessed Bethlehem news; "for," said he, following his master Saint Francis, "Christmas is the most jubilant of all high days, for when once God was come to earth it was not possible but that we should be saved." Then he thundered against the lechery and ale-swilling of the past month in the forest hamlet, whereof he seemed to have a wondrously full knowledge. "In God's name," said he, "come to penance this night o' nights, for Christ is cold here, nay He is sick, He is dead! Yet, please God so, we will to-night awake Him. Feast! my masters!" said he; "may happen we will feast an God bring us to another Christmas, but this one, shall we not shrive us clean

fast, lie rough, and feed sparely, give great alms of all that we have?" He turned from the weather-beaten shepherds and homely maidens to the bravely clad knights and squires, the miller and the vintner, the women-folk snugly wrapped in bright cloaks and heavy furs. "To Christ," says he; "To Christ ye easy ones that feed full and lie warm while Mary and Jesu suffer famishing and cold. Now who of you will win merit and the kisses of our Father Francis that put the leper to bed, and knew him for Christ ere cock-crow? What? Stand ye staring? Take this man here, sir knight, and feed him! Take this wench home, good dame, and give her good wear for her thin rags! Take yon leper home, mistress, and tend him for Christ, haply He is Mary's Son Himself for aught ye know!" This last mandate was to Francesca who knelt on the bare ground, gazing at the Babe in the stall. Amid the murmurs and the haste, as the friar hustled those sheepish gentry and

shy women on their strange errands, she rose very quietly, went to the leper he had pointed out, and knelt to him in reverence. A tall figure of a man with a white coarse hood drawn over his eyes, leaning heavily on his staff, he crouched dumb and patient far away from the crowd. He did not draw away from her as she knelt before him, but suffered her eager hand to take his, and followed her through the shrinking, half-shuddering women. To the low-roofed guest-house by the friars' great gate she led him, passing very smoothly and gracefully, while never a word crossed between them. For awhile they were hard at work, mistress and maid and men. The guest's feet were washed in steaming and perfumed water, food was cooked for him and tendered him (but he would not raise his hood to taste it), pillows were heaped most velvet-soft for his sore limbs. The grim, silent figure, albeit he suffered the washing of his feet (that showed no scars of leprosy), would not give

his face to be sponged, nor allow the mollifying of his sores with ointment. Always the eyed hood held fast its secret. Reverently did the four minister to him, the three with care to stand away, and some faint show of abhorrence, the one with zeal to come near and undoubted love. Soon the quiet of the night so long delayed fell upon the priory, the last voices dropped away. The two serving-men were stretched out in the porch of the guest-house snoring thickly, the maid slept on the rushes of the guest-room. The leper sat up in the bed, his chin propped between his knees: there was no sign whether he waked or slept. Before him in the glimmer of the dull candle-light knelt Francesca, neat and fine as ever, her ruddy hair looped up as trimly as in the day, her eyes alert in their vigil. But as the hours wore on those patient lids grew heavy, and, even as though she dreamed of angels bowing, she bowed stealthily time and time again. At the last, her inclined head rose no more

but rested on the carved arch of the bed-front, and she slept. She woke with a start, and an instant look at the bed whither a dazzle of morning light was pointing. It was empty. "'Twas Jesu's self!" she cried with a quick gasp. Then came a touch on her shoulder, she shivered and turned. The figure of the leper stood behind her draped as before in solemn white, but now the hood was thrown back and the face disclosed. Little account took she of the face now, she was at his feet with her lips to his cloak-hem. "Jesu," she said and adored prostrate. Then to her in her joy came the voice of James of Calvary breaking her tenderest dreams, yet not without a tenderness of its own. "Daughter, yon is not our blissful Saviour new come from gloire, yet is a Christ given to thee to cherish! Though ye have not entertained Him in bodily presence, as our father Francis did, yet is He the guest in your house. Nourish him, for ye have such faith and charity as he hath not gotten. An he be not

poor in gear he is poor in those. Now by all gentle saints, and chiefly by our father Francis, vow to cherish Christ in him till death!"

"I vow," she said, and rose in a great fervour of charity to kiss that unhooded face. As she kissed the lips, she knew them for those grim fringed ones of her husband. But she did not flinch, she did not even start in amazement. She had given herself, wilful as ever, in most stedfast wilfulness. Her feet of freakish quicksilver were set at last in the way of home. "Strange!" said the Franciscan "how the most charitable of saints may forget his hungry heart, who shares her board and bed!" Francesca blushed woefully. "Brother!" said he very sternly to Francis, "remember whose part ye have played to-day. Ye have been Christ to her to-day! Woe be to you if ye turn Nabal to her to-morrow!"

So much said, he shrived them forthwith and gave them God's Body to their hearts'

solace. Of their good works in after years some brief record has been left. When, more than nine years on, Francis died of wounds gotten in Barnet fight, he was buried as a Franciscan tertiary in the brown frock of a Brother Minor.

Times go by Turns

It was a bleak night of the late winter in the year 1460-1, that a girl with a lantern went her round among the ewes and new-dropt lambs. The field where the shelters of wattles and straw were set, was a hill-pasture on the road's left as you climbed from the Chelmer valley to Felstead village. She had been stooping long to set up a wattle and to make all snug within the fences, when she started and turned at a voice that called her. Her lantern showed her a boy standing in the roadway, who was asking how far it was to Stebbing. She told him as well as she could, but he stood lingering as if loth to slip back into silence. "I am freezing cold," he said, "and there is a fire yonder. May I go and hold hands to

it?" She bade him go and welcome, and he stole away in the dark to the few sticks she had kindled under the hedgerow. She finished what she had to do ere she joined him.

He was stretched by the fire whistling, a lank boy with delicate hands and cheeks, and great bright eyes. He had a long bow slung over his shoulders, his suit was grey and crimson, and he had a white rose embroidered on his grey cap.

"I would rest an hour," he said. "I have come all the way from Chelmsford this night, and I must be in Stebbing ere dawn, that I may meet with him who goes the same road with me."

"And what road is that?" she asked.

He tapped the white rose in his cap for answer.

"To the wars?" she said. "There be a many going. How I would like to go. But there is no way for such as me." And she shook her yellow head woefully.

He laughed but said nothing.

"What is your name, boy?" she asked with motherly interest.

"Amor, girl," he said, "can ye not guess who it is, walks by night and carries bow and arrows?"

She reddened, she did not know his meaning. "Now tell me why ye work like a farm-boy of nights in the east wind?"

She told him how her own father was killed in the last fight of the French wars, and her step-father taken and hanged in the Christmas-tide that was gone by. Also how her mother had four maid-children to care for, and lived in a cottage near the Church of Holy Rood in Felstead, and how she went every day to sew or scrub or bake for the collet's wife.

"And now I earn a great boy's wage at the farm in the valley," she said. "And they feed me well and never beat me, only it is cold of nights this lambing time. The boys they are gone for archers, and therefore must

I come out and earn a boy's money. There is none else to come. My mistress has two babes to mind, and my master has been sick at home all this month. Yea, but it is cold these nights."

He sighed. "Shrewd weather for wenches. Why a man must set his teeth to face it!"

Then he told her his story how his name was Hugh, and he had served his prenticeship to a lorimer to a day, and was now free for the wars. "I have a cousin at Stebbing who goes with me, an he be not gone already. We can shoot well, the two of us. We shall find a company to join at Cambridge. But 'tis ill-faring to the wars thus lonely, in hard weather, and with little to eat."

"Times go by turns," she said sagely. "Ye will soon be by a good fire and breaking fast."

"'Tis good hearing," said he.

"Yea," she said, "the Father of Saint Francis taught me that rede, he that came by yesterday and found me crying for the cold.

"Dry eyes, Doll," saith he, "it shall soon be May Day." And when he came back with me to see my master, and had bidden us all to be of good life, he asked the dame to give me a whole holiday for May-Day, and she granted it him with a gay word. "Now be glad, be glad, Mistress Doll," he cried, "Said I not of a truth 'Times go by turns?' Soon shall you see the sun rise on May morning in that same east whence the wind comes. To-night to shrift, to-morrow to Mass. This month black frost, next month green leaves. This year to wars, next year to weddings. Verily all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well as wrote the Lady Julian."

"And who was she?" asked Hugh.

"I know not. But hers was a hearty saying. And he was a great hearty man that made the sun and fire burn brighter when he came in sight of them. You should have seen him go carolling up the hill. But he was ill at thrift. He gave me all the sweet

cake that my mistress had given him for his own eating, and his wallet rattled as empty as a dry pod with one pea."

"Ah!" said the boy, and looked long in the fire, and whistled softly. Before his hour by her fireside was spent, they had plighted troth to one another that they would keep May-Day in fast friendship.

"The battle will be won ere March is out, and I will be back if there be any way to come."

"And I will be at the little horn casement under the thatch in the cottage by the splintered elm."

"I will throw a pebble up from the street. Await me soon as ever the cocks crow."

Even so," she said, "and we will bring home the May together."

Thus they parted, assured that this tryst of theirs was of God's own Will and the saints' contriving. They joined hands awkwardly in the smoky light of the fire, scarce daring to look one another in the face. But the press

of her chilblained hand brought him courage, he stole a glance at her grey eyes and bright curls, then he kissed those piteous chapped lips that shook with the trouble of saying good-bye, and was gone in the dark.

Afterwards came the thought to both of them, that their parting was the one sure thing about their friendship, and that Fate had a score of Noes to say to their meeting on that unborn May-Day.

But we will leave such broodings to night and the east wind and the sleet and rain. We will come out in April when there are already flowers a-blow on the trodden wolds of Towton, and the Cock beck runs brown and wholesome once more.

Hugh came to harm that snowy Sunday when it sprawled over the valley like a giant's burst vein. He had opportunity to note its horrid colour, for he lay watching it with dizzy wondering eyes all the hour of sunset. He had shot well that day and his fingers grew raw and stiff. He had but just

begun to give them a thought, when disaster overwhelmed him. For once in a way the enemy pressed a charge home, and many archers that had had an easy morning with the wind at their backs and few but spent arrows falling about them now fared very ill. Hugh was beaten down in that desperate rush, and was favoured to come off with but a thrust and a slash, yet he had gotten enough to keep him quiet for many days.

When he was helped up on horseback three days after and made essay to ride south with two score of Kentish horsemen, he could not support the travelling till noon. His captain who had cared for him with rare tenderness, must perforce press on and leave him, knowing little how it would go with his hurts. He came into good enough hands though, at Cardall Manor House where four of his fellows left him with a good horse and four pieces of gold. They bade the lady use them on his behalf, for Masses or for his home-going as need should require. That lady came much

to see him in his blue chamber above the kitchen. She was not very hopeful in her answers when he asked to ride ere the month should be out. Hers was a very dark beauty under her high-horned cap, but her early bloom was gone now, and her eyes would at whiles betray her weariness even when she smiled. She had no children, and her husband was, if rumour said true, little comfort to her what time he kept at home. He was an eager man for his estates, and in waning age now: he had been long gone this year, watching the course of the warfare. The marriage had been none of her choosing, but she had kept his house well and served him truly for these ten winters past. Very pitiful she showed herself, when Hugh told her of his dire need to be home in Essex by May-Day.

"I will do a woman's part to heal y'r hurts," she said, "but that day is over-soon."

In a day or two more they were such friends, that Hugh asked her for tales of

her own Mayings. She told him two or three.

"Heigho!" she said, "If we had but one more life to embroider better when we have stitched the one away!" However she kept her tears in, even for that while, and only a little choke in her throat told him more than he ought to have known of her private griefs. He was mending still more slowly when, on the sixteenth day of April, an old friend came to that house. Leastways so he seemed to Hugh, although it was but by hearsay that he knew him. It was Father Benet the Franciscan on his home road to York, shriving and preaching all along his way. The moment that he let slip his watchword, Hugh knew him for the same that had comforted his dear shepherdess.

"Times go by turns," he would say again and again, to Hugh and to that lady alike. "Doubt not that all shall yet be well and all manner of things shall be well, yea even ill things, as said the Lady Julian."

"I foresee that ye shall start to ride home slowly six days from now," he told Hugh; "Nay I think ye will not miss to keep troth. Verily the turns of time come in happy course. To-day—feet of lead, that day—dancing feet. Yet think for the turns beyond!"

The man seemed possessed with the one word of comfort. It was such a sure thing that he verily believed what he said, that he carried a strange power of assuaging their despairs and regrets. The next morn he spoke to them all in the Chapel when they had gathered to his Mass, Hugh rather faint and helpless but already in new hope and heart.

"Last night was night of grief when the thorns pricked you and the olive trees were black above, and your sins as red drops were wrung from you, and your drink the veriest gall. But this morn is the morn of solace. See Christ's hearth is ruddy with welcome, and there is Rest here and Meat! Come

awhile, tarry awhile, then on, on! On by the winter way and by the summer way till the road twists over the sleety moors of Purgat'ry into the still park of Paradise. And after that there is no more twisting for there is no more road to go!" Afterwards he found time to speak with Hugh alone.

"Come cleanly to y' May-Day as to a little Mass in the green meadows. Remember those that have the worst of the road's turns when ye have the best of them for the while. Verily all shall be well an we be but well at heart!" Soon he went off briskly down the south road. He had been a true prophet of health, for Hugh caught him up only some eight days later, eating his broken bread in a shaw by the road-side with many birds around him. Nought would content him but that Hugh must share with him as well.

"May-Day," he said musing, looking up through the new green leaves to the ancient blue. "An I mistake not, the last turn of Time for the blessed is to May, wherein

they are fast bound by Eternity. This may ye perceive by certain tokens that are manifest. Look up when the nights are clear and tell me whether the blue floors of God's gardens be not strewn with white hawthorn drift. Surely the pilgrim staves of a many saints be grown there to pleasant thorn trees. Surely our Lord Jesu that wore a crown all thorns from the May-bush in that leafless Spring of His Passion, weareth now sweet white-thorn flowers in remembrance of the same. Moreover we learn here not to marry in May. Now in Heaven neither are hands joined nor are hands given in marriage. Wherefore? Because the singing folk there love on and on for ever with the love virginal of May everlasting."

Thus did Hugh take leave of him and come on by easy stages to Thaxted on the eve of the day desired. There he bought ribbands of many rich colours, and pressed on to Dunmow before night.

The cocks were crowing when Doll woke

from her dreams in the little loft where she lay with two of her half-sisters. It was good to think of her whole holiday but it was better to think of him that was coming. She put her hand under her straw pillow and drew out some withered twigs of hawthorn.

"My dreaming was dim," she thought. "And I cannot tell justly how it ran, but he came for sure."

Hawthorn in a house brings sickness, they say, and verily she was sick with hope. She washed and dressed her in white and combed out her curly hair. The tiny casement seemed growing brighter every time she looked upon it. She looked many times between whiles as she told her beads, kneeling upon the straw. The dawn must be very near, she thought, while as yet it was very far; she did not understand how that her own eager eyes made the square so bright. She was almost despairing when the whistling of a tune came to her from the street, at first like a fancy in a dream, then bold

and sweet. A pebble struck the pane with the crack of fate.

