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THE SINS OF A SAINT



“SEIZE HIM, IN THE NAME OF GOD AND ODO!”
SHOUTED THE BISHOP.

(See page 85.)

THE SINS OF A SAINT ¶ ¶

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE

BY J. R. AITKEN

AUTHOR OF "LOVE IN ITS TENDERNESS"



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TO
C. E. A.
IN TOKEN OF A GREAT KINDNESS
WHICH MAY NOT BE FORGOTTEN.
1894-97.

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“The events of this reign are among the most painful in English history; and though not free from obscurity they are sufficiently clear to win for the king our sympathies as the victim of unmerited injuries, and rouse indignant feeling at the lust of power and pride of place which involved an ecclesiastical party adverse to him in the guilt of atrocious crimes.”

MILNER, “History of England.”

CONTENTS

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. BREAKING A CIRCLE	3
II. HOW LITTLE WHITE HEART WENT TO CROYLAND	11
III. AT THE SHRINE OF WODEN	17
IV. THE KISS OF A MAIDEN'S HAND	24
V. A FAINTING HIND	30
VI. FOR THE GOOD OF A SOUL	35
VII. "CHRIST AND KING"	43
VIII. TWO GREAT VICTORIES	51
IX. CORONATION GLORIES	61
X. HOW A SAINT BLEW OUT GOD'S CAN- DLE	69
XI. DISPELLING A DREAM	78
XII. VISIONS OF SORROW	87
XIII. FOR THE HONOR OF THE KING	97
XIV. A BENEDICTINE GOWN	108
XV. A SAINT AT HOME	112
XVI. OVER THE MENDIPS TO THE SEA	124
XVII. A CORACLE AND A SKULL	131

BOOK THE SECOND

XVIII. THE CRADLE OF CHRIST	141
XIX. A DREAM OF SILK AND PURPLE	150

THE SINS OF A SAINT

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. THE SWORD ON THE ALTAR . . .	161
XXI. HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE . . .	169
XXII. GRAY HAIRS AND GOLDEN . . .	180
XXIII. THE BATTLE OF THE VER . . .	182
XXIV. TWO MOVES IN THE DARK . . .	192
XXV. A PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER . . .	204
XXVI. RECEIVING A CROWN OF GLORY . . .	216
XXVII. THE MANTLE OF POWER . . .	227
XXVIII. THE PRIEST OF THE LIGHTED SKULL	230
XXIX. THE MERCY OF A MONK . . .	236
XXX. THE PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY . . .	244
XXXI. LIFTING THE FALLEN CHRIST . . .	254

BOOK THE THIRD

XXXII. A TALE OF A SICK NUN . . .	265
XXXIII. MUSIC AND MORALS . . .	270
XXXIV. A SOUL'S BOG-LAND . . .	279
XXXV. NUN'S VEILING . . .	288
XXXVI. THE HOUNDS AT BAY . . .	298
XXXVII. THE RING OF BATTLE . . .	302
XXXVIII. THE BARGE OF DEATH . . .	313
XXXIX. BUTTERCUPS AND BLOOD . . .	318
LX. THROUGH THE FIELD OF FLOWERS . . .	323
XLI. AN ANGRY HEAVEN . . .	330
EPILOGUE. AFTER THIRTY YEARS . . .	337

BOOK THE FIRST

THE SINS OF A SAINT

CHAPTER I

BREAKING A CIRCLE

ON May-day, in the year of our Lord 955, three noble youths were lying on the banks of the Thames, in the royal grounds at Kingston. They were tired with the frolics of the day, and silently watched the river run, the sweet-breathed cattle graze, and the sun set, in glory of gold and crimson, beneath a bank of murky gray. Since early morn, when with the royal maids they washed their faces in the glittering dew to make them rosy all the year, they had filled the hours with leaping mirth. In concord and in peace, they lay together, happy as youth without a fear. But had it been given them to see, only for one moment, the coming years, they would have started, clutched their golden scabbards, and wondered.

Over the meadows, golden with buttercups, two white-robed maids came tripping toward them.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Hand in hand they came, pictures of white, in framework of gold, aglow with setting crimson. They smiled as they neared the admiring gallants, and gracefully bowed.

“Welcome, Elgiva, and thou, little White Heart!” cried Eadwine, rising. “In sooth, the evening finds you rosy.”

“And fairer than day,” said Eadgar.

“And sweeter than night,” added Oslac.

“Good evening, noble sirs,” replied Elgiva. “The happy day has gone, and night creeps on with sadness.”

“Sadness! What shaft of woe has pierced Elgiva’s heart?” asked Eadwine, with sympathetic voice.

“A long expected, Edwy,” she answered. “White Heart comes to bid you all farewell.”

“Then, in truth, will night come on, and sunlight leave the valley!” cried Eadgar, stroking his flaxen tresses, plaited with shining gold. “But why?”

“To-morrow she wends her way to the cloister and the holy life she hath chosen for herself,” answered Elgiva. “Turketul hath come, and at sundown will lead her way to Croyland.”

BREAKING A CIRCLE

“The cloister! Bah!” snorted Oslac, with fine scorn. “Beware of it, White Heart!”

But, with the seriousness of youth when its life is troubled, Eadwine¹ took White Heart’s hands in his, and, bending toward her, questioned gently:

“Why dost thou leave us, little cousin? Is not the land large for thy cleansing, or the court in need of saintly women?”