How they cried in and out to one another. through that horngate of good and true dreams, with a kind of beast or bird cry that was not words, but yet made clearest sense! Then, she stole down the rude ladder and with hush'd fingers unlatched the door. There he stood in the grey light: he seemed to have grown taller than she remembered him. There was but the faintest tinge of colour in the skies, the sunrise was yet far. She turned and shut the door smoothly, then they kissed each other reverently as though they were kissing in a church.

Hark! Down the street were coming a whole troop of boys and girls, two and two. The words of their burthen came to them:

"Wake! The red cock crows his birth,
Whist! Come stealthy out to mirth.
Seek with mute and sacred tread
Green fields newly brought to bed!
In the starlight ere the day
Bring him home, the new-blown May!"

These went by with the rout of children that followed them, down the road towards the ancient Mill house. They themselves turned into the silent road that goes down to the bridge over Chelmer. They would gather May in that self-same hedgerow that had sheltered them from winter. I cannot tell you all they said, nor all that they desired to find words for. But I know that they had much to tell one another and that it seemed very good to remember the east winds on that threshold of a gentle day. Far down in the valley they found their hedgerow and chose out their hawthorn-boughs just as the sun was near to rising. They said Ave and Paternoster and three times three Glorias. Then the sun rose, and Hugh began to sing the same tune that he had gone away whistling in the winter :

"Open, buds on white thorn bough !
Peter's cock crows Glorias now !
All dead virgins under-ground
Rise in violets at the sound.

Dead babes that with Mary dwell
In her lap 'Laudate' swell.
This good May the sun brings here
Comes the one day in the year,
And men see not many Mays!"

Their way had seemed all too short in coming, and it seemed none too long as they climbed the hill with their burden. The children were already busy on the arches about mother's door. There was much for both to do ere all the white-thorn branches were built up into a goodly bower. Then Hugh went forth seeking cakes, while Doll sought cream, and right nobly they feasted the whole household not to speak of two or three beggar-men. Afterwards the two went forth, hand in hand. Doll wore a coronal of hawthorn, and necklet and bracelets of freckled cowslips, if Essex paigles be really common cowslips, and not fairies' amber. He had his cap bound with a green wreath and wore the suit of warm blue that he had been given by the lady of Cardall, to keep for his Maying. The cobbled street was

freaked with sunlight patterns and cool chequers of shadow like a forest. A bower or arcade, or at the least one arch was set at every door. Four or five doors of houses that mourned slain men in this red year, showed green remembrancers in cypress or laurel or yew boughs. The street was almost as lonely as a forest now, for the folk had gathered to the Maypole on the green without the village.

"There is much we must see to-day," sighed Doll a little wearily.

"And wherefore?" he said, "the sun and the green shelter please us best."

"Ay, my hands are marred and chapped, and my feet have sore chilblains."

"And the slit in my ribs irks me somewhat."

"Dear Heart," cried she, "and I had forgotten."

She would not suffer him to wander further. They went back to their home bower where they found all gone a-field save the small sister that had sprained her foot.

"And to think we never thought for her," he said.

"Ah!" said Doll, "we have forgotten too soon the cold and the pain, and what it was to be lonely."

So they two shared their joy with a third, and as I think gained somewhat thereby that kept their joy as green at evening as it had been ere sunrise. Of all that they said and planned to do in the compass of that day of days, I have not the time to write. They were very tired, the twain of them, but very well content, when he parted with her at the gate of the farm in the valley. Was she not a slip of a girl who had defied winter, and earned boy's wages all that weary while? Was he not a mere child-at-arms whose desperate wounds had jostled him almost against the lintels of Death? This day they had come to a happy turn in their road albeit they guessed that it must yet wind again and again. I would bid them farewell under that red sky in their green May-time. Verily I

believe that they are gone all their way together past hard winters, and wars, and sweating sicknesses, past Shrove-tides and Christmas Days and Mayings, past cruel east winds and glowing eastern dawns, over the sleety moors of Purgatory, into that still pleasaunce where the folk live with the love virginal in everlasting May.

Amor, Filius Misericordiæ

It was that February when a Red Rose army came down the Great North Road pillaging and laying waste on its way towards London. At the time, Joanna Stanford had gone to her father's great house at Bulphan in the Essex marshes. She had been a lady-in-waiting in the old court of Richard of York before he kept black Christmas-tide on Wakefield Green. In November she had come home to tend her father who lay with a sore wound got in a skirmish, and now a whole month she had been left fatherless in the dull house looking forth on bleak Essex winter. As for her guardian, he was away fighting and had sent her word to stay where she was, till he had time to come and arrange a marriage for her.

She was very lonesome there in Essex for she had small knowledge of either country-side or people. She had been long in the York household now, nigh all those ten years since her mother died. When she had come home at whiles it had been to Bellaise in Epping Forest where her father would keep a merry house at Shrove-tide and Christmas. Bellaise in the greenwood was home to her, Bulphan Manor that stood in the grey wind-swept marshes with the gale-tormented seas near at hand, was exile.

On a certain morning in that February, came one to see her. This was Sir Edmund Grey whom she had seen at Bellaise, whence his house was but eight miles distant. He was brown-haired and blue-eyed, but made a poor show as a court gentleman; he lacked ease of manner sadly. The sight of such a stately young lady in such shining dresses had terrified him both the times that he had found himself in her presence. Most certainly he had found little to say to her,

but twenty or thirty words in all, and she had shown little relish for his company.

Now, he ventured into that dire presence again of his own free desire, having ridden some forty miles to accomplish it. Strange to tell, he showed far more assurance now though he was far less presentable than of old, being splashed from head to foot, while his brows were scratched right across with a briar. But he came in manfully and told his tale without flinching, albeit many words were wanted to tell it.

The Red Rose bands were ranging wide into the forest. Her servants at Bellaise were few and could not or would not hold the house. There was much gear of hers and her father's in keeping there. Time pressed, the danger was even in air to-day, as Belton manor six miles to west was burnt last night. What was her will? The fair girl in her black mourning had looked him over with amusement when he came in, so scratched and miry. He was naught as a man among

all the men that she had seen, for some of the stateliest and manfullest in all England had changed words with her. But he who had tumbled to her mood of scorn so easily at Bellaise and humbled himself before it, now told his tale plainly and bravely. What was it he said, if she valued aught very dearly at her house let her send him to save it that night.

An hour after, he was riding north-west on a fresh horse. The memory of a very precious face went with him; what was there in black mourning that made the colours of hair and cheeks show so delicate? And yet she had not become any too lavish of her smiles as yet, he could remember but two of them,—the one when he said he would ride for her, and the other as he rode away.

He splashed through marshes and pattered along forest roads nigh all that gusty day; when the sun sank, he was but two miles from Bellaise. The wind had dropped and the night was very still among the trees, as

he came to a forester's cottage and asked him for his news. The news was menacing enough. Thomas Guest, a stern and masterful captain lay with fifty lances in the wood, a mile from the house. A few men were picketed around Bellaise itself. For all the forester knew there had been no pillaging as yet. "Their captain willeth to have the matter his own way when 'a hath leisure on the morrow."

Edmund turned his horse loose in the orchard, and then took counsel with that old man in the Stanford livery. It was a starry but bitter night when he made his way in through the forest with the forester's boy to guide him.

There were two treasures that the lady Joanna had bidden him save, if there should be any way to save them—her brown bear and her new court robe all of crimson set with gold fleurs-de-lys. These must be conveyed to her, be the cost what it might.

Soon a red blotch of fire shone through

the elm trunks. That way was the great door of the house, a poor house for defence, not moated but a mere hunting-lodge. Grey went quietly forward towards it. As they came nearer, the boy crept on in front of him and showed the path to a screen of thicket within thirty paces. There were five men sitting or kneeling around the fire cooking their suppers. Edmund had made his cross-bow ready long ago, now he took aim through a gap in the hazels. But the boy checked his arm. "Let me have the shooting, I can shoot well," he said "be ready with the steel." The first shot proved his skill sufficiently. One fellow pitched forward with his face in the pot that he was scouring. Up sprang a big man in great haste and stood a dazed, helpless figure against the fire. "A child's mark!" said the child that took aim. The giant crashed down with a quarrel in his thigh. "Now comes the rush," piped the boy, and stood aside. Three came running for the thicket. In the dark

shadow where they could not see what they were doing the steel met them. One dropped, then another, the third ran for it shouting. "Now into the house," the boy said, and they sprang forward. Edmund thundered on the door, and gave the password "Maria auxilium." A lame man's step came wearily along the passage, and a shaking hand undid the chain.

"I come for your mistress," Edmund said. "Give me what she hath asked for." The old man would have told a long tale but Grey cut him short. He would be shown her room at once. There with a flaring torch he found the chestnut-wood press she had told him of. Within, smelling of some garden herb, he could not mind which, was that gracious robe of hers. The room was small but a very rich one. Edmund remembered the silk coverlet on the bed, the silver crucifix, and the glowing tapestry of lady Eve's wedding, with all the birds of the air in her bridal train. He remembered them long

afterwards. And yet he had only glanced at them in bitter haste by the flare of a burning link.

The next moment he was back again in the hall, and making such dispositions as he could. He folded the crimson dress in a cloak and gave it to that child with the cold eyes and the steady hand, he bade him ask his way to Bulphan Manor.

"See that ye make speed," he said. Then he went to seek the bear whose chain was clanking in the yard behind the house. The beast was tame enough and seemed glad enough to come with him. He came through the house again, bidding the steward hide all that he could ere morning. Softly he stole out of the great door and headed for the wood. Two wounded men lay by the fire, another was writhing himself towards it. This last caught sight of Edmund and raised a Hola. The twang of a long bow answered him. But it was not Edmund that fell. The brown bear lay huddled on the ground,

moaning piteously. Before he that had led him could get free, men were upon him from all sides. He was bound hand and foot and laid by the fireside. Just then one who seemed to be a captain rode up. He swore grievously at hearing of his watchmen's losses, then said he.

"Carry the hurt men into the byre. Nay, not into the house. I will have no thieves there. Hang your prisoner to the yew tree."

Edmund besought him for a priest. "'Tis but ten minutes' grace," he said. "As ye love your own soul, indulge me!"

The captain grumbled.

"Call Dick the priest!" he said. "But look ye, in half-an-hour when I come my round, this fellow must be swinging!"

He was gone in the darkness. After the sick men had been borne off by the two that were to tend them, there were only two left by the fire. Five minutes later, an ill-shaven priest stood over Edmund. "Leave us!" he said, and the men obeyed him, they

carried some of the brands away with them and began to build another fire close by the great yew tree. Then one clambered up it, and made fast a rope.

"Saint Edmund!" said the prisoner, "It is Dick Aylward and none other. Now help me to go free, Dick. You owe me ten pounds since Oxford days. Here then is a chance to clear y'r debt."

"With all my heart!" muttered Aylward scratching his head. "Yea, if I let you go 'tis but my neck for yours. Ten pounds, it is a poor price for strangling! Tom Guest is not like to spare a priest. A Lollard of a fellow! An we all have our dues, he should have a faggot!" At that instant the brown bear gave one last shuddering moan, then lay still.

"Hang yon poor beast in my stead," whispered Edmund, brightening up. "The captain will never know in the dark. Here Dick, find my purse, and say what is in it.' Dick felt for it.

"How much is there?" asked the prisoner.

"Ten pieces of ten!" said the priest, counting the money in apt hands.

"Well, three each for yon two archers, and four for you! Be speedy and buy them!"

In five minutes, the affair had been almost settled. The bear was wrapped in Grey's cloak, Grey's hood was drawn over her face. Very high up in the gloom of that yew of justice, she was set swinging. The archers had three pieces each in pocket. But more haggling followed about the burial fee.

"Ye must bury the body as soon as ever the captain has seen it hanging, when he has gone his way for the night!" So Father Aylward insisted. Edmund had to cut off his belt-clasp in payment, for it would be ill work digging when the ground was so bound with frost. At last all was agreed, and Edmund stole away a free man. He made straight for his own home near Medham, he

would save what he could there. Three miles away the news met him that his house was burning and that his mother had fled to Saint Albans. He must go straightway to seek her there to render what aid he could. He lay that night at Medham, and with a good horse under him once more started at dawn. The country was full of enemies, but by skill and favour of Providence he made his way to Saint Albans without drawing steel.

Meanwhile the boy that carried Joanna's robe was on his road to her. He had skulked in the wood awhile, then he spied the new-kindled fire between him and his father's cottage. Being fearful to go forward for the time, he crept backward, and saw the black weight swinging in the yew-tree. He heard the captain ride up to the place of execution, then he saw the two men breaking ground with crow-bars while the priest stood by. After that he slipped away through the brushwood, slept at his father's cottage, and

was away in the cold of morning with his heavy tidings for Bulphan Manor.

When Joan heard that she had sent a gentleman to his untimely death, she turned very white, and went to her own chamber. She rode the next day for Waltham near to Bellaise. She would go a pilgrimage thence to pray for a certain soul, she said. She took two men with her. When she came to Waltham Cross she bade them wait in the village with the horses. Then she walked on alone as though to go to the nunnery.

She turned away into the forest under the yellow evening light, when none was by to see her. She would go to her ancient friend —the anchoress of Ladywell Chantry. There would she pray perpetually for the soul she had sent out of the world. Her life should go that way and no other. She wrapt her cloak of furs about her, and setting her teeth tightly, began her pilgrimage. That was the night of heavy snowfall. She was numb and dazed and weary with her battling through

the great white flakes when she drew near to the Anchorage. Then it was that in the forest road she came upon a woman creeping along the path, a crazy, half-frozen creature. Joanna wrapt her cloak about her, and then led her slowly on towards the light that burnt in the Anchorage window.

At last the grey eager dame with her complaining voice made them welcome within. Food and fire were all that Joanna needed, but her companion was far spent. Her home in the forest had been plundered, a grown son of hers had been shot with an arrow, her children were scattered and lost, she had wandered, she knew not how many leagues, she would not tell her name.

Towards dawn when the priest had just left her, when the wind was raving, and the ragged clouds were shredding off the snow in great patches and tatters, she drew her last breath, even as they watched her by the fire's light.

"Evil times! Hearts of murder!" groaned the Anchoress.

"Alas! for one heart of murder!" began Joanna, and therewith told her own story.

Two days after, when the snowstorm had past, that nameless lady from nigh Theydon in the Forest, was buried at Ladywell. Joanna had a thought now.

"Can ye find me a messenger?" she asked. The Anchoress found her one and gave him her message, for she would let none see her face save the priest only who shared her secret. The messenger carried that cloak of hers to two men in the Stanford livery that were drinking the cold away in Waltham village. They looked at it in bewilderment.

"Our mistress is lodged at the Nunnery this wild weather," they said. "Not so, if this be her cloak. She that wore it was found all foredone in the forest. She was buried last night." Forthwith they went to the nunnery, and found no mistress there. So they told their tale of grief in Waltham, whence it ran hot-foot to Bellaise. The enemy had marched out thence, and the

Stanford folk were now manning their lost lady's house manfully, that is to say the shell of it, for the goods and gear had gone in the pillage. There at Bellaise, the rumour of grief met Edmund Grey who was back from his journey now.

"And did she care for me so much?" he thought, with a taint of pride in his sorrow. "Did she go on pilgrimage for my poor soul, and come by her death so doing?" But the misery of the tale was too intense to dwell upon. Why should a lady so altogether exquisite have offered her youth in his behalf? His honest grief was indeed poignant. What remained for him to do? How might he in anywise repay her? For a whole morning he was minded to enter Religion without delay, but as the sun fell another thought came to him. "I will sell my sword to one that will pay dear for it. I will earn gold in these present wars. And by God's mercy, an He grant me this, and leave me life, I will build a chantry in that

forest of ill fortune. Therein will I myself seek her soul's interest. Not prayers nor masses for me all my days as yet! Nay, first, adventurous wars and perilous journeys! Yet by my troth as a Christian, all shall be undertaken to the one purpose!"

Thus it came about that Edmund hired himself to Lord Ashley for the northern war, and came in the way of much honour and a grant of three farms that he sold for a rich price after the fight at Towton. Having made his bargain he came South with all haste and made straight for Ladywell. They had told him that she lay buried in the churchyard there. He knelt long and with much devotion by the new-mounded grave where the brambles were still stretched over the green turfs. Then he turned away.

"They found her near to death in this forest," he thought. "A forest cell for me with all my heart, since cell it must be." He camped near the edge of the woodland at night, on some healthy ground above the

church. It was a very late and sweet spring that year after the snows; he thought he had never seen the wood-flowers in such plenty, or heard the thrushes make such loud music.

On the morrow he sought the anchoress' cell. A veiled servant came to the window and spoke with the curtain drawn aside.

"Our mother is sick," she said rather glumly.

"I would ask of you then," Edmund said, "that ye tell me how I may come to a place in the forest where the beautiful and digne lady, Joanna Stanford, was found a-dying. I have newly come from the wars, where I won gold to build her a chantry and buy her masses."

The anchoress' servant gave a strange cry, and drew her hood closer over her brows, then she turned to go on with her kneading. Edmund watched those very delicate hands moulding the dough a long while, before he ventured to ask again.

"I would ye could guide me to that

place," he said, "I sent her to her death, poor maid. When I have found it, I will build me a little cell of boughs that I may help her soul in all pity and charity, though I am ill at long prayers." The white-veiled and white-hooded figure began to laugh and cry by turns.

Edmund grew very uneasy. "What have I said?" he stammered.

"Fair sir, who are ye?" she cried. She threw up her veil and he saw Joanna.

"Ye were hanged for my sake, and my heart was broken with pity for you," she said. "I vowed mine whole life to you in compassion."

"Lady ye came by your death in the forest going a pilgrimage for me," he answered. "I swore my life to you in sorrow and in pity."

Then they told their tales to one another, and took long to tell them. They confessed, the one to the other, that anchorage life was not their vocation, yet were their two

lives pledged by Our Lord's Sorrows and Our Lady's Pity and all things most holy.

But the old anchoress that they told their perplexity to, declared a way of escape to them. Amor had surprised them verily and indeed, Amor with fire-tipped shafts and purple-knotted quiver. There was no mistaking him though he called Misericordia mother. What if Misericordia be often a name for Venus?

The Bowed Head

Mistress Grindal took to her bed in the outset of winter, the outset of that winter whose white outgoing was marked red by Towton Field. When the host of the Pilgrim's Bottle at High Easter heard the news of the dame, he wagered six silver pennies that she would never pass her son's threshold save feet foremost. The general opinion was that the forester from Garnett's Wood was a fool to take him up. Nevertheless the wager was lost as you shall hear in this story.

Jack Grindal's death had befallen some ten years before when he had seen his sixty-third year out. So it is fair to conclude that his widow was by this time well past the allotted term of our age, since she was but a

little the younger. Jack had fought from Agincourt onwards through five years of French and Scottish war. He had brought home enough to rent two fields and some commonage in his home parish of Margaret Roothing. On this poor holding Tom his son struggled for a living when old Jack was gone, while a second Jack was growing up to carry the thrifty line one stage further. In the April of the year 1461 news came to Dame Grindal of the death of her younger son the night after Towton. It was common fame in the village that this dead Richard was nearer her old heart than Tom. Tom himself knew it, and told his wife that the tidings from the north would be the death of his mother. But the tale of Richard's end, strange to say, put new life into her limbs. It was a dark tale possibly coloured a little in the coming southward by word of many a hard-swearing mouth.

On the night after Towton, Dick and five others, archers, had straggled far afield.

Deep in ale, they had gone to rob a rich chantry. Here a dozen of Lancastrians had caught them as rats in a trap and made short work. Dick had an arrow through his back, according to one story, even as he hacked at the Tabernacle, so that his blood splashed the outraged Altar. Never was a clearer death in Satan said those that told and those that listened. Another version of the tale, less authoritative, declared that he was grappling with a mate to save that Holy of Holies when Death came to him on wings.

His mother heard all that there was to be heard sighing, and went the way to cry her old eyes out. Had you noted her parched cheeks and puckered brows a month before you would have doubted her power of tears. But Sorrow with his divining rod disclosed unguessed springs of tenderness. Moreover to the wonder of all, that base story gave her back a measure of her youth, as though challenging her to essay its disproval. Sir

Daniel the priest bade her let well or ill alone. He would be graciously pleased, he said, to accept double alms and say Requiem for the dead man's soul, despite the brimstone reek that hung about its departure. But that generosity of his in no wise contented her. "Dick was an ill boy for cups or quarrels!" she would mutter, "but God's Body had no meeker worshipper than Dick, I mind me yet how he broke the Lollard's head that gainsaid It."

Now ever since Palm Sunday in that year, strange tales had come abroad from the Priory of Tilty some fifteen miles away. It was said that the sub-prior, not long from Italy, had carved a Wonder-Rood whereon certain notable signs had been observed. When Sir Richard Maynard brought a golden thank-offering for his wife's safe delivery, the Head had bent over the Bosom. When the miller of Thaxted coming to do penance for contumacy had parted with hard-won silver, the eyes had quivered with approval. Within

but few days Tilty's shrine was become a power to keep Essex pilgrims from Kent, as well content with their native miracles. Margaret Roothing with all her sisters, some less some greater, for no less than eight villages bear the name of the Roothing river, heard and wondered. The forester from Garnett's told the marvels one night at Tom Grindal's fireside. Dame Grindal, who now kept her bed no longer but sat up in her high chair knitting her brows and muttering, stopped her chatter to listen. When he had done she was smiling and nodding, and Tom's wife who helped her to bed remarked her change of humour. Two days later, on the 29th of April, the astonishing news of the old lady's pilgrimage was the talk of cottage and manor house. She had risen and gone in the faint twilight, taking little Jack with her, no one knew whither till the miller's cart came in. He had met the dame and her escourt three miles up the road making for High Easter, and had a message to give her

son's wife. She was gone to Tilty, to know the truth about poor Dick, whether Our Lady or Sathanas had him in keeping. If sweet Jesu on the Tilty Rood would bow His Head to her prayer, she would know all was well with her lad, and sing her *Nunc Dimittis.*

She had taken the broad gold piece of France that her old man gave her to keep for Dick thirty years agone. She had thus a fair offering for her Saviour, and would earn such merit as she might by faring afoot. Little Jack and Our Lady would take care of her and should all go aright she would be back by the hearthside in a se'nnight's space. Tom swore and his wife cried, but Sir Daniel who had a good heart though a greedy one for Mass-pennies, maintained that the dame's errand was of God and dear to God's Mother. "Sic dilexit Filium," he said, and pledged himself to say a Mass on her behalf the morrow morn for Christ's dear Love alone.

Meanwhile she was trudging on stiffly

within a mile of the great church of Saint Mary the Virgin at High Easter. Jack whistled and kicked up the dust behind: ever and anon he was up a bank or plunging into a hedge for a bird's nest. The blackthorn gave starshine here and there for the season was a late one, the springtime had but lately come out of long clothes of snow. The green of the fields had that dazzling look that only the first warm showers know how to give; the buttercups wore the true colours of a young and amorous sun. The larks were up and down the blue stairs all that morning, the cuckoo shouted again and again from an orchard on the right while they stayed to break bread on the roadside. Before the wind of the afternoon hurried a grey and white fleece from the west, and wrung a scanty shower out of it, they were safely housed at the Pilgrim's Bottle.

Mine host there, started as if it were his own mother come from the churchyard, when he saw who it was that came tapping with

her stick into the kitchen. "By the Saints!" he cried. But our dame was too breathless and faint for a while to tell her story. So he throttled his curiosity and busied himself in making ready hot sack with sugar. As he brought it to her where she sat in the chimney-corner pale and shaking, the rueful remembrance of his wager came to him. "By all the devils of France!" he grumbled. After sunset and supper, when the elm-logs burned brightly, some half a dozen were gathered in that same guest-room.

They were all save one—a billman faring home from the wars—pilgrims to Tilty. In her ingle-nook sat Dame Grindal muttering and musing, while Jack slept at her feet. On the other side of the smoky blaze sat a bowyer from Barking, whose frugality looked forth from his soiled linen. He was very eager to come by a miracle, if it might be had cheaply. He was not in the mind, he said, to spare many silver pence to compass it. Better company were the other three—the soldier

with his tales of Palm Sunday Field, and a yeoman and his wife from Willingale Doe. These clinked cups together and sang far on into the night. The singing grew drowsy, then ceased, and save Dame Grindal, all seemed to be sleeping. She sat, a small stiff figure in her grey homespun, still chattering to herself at whiles. Presently, she slipped her gold piece out and began to gaze at it and talk to it. Now and then a sleeper on the floor stirred uneasily, and she looked down with a sharp glance of suspicion. The firelight played strange dappling tricks among the pots and pans and over the smoke-grimed rafters. Now it shimmered on the gold in the brown, creased hand, now on the soldier's purple face. Once you could have sworn it played on a bright eye glancing out of the bowyer's cloak. The old woman's muttering grew dreamy, her chin dropped forward on her breast, and she slept with the gold still on her open palm. In the early morning the bustle of the guests departing did not awake

her. She was still sleeping placidly when Jack stole back with his pouch bulging from some secret errand of his own. He shook her and she awoke.

Her gold piece was gone, and there was no finding it. The master of the house searched the floor and swore at his knavish guests the while. Yet after all, he reflected, her gold piece and its loss might alike be the dreams of age. He said what he could by way of comfort, and gave Jack a bottle of wine and a pasty to carry. Not long before noon they tarried to eat—a mile the further side of Great Dunmow. Under a tall elm-tree they camped, the dame piling the sticks that her grandson fetched her. Presently when the fire was crackling in them, he brought out half a score of eggs from his swollen pouch. Even mutton pasty had little relish for him beside these ill-gotten dainties. His grandmother asked no questions, having matters of her own in mind, so a right good meal he made before grace-time. After

an hour's rest she was ready to go forward, and in the declining afternoon they came up the white road in full sight of Tilty. There are fairer and far greater shrines in Essex but never a one more pleasantly and proudly set among greenwood trees on a ledge above the highway. In the guest-house they met their last night's friends with many another beside. Dame Grindal's loss was proclaimed and she supped her fill of "Lack-a-days" and "Misery-mes," but none could or would help her further than by pity.

Jack had stolen into the kitchen and seeing a lay-brother whose home was in the Roothings, poured out his boy's tale of the business they came about. This lad went to tell the Novice-master, a man of a hard hand but a kind heart, so that there was much talk in the Refectory of the time-worn pilgrim and her sorrows.

"Dear Christ!" said the Novice-master, "an thou art the same that walked Jewry's roads of yore, Thou wilt give her an answer,

though she have never a grain of gold or silver to cast in Thy treasury!" "It is not likely," grunted the Sub-Prior ill at ease. "Our blessed Lord hath a regard for our House and hath kept strict account of our pilgrims' offerings!" "He hath shown no sign as yet for such as bring us vile brass," said the Prior, a weak man with watery blue eyes. "Such miracles as have been shown have tended little to edification!" quoth the Novice-master with a sigh. "Nay, there ye betray an unthankful spirit, brother," said the Prior. Our God hath mightily blessed the Sub-Prior's handiwork to this poor House's honour." The Novice-master said nought more till the bell rang for Compline. Then said he. "My Father, I crave your blessing for a night-vigil I would lief keep in the Church this night. I would fain scourge and pray for this poor widow. It may be that Our Lord will accept my tears in lieu of gold." The Prior assented readily. "Now," said the Novice-master with a look

at the Sub-Prior, "we shall see to-morrow whether the Christ rejecteth the clasped hands of a bedeswoman because they are empty." The Sub-Prior sniffed and shrugged his shoulders. The morrow was May-Day and many Masses were said in the dawn hours. To the High Mass two hours after sunrise, came certain of the May-revellers from the village in their cowslip coronals and daisy chains. These showed freshly amid the concourse of road-stained pilgrims.

The incense wreathed upwards, the Sanctus bell rang and rang again, the worshippers bent low before their new-born God in new-born awe and joy.

Afterwards came the time of pilgrimage to the Wonder-Rood that was sheltered in the Lady Chapel. The walls thereof were hung with arras of blue and white, and bedizened with green boughs, for had not her month begun whom Flora but foreshadowed? On the screen was the Rood, and the pilgrims marshalled by the Novice-master louted lowly

before it. Albeit she came with empty hands, Dame Grindal was chosen for the place in the forefront. Silence hung heavy as she knelt with those empty hands held up to our Saviour. Her old eyes overbrimmed, and the drops fell fast on the coarse grey of her kirtle. In the gloom within the screen the Prior was whispering. "It were well could some small sign be vouchsafed." The Sub-Prior huskily muttered somewhat about discipline as he turned away hastily and passed through the screen towards the pilgrims.

Beholding that pitiful figure full in his way at her prayers, he stopped conscience-stricken and aghast.

The business-like air of the fifteenth century failed him in that fine vision of faith, and he verily gasped for breath. Then aged and haggard and wan he shuffled back under the screen into the gloom.

As he went, a jolly-looking pardoner was elbowing his way through the press with a gold piece betwixt his finger and thumb.

"By God's body!" he grumbled, "I had not thought these monks of Tilty were such damned hard-hearted mummers! She shall have her miracle, and they shall have my gold, the swine!" But ere he had pressed his money into the Novice-master's hand, ere that clammy shaking hand of the Sub-Prior behind the screen had groped its way to the orifice it sought, a great hum of voices arose. The head of Christ was fallen forward upon His breast. One by one, those that had seen fell prostrate. From some came moans of deep contrition, from some cries of joy and wonder. When at last one after another gathered courage to look up again, the head still lay upon the breast. The blessed change was fixed; this was no fickle sign, no fleeting marvel. Meantime in the gloom beyond the screen the Sub-Prior with a face like ashes poured out his shrift in the ear of the Novice-master, whose face grew passing stern as he listened. A little while after, the Novice-master came forth among the pilgrims to bid

them sing *Te Deum* and thereafter *Nunc Dimittis.*

Never before was there such glorious tumult of voices in the Priory Church as broke forth at his bidding. That thanksgiving ended, alms were plentifully poured forth in the Prior's lap by those joyous pilgrims. Still (Benedictus Dominus!) the Changed Rood remained immutable.

Afterwards in the great church, the Novice-master spoke at the Prior's entreaty, alike to the pilgrims, and to the many folk that were flocking in from their May-games. He told them how the Sub-Prior desired to openly avow his guilt in that he had compassed wonders with nothing of a Christian's faith. A score of miracles, said he, have been reputed, yet were they procured not by God's will but by man's carnal knowledge of arts mechanical! Murmurs of wrath and sorrow and scorn ran through the church, and Sir Richard Maynard clapped hand on hilt. "But," said that good monk, kindling

from shame to triumph, "The crowning miracle that ye saw on this Feast-morning of the haut Saints Philip and James was of God's own provision! No offering brought this mother who came to enquire of her dead son's salvation. No sign, purposed that ill-doer to allow her. But our clement Lord stretched forth His stricken Hand. When our misled brother touched by pity sought to feign a miracle, ere he could handle his base wires, suddenly in an instant, by the act of God, a veritable miracle befell. Those strings of Satan were broken every one, snapped every one though newly-proven by the same Hand that snapped new ropes for Samson. The thorn-bound Head fell forward upon the broken Heart, signifying to the mother her son's acceptance. There shall that Head repose by grace of God this many a day—to reprove unfaithful magic, nay rather to approve the faith of this simple widow. "Ecce Miraculum! Ecce Verum Signum Domini!"

Thus it came to pass that Tilty's growth as a wonder-working shrine was stunted. She had her one surpassing miracle to point to, but could hold forth no future security as to the greeting of suitable gifts with a suitable response.

There remains the blessed record that many were moved to penitence, confession and satisfaction by the events of that holy May-Day.

Dame Grindal trudged home in very good heart quavering *Nunc Dimittis, Domine,* all along the road. She lived for two years afterwards and died on a Whitsun Day morning with very pious dispositions.

It is pleasant hearing that the bowyer brought back her gold piece, having gained no miracle for himself thereby, but only a passing heavy penance from the Novice-master.

It is reputed also that Jack never stole another egg, and repaid mine host of the Pilgrim's Bottle in silver money of his own

earning before Christmas came round. So potently may an honest miracle move to fruitful contrition even the hard earth of a boy's heart!

As for the Sub-Prior it is to be feared that the seed of his example bore an ill harvest elsewhere. For, long afterwards, that unfaithful device of his came into common use at a certain notorious shrine. But at Tilty Priory, the head of Our Redeemer drooped ever on His breast, and Prior and Sub-Prior alike died with every sign of penitence.

Unto that best of our frailty's virtues, may Jesu in His mercy move our own hearts!

A Lost Saint

WHEN Tom Alleyne came home to Kent from the wars around Northampton he came by way of Essex. He would see a cousin of his at Chapel and to that intent left his fellowship, and struck away down a by-road. After he had found his cousin's smithy, and waited three days in the pleasant woodland, he went the waggon-way towards Witham. That afternoon he was caught by a storm in open heath, and the sight of a small house in front of him was a joyous one. This house belonged to a priest and was rich within and fairly ordered. Alleyne had never seen so many rolls of parchment and such silver sheen of cups and platters.

The priest moreover, was a right courteous man and entertained him very graciously.

It appeared that he served Sir Richard Ives as Mass-priest and Man-of-law, him that lived but two miles away over the heath. He had letters that pressed to indite for his master even then, and he prayed Alleyne to forego his presence till supper-time. But when supper was served with steam of many good dishes, he came in fresh and alert and made his guest very welcome.

It was news to him that Alleyne's home was near Tenterden in Kent, news that set him pondering. Then he spoke frankly, revealing that he had a trust and a message for some village folk in that country-side. Was Alleyne fain to earn ten gold pieces as his messenger? Would he come back this way to join his lord's meinie, bringing tidings? Alleyne was minded to be distrustful. What errand should this be that was proffered to the veriest stranger, yet withal was paid so highly?

"Ye are bidden but to carry a picture," said the priest, then he spoke no more of his

behest that night. But in the grey light of the summer dawning, as he stood to say farewell in his garden, he brought forth picture and gold pieces. Alleyne looked at both in doubt and silence.

"An ye have the mind," said his host, "swear to me by St Thomas that ye will carry the picture, and be back before Christmas to bring me word how ye sped. An ye will not, it imports not."

The errand looked to be a light one, the wages a rich benefit, so Alleyne swore. The picture was tightly swathed, and he carried it all the way to the house his host had named, without ever a glance within. His home-going does not concern this tale. But early in the next month, that was July, he undertook the adventure of his errand. His road lay fifteen miles through the garden country of Kent in the heyday of a summer that many showers had sweetened. At the last, as he came to a bridge over the Medway, he saw an orchard before him that he judged

to be the place of his quest. He had indeed found the man he sought. He was mowing in between the apple trees, an old man with very bright eyes. Alleyne gave him the message even as he had been told it.

"A priest out of Essex sendeth greeting and delivereth up a picture that he had from one condemned in Witham of old."

The old man shook with joy at the telling. He asked many questions, but there was little more to disclose. Then he sent out his grandsons this way and that way. There was plainly something toward.

By the hearth that evening the two Kentishmen told one another stories. The old man's last tale had a strange sound.

"Ten years agone we looked for God, His Kingdom. But He came not. Christ He sent to our hundred a prophet, Saint Paul, was ever such a prophet! His eyes were coals of the smithy, his voice outrang the anvil. 'The Kingdom of the Lord,' saith he, 'nigheth fact. Behold and see the Plowman. Is not

this the Son of God? Now cometh breaking of bands and the year of release from ill masters.' Now cometh good cheer for simple folk and Christ His Kingdom!"

Alleyne hid away a smile in the half-light: the words sounded mad words, and he watched the grey man curiously.

"How sped ye?" he asked.

"We went up on London with the Captain of Kent. Well content were we with our errand. But there were greedy and evil-hearted men in our company, and we failed Christ in His need. Then God failed us."

"Did many win home again?"

"Some they were killed and some taken and some were let creep home. Two sons lost I, and another went wandering."

"What of this prophet of yours?"

"Our priest is dead assuredly. We heard how he was taken near to Copford. There were a many hanged that month. They saved none but traitors untrue."

"And how know ye he was true?"

"By Christ!" he flashed out, "John of Dymchurch is with the Saints now. He lived but for the commons of Kent, and to set them free."

Very soon he cooled down and was his weary self again.

"What matters it all now?" he said, "'tis ten years ago. Those were old sorrows and these be cold nights now. Eat a hunter's fill, and lie soft and warm. These be old sorrows and concern you not."

In the night Alleyne woke uneasily. Someone was going out of the door with hushed steps. He lay for a moment, staring with dazed eyes at the red logs, then he rose quietly and followed. The skies were crowded thick with stars, but the moon's course was all but finished, her crescent scarcely cleared the ridge now. It was for that ridge his guide was making. The track wound through field after field, and then up till their feet stood firm on the green hog's back above. Far along it within the screen

of half a score of oak trees they came to a ruined chapel. Then it was that one started out from behind an oak, and challenged Alleyne, grappling with him in the dark. But his host was ready to befriend him.

"I knew not that he followed," he said, "this is a true man, and shall hold his peace."

So he was suffered to slip within the walls and wait in the darkness. Soon came one with a torch, then another. After that they lighted four candles on a shrine in the southern recess. A woman was strewing it with lilies, new come out of the night dews, and heavy of perfume. In the end the gathering grew to ten men with three or four women. These were not long in getting to prayers. There was no priest among them, but one that seemed a scholar led the devotions. The Litany of All Saints was the beginning, then the prayers of Our Lady of Poverty, last the prayers of the shrine—"Sancte Johanne, Flos Martyrum, ora pro nobis"—and more to the same intent. The

picture that was new come out of Essex hung on the east wall under the window. It was rubbed and dull. Therein stood Christ the Craftsman setting down His tools to defy Satan, that came like a lawyer in a furred gown. But close above the shrine there was fixed another picture freshly painted, with the candle-glare full upon it. He that was rudely limned there, was a priest in his black frock with a face of ardour and joy. In his hand he held a halter. His face was dark and spare and there was little shown to tell him by in a crowd of priests, save that whether by chance or design his left cheek carried a red rood-stain, a birth-mark in seeming. Soon, their prayers finished, the pilgrims were taking counsel of many matters. The home-coming of their old treasure had gladdened them, but there was question held as to the how and why of its return. Alleyne stood forth and repeated the few words of his story. Men murmured and women sighed.

"He will come again and shortly." "He shall come with Christ and His Saints." "Sent he no word of counsel?" "Nay he cometh himself even now." "Peace, he is dead and at rest!"

Next a grey beard forester spoke fiercely.

"By this token, be ready to strike! Cade is gone and our true priest! Doubtless he will come again, though whether in the body, God He wotteth. Ten years have gone and yet we tarry. Now at last the wind blows fair. Some have fled their homes for the Calais coast; some are gone to the forest, many are dead, or nigh to death, the old master is dead, the new steward grinds small, we be broken men, all that be left. Yet times go by turns and this turn is with us. There is talk of a new Captain of Kent. Piers Plowman's word runs as fire through the villages. Bills and bows! This new Edward hath need of us. We will serve him that we may win the Fellowship its own." He spoke with faith, and that starveling

remnant of Cade's following, looked up and were heartened. Many were the stout oaths and promises in the air. The lean scholar was ready with his word—

"What said our martyr that was gallows-murdered in Witham town? 'In one, in five, in half a score of years, 'twill come, my masters!' We be gone grey and weak in the waiting, but doubt not that he spoke sooth? It cometh, ay, and he will come to bring it, he that kindled our crowd like a fagot on Horsett Heath. O blessed martyr of Kent, be with us as we go!"

Very soon after, a fire was lighted. In the darkness of the copse below, they would break bread and sup off deer's meat together. Strong patient men they were, but fast ageing: women of grace too, but with faces harshened by the east wind of poverty. The half of them outlaws, many excommunicate, yet none hopeless, they said valorous words to one another before they bade farewell. Alleyne sat, delighting in those eager faces,

as he watched them by the yellow sparkle of the flames. It was a mystery to him, this instant expectation of theirs, this rude Plowman's Gospel, but it did not leave him altogether cold.

"Ah Christ! for a Mass!" said a woman before they parted, "God send us a hedge-priest this Lammas-tide! Christ be with the dying! There be many that will die. It did not hail red for nought this Mid-summer."

Once more they prayed to Saint Mary the Poor and Saint John of Dymchurch, then they went their ways. Ere the orient sky grew feverish, the wood was quiet again.

It was more than three months after, that Alleyne came to the rich priest's house when the day was far spent. He was riding to the north and the wars. This was no time for young blood at home now, when all Kent was rousing to wear the white rose. The priest looked very frail and sick as he sat by his fire and heard Alleyne's tidings.

"Who is this Kentish saint?" he asked.

"None other but the priest that led them afield ten years ago?"

"How should he be so dear and hallowed?"

"Because he taught them of Christ, His Kingdom, and fell gallows-sick in the teaching." Just then the long evening beam that came through the window caught the priest's left cheek. 'Twas a strange red-staring mark: it showed close under the dark fringe.

"They wait for his coming again," went on Alleyne with somewhat of a sneer.

"Ah," said the priest, "but he sleeps. He taketh rest in death."

"Shall not the dead rise, and it be only for judgment?" Alleyne answered.

The priest muttered something into his beard, then he hasted to press meat and drink upon his guest. But Alleyne would none of it.

"Haply those unshepherded sheep know

best," he said. "A free slice in the forest is worth ten rich men's dinners."

He would not be denied, but rode away in the bright twilight, the way through the yellow woods. The priest stood looking after him, ever and anon the fire burnt up in his eyes, then died and left them lustreless. At the last he turned back through his garden. The night had fallen.

The Orb of Terror

THIS is a brief tale that will no more content you than a winter's day. In winter it begins, in winter ends, and its purport is winter.

The Gospel for Twelfth Mass as you must know has such mention of gold as gladdens the heart of children and simple people. Now in the year 1461, Sir Peter the priest that chanted it in Saxton Church near to Tadcaster was made glad thereby with a sinister gladness. He was a man dull, uncomely, and past youth, reputed of clean life and lips, but his was an untoward fame for itching fingers. On this feast-day it appears that he gave rein to his covetous ponderings once too often. When it came to the Elevation he shrieked and fell forward on his face.

Two men and a woman ran to him to care for his sickness, while his acolyth rushed to the altar, if haply he might shield the Corpus Domini from profanation. His eyes stared horridly, but after a drench of water and deft chafing of his wrists and ankles he was able to bring his Mass to a good end. That which he had seen he told no one save the acolyth; and no one guessed that the boy knew the half of what he did, until more than two months had gone by.

It seems that Sir Peter's fingers slipped and fumbled at metal suddenly as he lifted the Host, and that as he looked up in terror, a great chipped gold piece glared at him full in the face. That was too much, and all came dark before him. Afterwards when he was recovered of his faintness, all things seemed once more to be transacted as they should be in honest religion. Thereafter he was a changed man, albeit only two or three in his parish had the grace to remark it. To the rest he seemed but the same gentle

trickster, for folk grow in time to take a neighbour's vices for granted.

Not long afterwards Sir Peter made pilgrimage to Our Lady's Altar at Holy Cross and there vowed himself, to his own manifold advantage. As a winter day drew towards evening, he vowed himself in all simplicity. Our Lady's face that had looked so fresh an hour before, that would look so joyful one half hour thence, when they lit candles for vespers, now showed wan and withered. What was there of good in this vowing of his? All of his cares were so small and base, all of his faults had been so churlish and unchivalric. He was come out of a narrow lane of petty dishonour, and to-morrow and all the morrows he must walk the same way again. Whether he were saved from twenty or thirty peculations, what imported it? Vows of his sort are apt to be rather piteous gear if one considers them, more piteous than those of comelier and fuller-blooded penitents. But be that as it may, he vowed

again and yet again, and tottered out into the winter afternoon a jubilant, dwarfish figure, quavering:

"Of one that is so fair and bright,
Velut maris stella,
Brighter than the day is light,
Parens et puella,
I cry to thee, thou see to me,
Lady pray thy Son for me,
Tam pia!
That I might come to thee,
Maria."

The choir children mocked him with a scatter of snowballs as he went away at speed, for his foot slipped on a slide, and he went down and was silverly berimed. But he sprang up very merrily and went away singing, with a generous scatter of bright medals behind him. He took the way over the moors, the way of the red sunset. Afterwards when the stream wreaths rose around him as he forded the Raven beck, he was still singing. By then the skies were wrinkled with scarlet and purple, such colours as men

marked often in that winter, marvelling whether they forecasted wars and cruelty. Long afterwards in the dead of night he came into the wood among the wolds only three miles from his home. As he rustled along the path between the fir-trees his lantern threw jets of glory in the frost-fog. You should have heard him singing in great gasps all the width of that wood :

"Was ever such felicitye?
To wear the blue of that Ladye
Upon her quest of Charitye?
Tam pia!
She gave her silken veil stainless
In swathing white my sins to dress,
Unveiling so her loveliness,
Maria!"

Strange to tell, his fervour burnt on at summer heat all those grey winter's days that followed. He showed no zest for dues and offerings, he set aside fat portions for the poor from the few gifts that the rich gave him. How he pinched as Lent came into her own again with her endless requisitions on Chris-

tians—wide as Christ's Cross and deep as His grave !

What warfare the coming Palm-Sunday brought to that country-side I scarce need tell you, since the record is shared by many chroniclers. Suffice it that Sir Peter went through with it to the best of his courage and good intent for many dreadful hours. He was out on Towton height at his priest's work with his own Yorkshiremen who fought in the levies of Middleham. Some had cursed him for a pedlar of Masses over the camp fires at night, remembering certain tales in his disfavour. Yet before that scarlet-and-white Sunday was over he had won as good a name as any priest in either army. Of his baptism in blood and snow you can read with certitude in the story of the Yorkish archers—a coarse and cruel tale in the telling, and also a long one, so I have neither the time nor the mind to rehearse it fully. Be it noted that in that first stinging snow-blast at day-dawn he was ministering

to fallen men. There were many of these, as all the work of his friends was then up hill and against wind. Afterwards as you will have heard, the wind changed: the priest of the hasty feet and patient ears changed not at all. How many he confessed and fed in that push-and-jostle for hours together up the hillside under the snow, I dare not begin to compute.

Afterwards when the hill was won and his heroes became butchers, he was still busy. Down on the bank of the Cock beck in the snow that was trampled and stained brown and purple, he found his work that afternoon. There the water thundered by with ever a redder scurf for crest, there the deepest drifts were ever and again heaped virgin-white for men to defile anew. The day that had been no day wore on towards darkness. At last at evening came one stream of dayshine. It was then while the sunset showed wild mourning through the boughs of a thorn tree, in a snow-choked

copse by the beckside, that Sir Peter came to woe. All in a flash it was that his evil doom lightened upon him, all in a flash it was gone, leaving long night behind it.

His dull grey head was bent over one who lay crushed beside a dead horse, he listened as he had listened time and time again that day. The listening was over: his hands rested lightly on the gashed head in absolution. Then it was that he caught the gleam of silver. Such a dwarf image of Our Lady as he had never dreamed to see, hung in the man's bosom. The dainty face was in coloured ivory, the cloak was all gold and rubies, the kirtle all silver and sapphires. As that thankful penitent thrust it into his hand, his fingers tightened on it. He rushed out of the shadow into the full splendour of the winter sundown. Mother of God! Was ever such a treasure? Faintly the voice came to him.

"Mercy! Pity! Housel me for Jesu's

Love!" Not alone came his cry, who had given that enchanting image. Dying man after dying man, but just now shriven, was crying to the same purport. He did not hearken. Habit had frozen him stark where he stood: his old passion had buried him deep as in a snow-drift. The glorious metals and stones had him fast by eyes and heart. The red and orange fires to west had smouldered out, and many of those beseeching lips were dumb a long while, when he came unto himself again. Then he set about his old work resolutely. Along the dark-splash'd tracks of the pursuit he followed: his heart had as it were a knife pricking and hacking at it all the way. The gash a plunderer gave him in the navel was nothing to heed now. Just Saint Michael! Surely you set that remorse of his in the scale over against his sin long ago, and you wondered at the weight thereof!

They found him in Saxton churchyard that same midnight, glowering at the moon

but two nights now from her Paschal fulness. Like a broken Host she hung white and august in a Pyx of snow-cloud.

"The Host!" he gibbered in terror, "'twill hunt me down soon or late for sure. Must never out of nights now!"

The next morn at sunrise he was dying in a great anguish. He kept his face at his broken casement all the while, looking out towards the snow-covered wolds and the scarlet ball of the sun.

"He that denieth the Host to men dying, behold he dieth. The Host is hard behind him. The Host stoppeth the way before him. God's wounds! 'Tis a bleeding Host this day!"

Even as he moaned and choked in death, they brought a wandering monk to shrive him; and it seemed that he got his reason again, for he whispered and stammered in his ear. But when the stranger would have put the Host upon his tongue, he was convulsed with a new agony.

"A silver piece!" he cried with mirthless chuckling. "Not so! Retro me!" They say he even spat at the hand that proferred him God's Body, and in that act he died.

In Blue and White

Sir William Horne was an Englishman of his own time if ever there was one, and that time was the evil afternoon of the fifteenth century. The fierce war that stained those days so uncleanly with fratricide was, if I mistake not, but a delirious symptom of the prevailing pestilence. Black Death had but made way for Golden Death, and the latter brooded in grievous visitation over the land. New sense of the joy of this world's goods fed it, new blowing of the southern breezes of comfort ministered to it, a lulling of the old east wind of faith in scourge and nails and Cross gave it a fair vantage.

Little wonder then that the eminent in every shire were prone to fall ill of it—this fever for property real and personal, that

entailed endless litigation, and bribery and violent overawing of justice. Little wonder either that what with purchase of wardships, purchase of marriages, and continual playing with lusty lives as cold pawns—all of them demanded by the business habits of this pock-pitted day—innocent lives went often the way of martyrdom, and few were heard to cry shame.

I have said all this by way of prelude out of justice to Sir William who plays but a scurvy part in this story, lest you should think him all too unnatural. I would have you to know that he certainly did not lack the ill-nature that poisoned the air of his time. What he lacked was grace. If you had seen him twice on the Eve of Ladyday 1461, seen his riding forth at morning and his return at evening, this question had perplexed you—Which face showed glummer, that seen in the windy daffodil morning, or that observed under faded crimson two minutes after sunset?

When my lady who lacked not in grace, but lacked sadly in the business nature of her kindred, saw his morning face go by her window, she did not stop to think. She cried her fresh March-violet eyes into formal cirques of red before doing aught so reasonable. That finished, she thought a little and spoke much to her Will. He was come to the age of a good listener, some six or seven years, and with such at hand, one may flatter oneself in the saying that all confided secrets are heard, and console oneself in the afterthought that nought of moment has been comprehended. He was a quaint child with little borrowed from the work-a-day face of his father save the hawk nose, and all the charm of his mother's eyes but their heavenly colour.

Light grey eyes that he got from his mother's mother, and black hair that he had from his father and ten knights of the blood line before him, made his witchery together. This morning he had to hear much woeful

surmise which in nowise disturbed him as he played between the fire and the beads of his mother's rosary. Now that, and now those, had his mind, while she went on with her telling. Lord Michael and the Lancaster lords were the burthen of her discontent as she sat there, a chestnut-haired Margaret of Antioch by a rosy William of Norwich, the blue smoke haloes of the wood-fire about their brows. The sun was indeed high in the sky when up started my lady Saint Margaret and sped my lord Saint William off to his tutor. Was not her Terce of the Hours of Blessed Mary unsaid, and the time for saying past? Never such an oversight had befallen her since last All Hallows' week when my lord would have her entertain my lord Ancaster, Sir Michael he was then, his flood-tide of Christmas fortune being yet on its way. O how penitently she came to this belated office! But her act of contrition over, she seemed to preen and coo like a pigeon in the wood outside for sheer joy of

Spring sunshine. Was not this the Eve of the very heyday of the Spring of her adoration? Hers was never equable blood, but prone to heat to greenwood joys and freeze in leafless dolours. With full heart and bright face she came to that apostrophe "In thy grace and in thy beauty, go forth, ride prosperously and reign." She was one that kept all the counsel of Saint Francis in the saying of her Hours. To lean against a wall or a jamb of a door were to her profanation, but she must always stand upright or kneel at times upon her knees. She dropped on those, her office ended, and prayed her Mother to succour that husband of hers who was indeed in evil case. "Behold, dear Mistress and Mother," saith she, "he is beaten back to the wall. He would not change with the times last Christmas when my lord Ancaster his oppressor changed, through his too simple faithfulness!" (Behold how false was her plea, yet methinks Our Lady smiled seeing that same quality her

lips lied to claim for another, so manifest in her own stricken heart!) Next she went gaily about her household works through that stately but somewhat threadbare and starved manor house that King John gave to the third Sir William as the price of an evil day's work. I doubt if even the present tenant was planning a worse one.

Sundown came and with it Sir William's gloomy face that we noted before. My lady was at Vespers in the Chapel so could not come out to meet him, a happening that on other days might have moved him to curse her Chaplain. But this night he said nought, and seemed to heed nought in the world, going right on into the hall where two atomies of wax candles burnt like forlorn stars in a vault of inky panelling. Down he sat and buried face in hands awhile, till his steward came in with a lamp and started to see him. This was an old man with a hard face and weasel's eyes, who looked ill at

ease off his horse and out of his fighting or hunting gear. Sir William bestirred himself and looked up at his coming-in. The lamp's light fell full on his face, but could make no better cheer of it than the sun could. "'Tis done!" said the master. "Ay!" the man answered. "But the Bond?"

"Good for us. The home manor is spared us through my lord Ancaster's intercession, and we are assured of the Queen's pardon who has but now come into Yorkshire victorious." "And the price?" There were steps to be heard outside even as Sir William fumbled for his answer. He turned very white and laid his finger on his lips. The hard parchment face opposite him did what you had never deemed it could do, fell all a-quiver with twitching misery. Nought was said, and my lord rose to meet his lady with a fixt face, while that other went about his business at the further table.

By cock-crow next morning there were lights in the house and a clatter in the stable.

It was known that master and mistress must ride within the hour for Craven. At Craven lived Lord Michael Ancaster, and my lady had shown but little joy at the tidings of this sudden visit. "Yet," said her lord, "the matter presses and we must be at his house by daybreak. He hath but a day or two or three before he rides to join the Queen's levies at Tadcaster, and he demands our presence." "Wherefore mine?" asked the lady Margaret. She was like that other "meek Margaret that was God's maid" in this, that she showed a battle front when there was aught of the serpent or his works in question. "He is our benefactor," said her husband. "Our house is beggared, our men slain, we are broken folk indeed. But this man hath sworn to befriend us. He hath a favour for your acceptance even y'r husband's reprieve of life and liberty, he would bestow it into your own hands." "Then must I let myself be ogled by him as last All-Hallowsmas ere Wakefield fight?"

"Would God I had heard his counsel then!" said my lord.

"Thank the Mass ye were true then! I would that——" So far my lady fiercely, the rest was penitence and tears. Perchance she was too apt at these sharp alternations, and might have ruled her lord better with less use of them; she had her faults doubtless, and he his provocations. In the east wind of that Wednesday morning they started away. The snow clouds hung heavy and the young pasch moon had already set. So there was but little light as they rode down the hill to the bridge over the beck, then on through the woodlands to the east with the wind in their teeth. My lady Margaret wore a hood of Our Lady's blue and a great white cloak of lamb's-wool. But even for one thus warmly wrapped, it was ill facing that cruel blast, down which the scattered flakes came ever and anon. Fortunately this ride with my lord did not exact many unsealings of her lips. Nought indeed was said till in the

growing light they came up the long hill past Trentby Green, where was the great yew tree whereunder men say King Oswald preached. As they drew nigh to it the horses snuffed uneasily, and my lady presently gave a little cry and half-sobbed three words of horror. There in the half-light hung two that had been gallant archers three weeks agone: there was an ominous scuffling and flapping of roosting birds in the swart branches as the hoofs rung sharply by. My lord shrugged his shoulders and said nought at all.

A mile further on was the shrine of Our Lady of the Forest, a mere screen of fern and branches over and about an altar and a dainty image and picture. Here my lord would have gone by, but his lady was as firm as before, when the question of hearing Mass ere starting divided them. She must in and pray to her patroness on this day of all days. Sir William looked away to the wan east and noted how there was yet more than half-hour to wait for the sun. Then he muttered,

helped her to dismount, and walked his horse up and down the road, leading hers by the bridle. Dame Margaret hotly flushed, part with the wind and part with greeting joy, sped under that humble roof to play the Gabriel to her dear Mistress. "Ave Maria, Gratia plena!" She began exultant, but O her voice shook with pity, and as she came to the "Ora pro nobis," she liked not the errand she was bound on, though she little knew its purport. All she knew, she must tell Our Lady, not without tears. And Our Lady stood there lily-wanded and debonnair as ever, with her ears borrowed by million on million of her children's prayers, but a whole heart still to give to every one.

Some minutes passed, and Sir William was fain to fume a little as he drew up in front of that rustic chapel, the reins gathered in his hand. Very sour and formal he looked this morning in his steel-plated leather cap and jacket. All was in business order about him save his eyes which shifted endlessly and his

lips that trembled at whiles. Even as he growled impatient, a figure came forth from the bough-screen, blue-hooded in white lamb's-wool cloak as soft and fine and unsullied as any spun from Saint Agnes' flock. Without a word between them the lady mounted and rode on beside him. They were but five miles from Craven now, and Lord Michael would meet them a mile this side on the skirts of the forest. The east was already garnished with the warm colour and cloud-dishevelling that the cold and wind had plotted for her. The black, leafless woods that had hitherto gloomily echoed fox's bark or night-bird's cry, now grew stirring with pheasants' calls, pensive with the droning of doves, choral with singing thrushes. All of a sudden, the sun proud and merry at his new entry of Aries, and the proclamation of Spring, held up a laughing face to kiss the world. The voices of the forest grew boisterous ere they won to its end. At last Sir William who was going purple and white

by turns and breathing hard, spoke. "By Christ!" he swore, "'Tis a black bargain we go to drive at Craven." She who rode beside him bowed her head gravely. He had nigh bitten his under lip through in sheer hatred of that which he had to tell her next. He had expected some furious question, and then fire and tears and resistance in this last furlong of that shameful journey. But she asked nothing of him, there was only that grave inclination of the head and a boding silence, when as it happened no bird sang. Man of steel as he had deemed himself not unjustly, shame and misery burnt in him as though they would burn his harsh heart to cinders while they rode on. He stole a glance at her but could not see her face for the hood. Thus with ringing hoofs they came into the wide road that opens up the hill out of the forest. The frosty wind that had parched that road so sharply, brought now and again a flake of snow. But the sun brimmed over with good humour through

the silver and gold velvet of a flowering willow. The world seemed ever a little warmer, and the lease of Spring in verity begun. There in front of them, under a great oak was Lord Michael waiting. Rosy and becurled and girlishly beautiful he looked in his crimson cloak edged with martens' furs. True he showed one small blemish, a nose purpled by that cold wherewith his teeth chattered. Otherwise he looked well the part he had in hand to play—that part of Paris with a difference. Behold in this business-like fifteenth century a complaisant Menelaus bringing his Helen as *quid pro quo*, the purchase of a manor and a pardon! Alack for a pure Helen to be trafficked away shamefully by her own Menelaus, and she so fair and true! Troy's tragedy held nothing so tragical as this her case, that was contrived all in the cool of prudent business—the makeshift of a desperate man. Her husband must pay to save his manor and haply his head as well: what had he the poor man to

pay the rich man that the rich man lacked, save the same coin wherewith King David would be paid in ancient Jewry?

All had so far gone glibly in the matter, but now befell a marvel that gave the strangest turn to the fortunes of those three concerned. For that lady drew back her hood and looked upon my Lord of the Red Rose so smoothly smiling at her. And that long stedfast look of hers withered the smile in his eyes, and kindled in them smouldering shame and fear. He muttered as in a trance. "Traitor, wherefore have ye deceived me and rendered to me harm for such great good as I have done you? I bargained that ye should bring your wife to me for a day's grace, or haply a sennight's and ye have brought to me——!" Then that Dame in the blue and white rode forward into the midst between them, and said "Ay, who is it that he hath brought thee?" It seemed the sun leaped down to cloak her as she spoke, so bright she was, while her voice rang as silver lance

might ring on a silver shield. "The Mother of God!" that pretty boy paramour cried, and louted low, covering his face in his hands. The worse felon, the husband, sprang down from his horse and fell all along the ground. But the poor dumb beast he rode which had done no sin, came to her and put his nose into her fondling hands. Then she said to the boy, "Boy, get home and shrive thee clean and live chastely, for know that on the fourth day from hence thou shalt need mercy as thou never yet hast needed it!" And he kneeled and adored her, then turned home up the hill awed, ashamed, and humbled, with never a word. Next she turned to that knight, and her words were as scarring leaven, though what she said I cannot tell you, nor could ever hear that there was any record thereof. Soon he whimpered like a child, confessed himself criminous; and he that had played Pandarus to his own wife asked mercy of her who prayed for Judas. Her voice grew gentle with fourteen hundred

years of yearning for souls as dead to honour as his own, and she bade him ride back to his wife in her forest chapel who had slept for nigh an hour past, ride back and unbosom to her all his base intent, if he set indeed any store by Heaven's forgiveness; the last words she said to him were these or of like purport (for the chronicler took note of them when this tale came to be written).

"Be honourably true to thy pact and promise pledged of old unto thy liege-lord. Forty miles hence is prepared such a battle as England never saw yet Be shriven ere thy setting-forth, then haste thee for thy *miserere* thither into the shadow of assoiling death. Thus may all yet be well!" And with that she was gone.

It is certain that he rode back to seek his wife leading the mare now riderless. He woke his Margaret and told her all. She, after grievous conflict with herself, found Jesu's grace to forgive him. It was through her procuring that this tale came to be

written down ere her death, unto Our Lady of the Forest's praise, in Craven Abbey's Chronicle.

But it is not written therein whether Sir William, who went honourably to fight for the cause of York on Palm-Sunday only four days after, came back safe to his wife. Anyhow, he fought in the battle for the King that was to be, and thereafter his wife and boy were assuredly left secure in their manor. Likely enough their marches were pushed far on into Lord Ancaster's estate. It is certain that Lord Michael fell on that drifted field of Towton fighting for the Red Rose. But as I have said, there is no saying whether on that sad Palm-Sunday when the Cock beck ran blood, Sir William died, or kept his life to prove his penitence. Perchance it seems to us that the former event was the more to be desired, but doubtless she, whom he had wronged in intent so heinously, prayed her tenderest for his safe home-coming. I will end this tale of that dear Mother's mercy with

the words of one of old who wrote down to her praise many like tales with a deep devotion. He says, "Let us pray then humbly to the glorious Virgin Mary which is comfort to them that forsake their sins, that she will make our peace to the blessed Son and impetre and get of him remission of all our sins, and after this life to come to the glory and joy of heaven, to the which bring us the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Death in April

MARGARET ALLEN was a serving-girl at her grandmother's farm-house in Nettlebed when she first caught Jack Argent's eye. She came from Essex where her mother was dead this long while: her father had never come back from Burgundy whither he went as a soldier of fortune. She was brown and merry alike of face and hair and eyes. She had her word for every man, but not one word nor two alone for Jack, when he came up the hill twice a year from Oxford. In high summer and at Christmas he came to greet his grandmother, and to drink her home-brewed with unfailing esteem. The end of these greetings was that Jack and Margaret grew too free together. She had always served his poor old grand-dame but indiffer-

ently well, for her fever blood left her heart but a cold one. Now she stole off suddenly by night some whither. Jack who had travelled back to Oxford a month before was well content to meet her at the cross-roads. Thence they went by easy stages to Oxford, idling by the way in the pleasant harvest weather.

Afterwards Margaret came into Oxford and lived in Saint Clement's Quarter, while Jack went back to his books at his Hall. Jack was a vain, selfish boy, yet not untouched by that honour whereof he would be always reading in the black letter: he made Margaret an honest woman in so far as his name could help her even before April was out, on the morrow of Easter Day.

Their boy only lived till the Saint Giles' Fair following. Jack took his passing very ill. She had cared for him nowise at all for a week, he said, she had been all for her fairings and ribbons, and glances of admiration. Thenceforward they lived as cat and dog,

but happily those days together were numbered. By All-Hallowsmas Jack was on his way to the north and the war. They had not kissed at parting; they were both little less light of fancy than of old, truth to tell; they were hard and vain and selfish, but she was ever so much the harder of the twain. He had found her a home with a baker and his wife, under the shadow of Saint Mildred's in Oxford city. These were harsh people of strait means, and they made her work hard for her meat and drink, and saw to it that she kept early hours of nights. When the evenings began to draw out again, and the pleasant weather to stir the sap and the blood, she began to chafe. How she had never fallen on some grim mischance by her follies all that long winter seems to be a secret of God's and Satan's. Let it suffice that she was for playing with fire as often as she spied her vantage all that time. But it was not till a pleasant night in April that she came at last to rue her daring.

It was a wild time in the city just then when many of the students came back from Towton fight in triumph. The red rose party had been beaten to its knees, and all its power was forfeit, but where had York and the South been without Oxford blades and arrows?

Margaret slipped out of the house by Saint Mildred's before sunset. She ran down to Port Meadow with a light heart. About an hour after, the fun grew furious. At last, like a wise woman she would tempt fate no more, but made straight away. Just then there was shouting and confusion as a new party came brawling down into the meadow. She slipped straight through them, and went like a three-year doe over the soft grass and up the great waggon-way that goes down to the river. At last the noise came dull in the distance, and she threw herself on the grass, her breath coming quick and sharp. The moon was moving : it was past the full some two or three nights : it

hung for the nonce like a chipped gold piece in the boughs of a big oak tree. Away to the right was a little patch of lowly houses and a wan sheet of water. Margaret knew where she was now. This was one of the Hinksey villages. She would shelter there this night in some barn or under the screen of a corn-rick. Then before the full light came she would make her way back into the city. She found the hamlet quiet enough, there was only one light in all the dwarfish street. When she came to the lych-gate she turned in under the yew trees. The porch would serve her turn well enough. She was tired and had been frightened. She soon fell asleep in a broken, feverish rest, but whether what she saw was in sleep or not, I know not. A girl in her own clothes, grey frock and hood and crimson girdle, came and touched her. She looked up with a start to see her own face staring down at her from the grey folds. It was none other face indeed than that she was wont to see look up from her tiring

mirror of bright steel. She cried out as the girl went on into the church without a greeting. Up she sat and peered out at the world. The moon was high now, for midnight was near, the spring dark was soft and green rather than black, and you might smell the spring flowers on the graves hard by.

She sat wondering awhile and waiting for that maid with the still brown face to come out. Yet she did not come. Then a great shivering took Margaret suddenly. She must away from this place. She crept round to the priest's house and laid her down under the hay-stack in the glebe. Hours afterwards the yellow light came full and strong upon her eyelids yet found them still sealed fast. The priest going out to his Mass found her and called a woman to look to her. The woman took her down to her husband's cottage in the bottom, and gave her bread and milk. An hour after the priest came to see her. He found her up by the hearthside, very pale and frightened.

"Y' have sung Saint Mark's Mass, Father," she said.

"Yea," he answered.

"And yesternight was Saint Mark's Eve?" she panted.

"Even so," he made reply.

She was near fainting, but she told out her story in his ear. He was much moved.

"Ye know what the sight ye saw spelleth?" he said soberly. "Ye know what betideth them that are seen in a church porch on the night before blessed Mark's Passion according to the observation of ancient and honest men?"

She hid her face in her lap. He knelt down beside her and said the *De Profundis*, but she heard it not out to the end. He looked down on her pityingly, this comfortable old man with the red cheeks and the white hair, as she lay in her swoon.

"And who should this be?" he asked the cottage wife.

"A light woman," he was answered.

"By what token?"

The farm woman shrugged her shoulders. In the end she promised to feed and lodge her what time she herded the priest's geese for him. Thus Margaret's *Praeparatio Mortis* began. Daily Mass and Saturday Shrift became her rule. She accepted it in bare submission; no shred of joy or rag of fervour cloaked its bareness. Her fires seemed burnt out for a month at least. She passed sadly under the lych-gate every morning, knelt with an awed face afar from the Altar, fell fear-stricken at the Elevation. Afterwards she would go dejectedly about her goose-herding. If you had come on her at noon-tide you would have haply found her sitting by the stream on a stone, or in the great water-meadow under a hawthorn bush. She would ever be looking down on the grass or dust or water at her feet. The monstrous vault of the Heavens it would seem made her dizzy, she would ofttimes walk as if crouching away from their overshadowing height.

She went but seldom to the Common above the village. When she went she would now and again shade her eyes from the great stretch of the river valley that was spread out below, wherein lay Oxford city with its spires, its towers and belts of trees.

But on Saint John's Day, that time of mid-summer mirth and passion, of a sudden there befell a change. About the time of Saint John's bonfires there sprang up a flame once more in those grey embers of hers. This came about as she went to Mass in the dawn-hour, and saw the long train of carts and horsemen and foot-travellers making its noisy way to Eynsham horse fair. She was in the thick of the country people ere she knew her own intent. Then away and away through the cool of the morning and the after dust and glare. On Eynsham Green she saw all the sights and danced nigh all the dances. At night when the joy-fires were ruddy and merry, she saw one sight too many, and danced one dance that she had not counted on dancing.

Death in April

It was a grim pageant that came on the Green an hour after sunset, no other than that of the Dance of Death. Just at that time the theme was in fashion throughout English shires both northern and southern. It fell in with the mood of those years of a many wars, what time solemn yew tree shadows seemed to carpet all men's paths. Here in Eynsham the pageant was but rustical and ragged: it moved even the village folk to mirth, despite its sonorous drone of grief and would-be pomp of terror.

Wherefore did Sir Death exhort with ridiculous burr of Yorkshire dales? Wherefore did the knight's breeches of faded crimson burst their seams or ever he had danced his round through? Others might laugh, but for Margaret, the pageant was fierce earnest enough, in its jingle she heard the scurry of chasing Fate. This one day she had sought to cover her eyes from Doom. But lo! though she went away up the road hot-foot, Doom met her face to face at her

road's end. As the black-attired skeleton danced with knight and cook and pardoner in turn, Margaret was all eyes and tears and pallor. When he had tired of his fellow-mummers, his gristly hand clutched at the first bystander to claim him or her for a round. Fate guided that hand her way first of all. She was whirled round shrieking, and knew no more till the morrow morning. Of her awaking in a fair-booth, of the pity and the questions, and the manifold play of fear and shame in her own breast, there is no time to tell.

Before the week's end she was back tending her geese and working with a will at three new penances. A strange change overtook her at last. Her regard grew to be all for her Primer wherein she was but a slow reader, her lips were now for her crucifix. Out of her eyes began to peep that which would never come to the window to look before—a soul wistful to be at its devoirs to God and its fellows. Verily, our Lord God in the morning Mass, and her geese in lieu

of Christians, throughout the day must have benefited accordingly. When the sweating sickness wandered down into the village to sojourn all the late summer and far into the autumn, the priest set her to tend sick women rather than his geese, most of whom made a ripe end at Michaelmas. She was apt at any work she was set to and being past fearing would go and stay where others would not.

On Christmas Day she lay herself a-dying as it was supposed. She was not used to say more words than the day's work wanted but she spoke the night before that Child Mass morn when she was annealed.

"Eight months," said she, "and I thought I had a year, 'Mater Salvatoris, ora,'" and with that she turned on her side. Wondrously she struggled back the way of this earth and was on her feet again by Twelfth Mass. Very busy were the next months with nursing and spinning and farm-house cares. As Saint Mark's Day came near once more she grew restive and questioning.

"Will it come by a cold or a flux or a fever?" she would ask the priest. "Will it come full-speed in a night or after a week a-bed? Have the saints no word of it as yet?"

He smiled and shook his head.

"Labora per diem! Nox instat ubi nulli laborent," he said.

Ten days before Saint Mark's Feast, true heat of Spring heartened the green land. With the sun shining and the birds singing all day, she set herself to prepare for the black verity that the pageant of the dance had prefigured. Monday came but with it no sign of sickness. Tuesday! She grew uneasy as she watched her new brood of geese on the common. Would it come to-night? Nay, it came not, but a passionate remembrance of Jack came. She must off to his grand-dame on the morrow, to ask mercy for old deeds and words amiss. She must leave a message for Jack to the like purport. When she came through the great beech-

wood after the long climb up on to the chalk downs, the sun shone out time and time again in his mimic fight with the shower-clouds. It was now gold over silver and again silver over gold. The birds on the right side of the road seemed to answer those on the road's left in most joyous antiphons.

At last with the fall of night she was there at the long, low, thatched house. She was tired enough, but midnight found her still up and doing her best for the old woman that had lain these three days in a brain sickness. The days of her own life could be but two now. How the hours came galloping! But she had little time to think of them. She was fighting Death hard for another now. She was here, there and everywhere with scarce a hand to help her.

Jack, it seemed, was newly come back to Oxford. A message had been sent. Would he come to-morrow at even? If so, he would be in time for her own last night. She had time for a little shiver of fear as she watched

another sun up after another long night without sleep. This was the last, the very last sunrise this side of Purgatory! This was Saint Mark's Eve and the fate could not but fall. The day was a day of joy, for about noon the dame rallied. She, Margaret, was triumphant when Jack hurried in, an hour before sunset. They left the sick woman sleeping and sat by the hearth in the kitchen. Margaret told him she had but an hour to give him. He heard her out to the end, awe-stricken. He was very white and frail looking now and seemed five years older than when he went away.

That running wound in his thigh that he got in the Shrovetide fight needed skilful hands daily. Soon she was dressing it for him with every art of tenderness. Afterwards they sat awkwardly by the wood fire, not knowing what to speak of, wasting the time, just because they feared it was all too short for them. At last she began to speak earnestly of his kinswoman's sickness, stiffly

at first, then warming as she spoke of the last night's defeat of Death. Then she spoke earnestly of all Jack's concerns, with intense agony of contrition she sought his forgiveness, she prayed for his piety, his health, his joy in after years. He said little, but gazed at her with one long stare of wonderment. The candle burned down. They fell on their knees. The year was assuredly all but done. An hour or may be three hours passed, very dumb and passive, yet quick with Death's awful expectation.

At last he rose and came to the threshold to look out at the stars.

"Midnight is long past!" he muttered. Then he lighted a candle and took her cold hands in his and chafed them, drawing her to the fireside where the embers were still glowing.

"The year is gone. The fate is accomplished," he said.

"I am long dying," she sighed.

"Nay, but ye have been long dead," he

answered. "I have seen it these five hours past. Never was there a starker corpse than the Margaret of old. Is she not dead indeed?"

And she answered, "she is dead," and kissed him, and they thanked God for her death with all their hearts. So the glamour of Saint Mark was proved true even with the truth of his blessed gospel. In the solace whereof may Jesus Christ keep us and all that must one day come to die!

Crimson for Snow-White

THERE stands in Epping Forest, near to that village whose name sounds like the wind among the trees, a chantrey. It was built over a dead esquire and calls Saint Dorothy its patroness.

You are very close to the edge of the forest there, within but a mile of Willingale. Not far away are the eight Roding villages where the coppices are dotted amid the ploughland and the great wood has end. Since all should know the tale of Saint Dorothy, you should understand well why it was that all the summer through her statue never wanted for roses, nor all the autumn through for ruddy and yellow apples. Essex earth is a favourable nurse to the summer's flower, so there were many and well-scented

ones to choose from. In the Virgin's hand there was ever to be found a knot of white and red roses tied with ribbons of the two colours, all through June and July and far on into September. Such a fair bunch it was as might put her clients in mind of her primal bunch and the garden wherein she gathered it.

Death in the summer had of old in the Willingale country one singular consolation —no less than the conferring of a rose from the hand of Saint Dorothy. As princes haut and digne coveted from the Supreme Pontiff the Golden Rose of his esteem, so Essex folk would covet a rose from Saint Doll-in-the-Forest or ever they came to die. And the priest (save one churlish one they tell of) would not refuse the gift if it were but in season. As to the benison of the flower I cannot be very precise.

One young clerk who lay a-bed long waiting for the end, has left in a record, that with the coming of the flower he felt a strange

turning from the pleasant walks of May-time and the midsummer heats of the blood toward cooler thoughts and the quiet pleasaunces of God. Be that as it may, the red flowers were esteemed far and wide above rubies, the pale ones beyond pearls. It was one of these red flowers freshly wrapt in forest moss that Elizabeth Burnet sent to Richard Dale on the day that he started back from London. He came from Kent and she from Essex, but they had met at a kinswoman's house in Cheapside last year before the wars that were now just over. He rode by Stratford Bridge out of Middlesex one cloudy morning in June, on towards Forest Gate. He had sent her word of his coming, and there sure enough outside the Man-in-Green at Forest Gate was her messenger awaiting him. This was the mute boy she had sent to Dick once before, and nothing could be got out of him save nods and smiles after that he had delivered up his packet. It was tied up with rose and silver ribbons. Within there

was but a small letter and the one flower of a dark crimson stain. This letter was written by some clerk unknown (Elizabeth could not write): it bade Dick be at the chantrey in the Forest on the next day but one at sunrise. He must not fail. Also it bade him wear the red rose in due service to his mistress all the way that he travelled. It was one of Saint Dorothy's own bunch, the letter said, but Dick did not understand. He kissed it, invoking Saint Dorothy's blessing on his lady of the fiery lips and the cry-pardon eyes, and rode on eagerly with the boy trudging behind him. "The morn after next," he said to himself. "My horse must go lame or some long adventure stay me, if I reach her not in to-morrow's forenoon." He was conscious as he rode through that hamlet of some little stir, then a voice rang out "England and York," and a stone came after him. He looked down at the flower in a flash. "Saints keep me! An ill colour!" he said. Then he turned and glared at his challengers. But

none had stood their ground: he was too big a man for that. He muttered and rode on. About a half-hour later a storm caught him on Wanstead Flats—a heavy storm rolling up from the east and the sea. He was under an elm tree when a crash and river of flame came together. He was jarred and shaken but quite sound in body when he awoke to find the tree above him scarred with a deep white wale. He had escaped but narrowly. How he praised Saint Dorothy—the best little saint in all the Calendar to keep a man from the great dread of lightning! It was miry going now, and the rain pelted down fiercely. He was glad to lie down in a half-ruined lodge in the wood and to wait for the storm to clear. Waiting thus, he slept. When he was awakened, he was aware of the deaf boy's bland, vacant face beside him, but there was other company in the doorway. A man with a rough black beard and a ragged cloak stood there watching him. His eyes had a hungry air, Dick

thought, and he felt at once for his belt and gold pieces, but there was no cause for his fear. "The flow'r's the good colour," said the unknown with a laugh. "Had ye worn white, ye had slept sounder." He grinned and fingered the sheathless knife in his own girdle. Now thought Dick, "God and Saint Dorothy be praised for my red rose!" To have one's throat slit in sleep. Ugh! Soon they were friendly together, those twain, having put all further debate of flowers aside. How dainty a wood fire roast is when the weather is bad, and it is long since one has eaten! A hare that the hungry man produced from under his cloak furnished their feast, then and there. The sticks snapped and glowed and the patter of the rain on the forest came but faintly. All was cheery and warm, and the good wine that the one could set against the other's good meat heartened both to speak. What Dale said does not concern us. Soon the ragged man told somewhat of his tale. He had, it

seemed, some cause for his bitter mood, albeit there be nought that can excuse such would-be cruelty in a Christian.

The story he told was crimson wine of passion curiously tinctured with the dull drugs of commerce and barter. He had bought his marriage in the Forest by a promise of sixteen yoke of oxen and a holding to his father-in-law. Strange to say the girl cared for him if his report could be trusted, but the terms wherein he told of her love failed to carry much assurance. He spoke of her pleasure in the furs he had bought her for Christmas, of her delight in his farm-house kitchen, of her prudent computing of the advantages he had to give against those that another proffered. Yet through all his speaking there hissed a hot vehemence of devotion. "She is all for me, and I for her," he said, and that sufficed. Now to-day her promised price was unpaid and he was ruined. The same Towton fight that made Richard Dale had ruined him.

Dick said nothing but felt guilty. "The devil was in the wind," groaned this aggrieved archer, "an it had held, all had gone merrily as carols at Christmas, but it veered and the snow beat us. Now I be undone and my mistress spent for life."

What seek ye now?" said Dale. "I watch her house. Her father will not tarry. I have nought to pay. The other fellow hath all ready. Ere she be flitting, I must be slitting somewhat." "Where does she live?" Dick asked. "At Havering-atte-Bower in the forest." "Who is the other fellow?" "Richard Stone of Hordon," he answered. "My own captain," thought Dick and whistled softly. Just then there came a battering at the broken door and a rough woman put her head through. "Be waking, Tom," she said and tossed in a little bunch of flowers. Then she was gone in the wood. Tom seized upon the bunch and turned the flowers over with thirsty looks. "Why they are all white and that's ill," he said. "She

is hard put to it for certain. I must go." He buckled his belt and cleaned his knife on his boot. Dick picked up the bunch. "So white meaneth ill," he said. "Then what meaneth well?" "Crimson," Tom answered and bent over them again. Sure enough, there was the rusty rowel of a spur made fast among the roses with a tie of ribbon. "Speed, speed, it saith," he cried. "And by Lancaster I will." "I will come too," Dick said. "Am riding the same way." As they came out, the sky was clearing and the sun shining heartily. "I have lost too much time," Dick said, "ye cannot go too fast for me." When they came to the great grove of hornbeams on the hither side Havering, they saw a small house with a pond of water before it. "This is the place," said Tom. But the house was barred and silent. At last they found a boy herding pigs in a coppice near by. "Whither are they gone?" "They be all gone to the wedding at the church." "Lend me y'r horse," shouted Tom, as hot as

fire. "Nay, we go together," Dick said, and took him up behind on his grey gelding. When they came to the church they found a disconsolate party outside. Another shower was just beginning. Two ugly wenches and three old serving-men were seeking shelter under the arch of the lyke-way. Above under the church porch Anne Ford and her father waited. Up rushed Tom and burst forth into protestations. That old man was fully his match when it came to high words between them. "But the money, rogue," he bawled, "I waited these ten months and ye never paid. Ye had it snug in hand this Christmas past. Then ye must needs go to war to win more, and lost all. Now I will wait no longer. Ye are nought now. Ye sue for pardons but shall have none, ye seek pieces for y'r purse but find none, nay y'r belly goes empty but there is none to give and nought to fill it!" "What is toward to-day?" Tom asked savagely. "Anne's groom is gone for the priest even now. A curse on the monk for

his tarrying!" Tom swore and fingered his knife. Then Dick on an impulse had off his belt and gave it him. "Here's the money since the matter presses," he said. "Repay me when you can. Trust me I will sue for your King's pardon. Am I not high in favour?" He was not to be long in favour however: in his case the boast came just before the pitfall. For back came Richard Stone in time to him as he was slipping off out of the turmoil, having done his share for Tom and his mistress. "Hola! Dick Dale!" he called. "What brings thee here and what colour art wearing?" Dick gnashed his teeth, but faced it out manfully. "Give her up, Master Stone," he said. "This Tom has fought the wrong side but Anne wants him and not y'r worship." Then Richard Stone began to curse after the manner of his camp days in the north. He cursed Dale for a damned thief and a traitor and a meddler and much else beside. Soon they were fighting, with Tom looking on, his itching

fingers at his knife-handle the while. It was a fair fight when one comes to reckon it up. Instead of Tom who knew nothing of swordsmanship, Richard Stone had to fight the best blade in his own troop of horsemen who had often given him lessons. The prize moreover was according to agreement, Anne's freedom. If Stone won, he was to have her, but apart from his ill chance of success, the issue looked angry for him. Tom was waiting to stick a knife in his ribs should the event require it. However he fought sturdily enough. Dick however, was his master all through, countering him and forcing the fight with all the gay confidence of one who has found a way to win of old, and has by no means forgotten it. 'Twas a fair sight in the big scatter of a thunder shower with the sun dropping in the west, to watch the to-and-fro of the grinding swords while the play was still fresh and eager. But Dick soon went on from wounding the left hand to beating the sword out of the right and

then all was over. With the strange heed to chivalry that lightened the bargains of that day, Stone exchanged courtesies with Tom, and thereafter swore to respect his rights as having bought Anne honourably from her father, nor to stand in his way when he sued for the King's grace. Then the man's sour nature came out as he swore thickly in his yellow beard at Dick and bade him look for no party favours. "I will undo you," he said, "meddler that ye be. I will carry this tale to our good lord of Waltham, nor will I forget to bruit abroad the fame of yon flower y'are wearing." Dick muttered that the flower meant nought but his lady's whim and Saint Dorothy's favour, but the other would not listen. There was to be no peace betwixt them that night, and Richard Dale rode off with a heavy heart, after that Tom and Anne had beset him sorely with their reiterant thankfulness. As he looked back from the turn in the wood-ride, he saw them going into the church, with the priest in

front of them. "Have made other folk's fortune and marred mine own!" he thought and brooded over the matter heavily on the way to South Weald. There he saw the lights of a fair but avoided them, being somewhat sore as to this rose badge that honour forbade him to put by. In the forest road that he took he stumbled on strange company, none other than Juniper the hedge-priest of Navestock and his dog that went his woodland rounds with him. This man, whom they named after a companion of Blessed Francis, looked a wild figure of a sylvan, when Dale came upon him in the thick of a covert. His rough yellow dog sat up to watch beside him whilst he nourished an orphan fawn from the dug of a leathern bottle. Juniper took to Dale readily, as one Kentishman ought to take to another, and they were soon busy with a crack about Kentish archers and Palm-Sunday Field and the many that would never come home. Juniper had no mind for roast flesh since he

loved living flesh too well, and their meal that night was only fruit and bread and pot-stew of roots, but their rest was happy enough notwithstanding. Compline said, they lay down beside the great stone that served Juniper for an altar at dawn. Just as they finished mass, a boy came running for Juniper. A forester was dying ten miles away and would have none but him. He must go. He would come again with speed, he said, for he must preach in this same end of the forest on Sunday. Said Dick, "Ye shall have my horse, y'have a broken thorn in one ankle and the poor sinner may be dead before ye limp to him." So Dick must stay and wait for the horse and feed the fawn while Juniper went away in all haste. Meanwhile he sent on his mute messenger with a letter promising that he would not fail of his morrow's troth-keeping. After priest and boy had departed, Dick fell to thinking. Here was he wearing another side's colour and shouldering other men's burdens, all the

golden pieces of his belt were gone for the time, moreover his reputation and hope of patronage were gone also. He had only his gay clothes and loyalty left to carry to his lady. The first went without delay when Juniper came back demanding alms imperiously for two ruined people. For Dick had out his war-worn breeches and jerkin of deer's leather from his saddle-bag, and proffered his new suit of grey and rose colour to glut those widows. Having gone so far on the mad way of the ragged brethren, he might as well go farther. It was near sundown when he left Juniper. He pushed on as far as Saint Mary-of-the-Maybush a mile out from Ongar. The red flower made him shy of men and companionable for Saints. Ere he lay down to sleep that night in the broad moonlight, he told his beads before Our Lady's statue. She stood in the white glow there, all loving and lovesome with warm red wreaths of mid-June about her. What was this? Was he treasonable to

Elizabeth of the fiery lips and the cry-pardon eyes? Christ, No! but he wanted her somehow apart from the weary thrust-and-push for place and purse and patronage that he saw before him. Would that they might be their own true selves, and their love be their own in some less sordid time or country! That was the extent of Dick's wildest treason, but it left him ashamed and wondering. He, the plain, hard-hitting rider who had sold his sword sensibly to the richer and stronger cause, had been becrazed by these two days' ride in the forest. Money, favour, clothes, loyalty, where would it all end! Verily it was an unhappy and perturbing gift, this crimson rose of Saint Dorothy's. What had his mistress in mind when she sent it? He knew the next morning, when he knelt beside her bier in Saint Dorothy's Chantry. She had lain long adying of a burning marsh fever. He was but just too late home from the wars to see her. When she heard he was coming she had sent him her own perquisite of the

flower of Viaticum. She had hoped it might wean his heart a little from the joys they were missing to other pleasures and pleasaunces. Now as he knelt at her requiem, the smell of the forest came through the door, a smell bountiful and redolent of rich earth, and the many short lives that call earth mother. At his breast, the red rose hung withered, not so withered yet but that it gave out perfume. What he had done without green forest and crimson flower in that doleful time I cannot say. After all that had been achieved for him, he yet ached a good deal. Let us be sorry for him, so lonely! Nay, let us be glad for them, for have they not these many years now, been glad together?

The Black-faced Lamb

THIS is the story of Bride the shepherdess, of Agnes the anchoress, and of Mildred. Agnes indeed plays but a mute part since she fell on sleep or ever the tale begins. Yet is there much to tell of her, and of how she was put to bed.

She was born of a Saint Agnes' Eve (that in Towton year), and her mother vowed her to God if so be He would send her husband home, to wit Sir Harry Fane of Westling. In due time God rendered him back, and so when the maid was seven years old he received his quittance. With much pomp and circumstance, with a train of fifty men-at-arms, with silver largess by the way, and feastings and junketings at the way's end, the child was brought to her cell in Hart Hollow near

Cuckmere Haven. Here was a new-built Anchorage hard by the church of Saint Agnes, wherein her mother had been christened.

There was a room beside the cell, and her nurse, a Cuckmere woman, was housed there. Moreover a small serving-maid was hired to bear her company. Joyous was that day of the vow's discharge, but it issued sadly in that her mother was struck by the cold going home, and never mended before her time came, two months after. So Agnes lost mother and new brother at once, and was rudely weaned from her care for home since she knew little of her other parent. He was away on the northern marches most of the years of peace, seeking occasions of strife where he could find them. When the stern wars for the Crown called again, he came to the call greedily, and served with a will. But he had shown small discretion in choosing his party, and for a while after the Tewkesbury rout, he had perforce to walk

warily. Home and friends for that time saw nought of him. A month before he sued his pardon and received it, Agnes went home to her mother. She had never been full of health, this dark, dwarfish child with the left foot trailing wearily as she walked. Of late she had wasted fast. Folk said her rule was too hard for her, and that she fasted and prayed too long of nights for the undeserving. But it would seem that she took her life in good part, and was in content with it to the very end. There was never such a child surely for glistering and colour, whether she found them in her Missal or her Hour-Book of Our Lady that was painted in Florence, or in the flower beds of her Anchorage garden.

But she grew weaker and weaker after she had finished twelve years, and at the last in hay-harvest time could scarce kneel to pray. A yellow Lammas sheaf that the priest brought in to show her gladdened her grey eyes on the first morn of wheat-cutting, but before the terce-hour her breathless sleep

came on. Assuredly there should have been little sadness over a death that came about in content and faith and charity, but its very bliss added fuel to a fire of wrangling. For long there had been dispute as to who should have her body. At the priory of Austin Friars in Westling, a conclave had been held and it was decided to sue for it. But the Hart Hollow folk were sturdy for their own right, she was owed to their own Church of Saint Agnes. The maid still lingered on, there was time for an appeal. Then went the Prior of Westling to his stout patron, the lord of the Manor at Seaford. He set forth his case very resolutely. The child recluse was owed to Westling, her tomb was already prepared beside her mother's in the chantry of the Fanes. Was not a brother even now gilding the Legend of Saint Agnes upon its frieze of stone?

Forthwith an imperious mandate came from Seaford, one which the Cuckmere tenants dared not disobey. Thus her beatific

ending embittered her kindly neighbours as having their part and lot in her denied. Two burly monks were prowling around her for full two days of her dying. Doubtless the fading grey eyes took little note of the black eyes that came ever and anon to the casement and watched her suspiciously. But other eyes did and took them very ill. "She is too long in passing for them!" "See the lamb! see the crows gather!"

How anxious were those Austin friars all that afternoon of her death-day! How they grudged the hours that she lay white before St Agnes' Altar with brown beeswax candles burning about her! Yet they judged it prudent to be generous of the time, there were such mutterings and scowls wherever they came or stayed—as they knelt in prayer or paced to and fro in their watch. They were under obedience and did but what they were bidden, so it were ill to think harshly of them. They had bargained with the priest to have the body away at sunset. There

were but nine miles to go and there was a harvest moon to go by.

So when the Angel's Bell rang out there was crowding and hurrying to take the last leave, women and children started to cry dolefully, men were prone to turn away in dumbness. Some when they came outside the church vented sorrow by cursing the theft of their innocent. Not a few stones were hurled and many fists were shaking as the two bearers started off carrying the bier that was tied with corn and flowers and green leaves and white ribbons, the tokens of her blamelessness. Had they cherished hope of final victory, the village would have fought for her, but what were a few shepherds and fishermen against the lord of their own manor, with a band of monks at his elbow to contrive against them? The villagers then let ill be, and she passed away along the chalk road between the corn-fields. The twilight was already fading when she set forth with many torches flashing. It was already

nightfall when they came to the foot of the Trundle Hill. Thence the north road runs up and up. It was there that the escort of torches dropped away, and very gloomily their bearers turned to go home. The feet of the friars were on the steep white road that rose steadily mile after mile. The moon that had risen coppered was now a silver lantern for their way, and they could travel fast with little care for slips or stumbles.

In the meanwhile one was waiting for them on the brow of that ridge whence you might almost roll a stone, all the four miles to Cuckmere Level. It was she who had served the baby saint when new come to her cell, Bride the fifteen-year old shepherdess. She was very fair and very tall now, with somewhat of a frown always gathering on her brows, a good Angel with a standing grudge against Satan. How ill she had taken it, this last Christmas-tide, to have to come home to the hills again, to be set to keep sheep, while her friend kept her rule in the valley!

She had gone on pilgrimages to her sick-bed every Sunday, of late, and had her own thoughts as to the sickness.

"Saint Agnes will have one of her own years to play with," she said decisively, and had no doubt what the end would be. On the last Sunday she had seen her friend, and heard the ill news of what the Westling friars were contriving. How often in the past the two had planned together that Agnes should have a bed by that south wall of Hart Hollow Church where the flowers grew with deepest colours. For there were the marigolds planted, even now a bloom for August, and there were big Lancaster roses that hung on that side the church. But just through the wall was the chapel of Saint Agnes with the Pyx hanging in its rose-red veil and the red lamp burning that looked so bright through the window on cruel nights of frost.

Bride was furious when she heard the ill news of the Priory, but she would not break

Agnes' content. However, she slipped into the church that same Sunday and vowed a vow before the Housel. She knew not what in all the world to do except pray, but when the two religious came by with the bier and went down the hill on Wednesday, her wits grew brighter. As she knelt of days on the turf, or of nights on the floor-stones, interceding fiercely for the dying, her great love would ofttimes run away from praying to planning. Many thoughts came to her and she did many strange things. When her mother was away, she stole her silver-green gown from the press by the hearth-side. This was the dress that she had worn as Goodwill in the Nativity Play of last Christmas, her white goose-feather wings were wrapped in it. Bride took the whole bundle away to the Chantry on the hill-brow that stood by the roadside. She took thither also a vial of cordial which her mother mixed for the ague pains. Therein are poppies, and he that drinks it shall soon find sleep come

to his burning head. A great horn too of farmhouse mead brewed with virgin honey went the same way with her on Thursday morning. On the Friday when Agnes lay dead, news came to Bride as she sat in the kitchen cuddling a great black-faced lamb that was very sick. It had fallen in a chalk-pit and broken a foot two days before, and now it seemed that no nursing would save it. Bride took the news dry-eyed, but ran with the lamb in her arms to the Chantry. On the way her grief stabbed her, and it was with dull red eyes that she sat watching the bright sea-road. Long she watched and dreamed, then sobbed, then dreamed again. When she came rightly to herself the sun was dropping low and the lamb in her arms was a stark burden. She mopped her eyes and ran home to fetch some bread. Long before the first flash of the torches below, she was back again.

The friars came the first miles up the hill at a round pace. Soon they were breathing

heavily, and the third mile was covered more at leisure, but still they kept travelling. The fourth mile tried them sadly, and the younger was all for a halt, but his companion chode him on.

"Time enough to rest at the Chantry," he said, though his own side pinched him cruelly. At last they came where they would be, and bore the corpse in at an open gate, then through the narrow porch which had an uneasy twist for such entries. What followed came like a dream. It seemed that an Angel very quiet and steady of purpose was with them as soon as ever they entered in. His presence ruled the whole place and they could not but obey. He bade them set down the body on the grey tomb that was there already with candles burning on two of the prickets of its hearse. Then he bade them kneel on the steps of the tomb and led them in a *Gloria* and a *Requiem Aeternam.* Next he fetched from the window-ledge a great horn of sweet brewis and held it to their lips.

"Drink and drink deep!" he said. So they drank to their great solace, having come so far and so high, then sank upon the steps of the tomb to gaze bewildered. The cold sea-stones swayed up beneath their feet, the blue heaven came breaking through the chapel roof, and all the air was filling with floating stars full of heat and glow. The younger man bowed his head and slept placidly. The elder raised his hand as in deprecation. He half rose. Then a green-and-silver flashing arm waved him down; warm white wings overshadowed him snugly as he half struggled. With a sigh he yielded himself, and was soon fast bound by sleep.

Two miles away in Westling village, Mildred was keeping a night vigil. Her husband was away hunting with his master. He had left her alone with the sorrow whereof he himself had no knowledge. She had only been married a month, and was but a sixteen-year old wife, fair like Bride but with a smile for every frown of hers, and

wistful eyes of strange sea colour. Two morns ago when she awoke her left arm was limp and lifeless. What was it that had befallen her? Her mother's mother was palsy-twitched. Dared she confess to her husband that her youth was withering in the same way. She had escaped observation these two days. She had seemed to herself to come and go as folk say the night-bird sings, with breast pressing against a thorn. But her stealth would not avail her long. She was minded to tell all when her man came home. How dared she think to tell him? And how dared she keep that dread secret of her green sleeve?

All this second night that Tom was away she knelt or half-knelt part brooding, part praying. What sin was her's in the past? What hope was her's in the days to come. She thought much of the expectation of the morrow. Tidings had come of the virgin relics that were on the road that night. Was this holy child one of the wonder workers? She would assay her. Or ever the sun rose

she was at the Priory Church. The doors were open and a Mass was being said, but there before the Altar reposed no virgin Saint as yet. Soon, however, there came the trampling of feet, then the choir of welcome gathered around the west door, at last with chanting and incense the bier was borne up the central aisle and lain in triumphal rest with a lavish glory of candles around it. Many people pressed up to see, but the bearers would let none come near to their late burden. To-morrow would come the festal day of the lying-in-state and the entombment. With some mutterings and murmurings, then, folk must go off to their day's work ungratified for the nonce. But few stopped to hear a Requiem Mass. Mildred, however, on her part knelt and knelt till the last Mass was over and the last of the villagers gone. Then she stole up to him that watched the body. It was her old tutor, Brother Julian. She told him her trouble in gasps and sobs. Might she touch now, if haply she might be healed. He

assented and knelt with her in prayer awhile.

"Dominus tecum!" he said.

She felt very forlorn in that moment. Then he held out to her his crucifix, and she kissed the Face. In the passion of that kiss, she pressed forward, her heart leaping.

Meanwhile strange words were passing in the cloister. Before the prior stood those two bearers white and shamed. The big bull-neck was telling his story, the younger brother gasped a word or two confusedly when his chances came. Their vision had been recounted, also the grim awakening of the elder man in the early morning.

"I had a heavy head, and our brother he would scarce awaken."

"My brows have the weight of dross of lead," put in the other.

"There was none else there, man nor angel, all in the Chantry was as it was afore. Only the corpse in white wrappings had a strange semblance."

"Did ye unswathe it?" asked the prior.

"Yea, I looked."

"And what did see?"

"Nay, I know not what I saw."

"But you, Martin?"

"I know what I thought to see, but it was most-like mere illusion. All was illusion in those curst four walls!"

"Shame! Will ye miscall a blessed Chantry thus?"

"My father, 'twas most like we dreamed, 'twas all dreaming. But soon we saw the people afoot to meet us in the vale below and we hasted to wrap the corpse well, and bore it on."

"Tell me your dream, ye twain, by all saints I adjure you!"

Brother George leant forward and whispered in the Prior's ear. The latter flushed up hotly.

"Sots!" he shouted. "Ye have drunk deeply and been finely fooled. Did I not

warn you? These Cuckmere folk are bold thieves but they shall restore. Mary! Ye and they alike shall taste stripes!" He left them open-mouthed and sped on to the Church. There at the west door, Brother Julian met him. "Gloria! Gloria!" he cried, "a miracle most undoubted!"

He led the Prior on to the bier. At its foot was Mildred kneeling, with a look like that Our Lady wore for gladness when her Child first tottered alone. She held out her arm to them.

"See, my father," she said simply.

"See," said Julian. "She hath touched the holy body but now, and lo! her arm that hung lifeless, it lives."

The Prior watched them both curiously, the contempt still in his face.

"And ye attest this miracle, Julian my son?" he asked.

"By Corpus Domini!"

"Then bid the girl go and make her thanksgiving to Our Lady of Pity."

She passed away with that radiant look of hers into the Lady Chapel behind the High Altar. When they were alone the Prior went to the poor corpse and uncovered it. A black-faced lamb lay manifest.

"How think ye now?" he said. The friar looked with eyes of wonder. Suddenly they filled with reverence.

"Saint Agnes' own miracle!" he cried. "She hath changed her own to the semblance she best loveth on earth."

Then the Prior told the bearers' story. "The body was thieved!" he said. The friar blushed abashed.

"But they saw an Angel," he pleaded.

"Believe ye so much?" was the answer. Julian drew near to the body and reverently examined it. Presently he cried aloud for joy—

"The proof is undoubted!" He showed the poor broken hind-foot. "It was so with the child living. Verily, this is Saint Agnes' own dear lamb."

"But how of the black face?" asked the Prior.

"The miracle is of our downs of Sussex!"

Then they hastily covered the bier again for footsteps were heard. Mildred was coming back. She fell at the Prior's feet and poured out her joy and wonder so artlessly, that his kind heart could not but be moved. Her miracle was undoubted. Did not the one miracle prove its fellow?

The miraculous body did not lie in open state for some mysterious reason. Westling folk took this very hardly. Only four in all of those that buried it had seen the dead face. But there was much thanksgiving notwithstanding, and rich pomp of death at the burial. The story of Mildred was common fame long before the body was laid in earth. The mystery of that lamb of Saint Agnes crept forth more tardily. One lock of lamb's wool was kept henceforth in a relic—and by the next Saint Agnes' eve the history was

written down and fairly illuminated in an Acta Sanctorum Angliæ. You may even now trace very faintly upon the tomb, that which in old days was a painting of Saint Agnes with a Southdown lamb at her side. So runs the one story of Agnes Fane's burial, the Cuckmere tale runs otherwise. For a while it was prudent to use discretion in the telling of that tale since it breathed defiance of the powers that were. Suffice it that some were ready to swear that their anchoress was put to bed in the garth of Hart Hollow Church. They said that the time of her burial was before sunrise and that the place was chosen where the marigolds grew thickest under the southern wall. That was the wall of the Chapel of little Saint Agnes, and upon it Lancaster roses climbed.

Now that the powers that were are past and gone, and that Bride the shepherdess need fear no wrath from the Austins of Westling, may it please you to lay the two legends together and to believe as you list.

For myself I would fain believe devoutly in two marvels alike—in the pastoral miracle of Saint Agnes with the Westling friars, and in the loving tale of Bride the shepherdess, with the shepherds of the South Downs.

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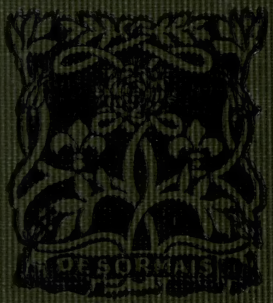
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