“Yea, Edwy,” answered White Heart, with soft, mild voice, whose very tones made men aspire to saintliness. “The land, in truth, needs cleansing.”

“Then why, little White Heart, dost thou not stay, touch it with thy life, and make it white as thou?”

“My soul longs to pass the days in quiet service,” she answered simply. “I am tired and world-weary.”

“Oh, White Heart, Croyland hath no need of thee, but we have need of souls like thine to keep us pure and holy. Since Turketul himself went off, forsaking the court and service here to join the pious monks, the world hath not improved

¹ Eadwine and Eadwig are identical names of which Edwy is the diminutive.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

around us. Then why thou join him, letting the land grow dark?"

"I know not why, fair Edwy, save that my soul cries out for quiet tasks, and can not find the rest it seeks in troubled courts and gay. But do not plead with me or tempt me so. I love you all, and find it hard—harder far than I expected—to tear myself away."

"Pardon, little White Heart! I did not mean to wound thee," answered Eadwine. "But love would plead with thee, and scarce would let thee go. Yet, since go thou wilt, come, and let us, for the last time, play together, as we have done from childhood. And maybe, when thou art by thyself, and comfortless, the memory of our play will return to thee, and touch thy heart with gladness. Here is the May-pole still. Round it let us dance once more, ere the darkness comes."

Hand in hand they danced around the May-pole tree, Eadwine leading with this fine, old Saxon song, in the refrain of which all lustily joined:

The May-pole calls, with merry voice, to youths and maidens
O'er the lea : "Come and dance, ye merrie men,
And maidens rosy, full of glee ; come with dewy feet,
And, tripping, sing around the May-pole tree."

BREAKING A CIRCLE

Then merrilie round the May-pole,
 Around the May-pole tree,
Youths and maidens, merrilie singing,
 Tripping around go we.

The May-pole calls, with merrie voice, to youths and maidens
O'er the lea : " Come and laugh, ye merrie men,
And maidens rosy, full of glee ; come with dimpled cheeks,
And, smiling, sing around the May-pole tree."

 Then merrilie round the May-pole, etc.

The May-pole calls, with merrie voice, to youths and maidens
O'er the lea : " Come and love, ye merrie men,
And maidens rosy, full of glee ; come with ruddy lips,
And, kissing, sing around the May-pole tree."

 Then merrilie round the May-pole, etc.

The May-pole calls, with merrie voice, to youths and maidens
O'er the lea : " Shield your hearts, ye merrie men,
And maidens rosy, full of glee ; shield your hearts, for
Cupid, shooting, flits around the May-pole tree."

 Then merrilie round the May-pole, etc.

Round and round they danced together to the
sound of this old May-ditty, forgetful of sorrow,
and happy as youth without a fear. And while
we see them thus, their faces merry with song and
wreathed with smiles, you must paint their pic-
tures and place them in the hallowed halls of
memory.

You can not but mark Elgiva's tall and supple

THE SINS OF A SAINT

form: it would take the eye amid a crowd of courtiers. Dark is her hair, and her face of winsome wistfulness, so fair that they have named her The Beautiful. Her mind is filled with high thoughts, her soul untouched by the guile of the world, and her heart glad with the birth of a great joy. If you watch her eyes as they look on Eadwine, and mark their happiness when his meet hers, you will understand. Ethilda, her younger sister, called White Heart for the purity of her soul, would enter your life and touch it with thoughts divine. A pathetic little figure, of rare refinement and piety, she creates an atmosphere of saintliness, and lifts our life with visions of other realms. That you may love her as you ought, you must hallow your heart with incense of prayer. Scarce fifteen years of age, yet "tired and world-weary!"

Of the youths, the eldest is Eadwine, surnamed The Fair. Fearless, frank, open-faced, and generous, he carries his tall form like a leader of men, and reveals already an independent mind and self-determining temper. On the death of his uncle, the king, he should come to power. But the lines are not fallen unto him in pleasant places. Already we can hear the flapping of eagle's wings.

BREAKING A CIRCLE

The second youth is Eadgar, his brother and junior by a year, a handsome, well-dressed lad, of short stature and slender frame, with long flaxen tresses plaited with threads of shining gold. Fond of ostentation and display, his loves will lead him far. The third is Oslac, a lithe-limbed, assertive youth of much power and passion. Never known to fail in strife or shirk a daring deed, he is unscrupulous in life and effort. To wind the horn, bend the bow, hunt the stag, and head the chase—and then to woo a maid—are his favorite occupations. A subtle mystery coils around his life which, it is whispered, only the good King Eadred can explain. Mark him well, this Oslac, a sinuous serpent sleeps among his hair.

From earliest years these five have sung and played together. But the forces destined to drive them far apart are gathering round them even now. Fain would we cry to them:

“Sing on and dance!”

But the fingers of Destiny unloose their hands, and the powers of Darkness creep along the sky.

“Good-by, little White Heart! May the joy thou dost hope to find come nigh thee many times,” sang Eadwine, with rich, deep, honest voice.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Good-by! We shall miss thee in the pag-eants,” cried Eadgar, as he arranged his flaxen tresses.

“Good-by, fair cousin,” shouted Oslac, “and since thy heart is not for us, take care a pious monk do not storm its castle!”

“Good-by, dear cousins, good-by! And may the Christ be with you all,” faltered Ethilda, her voice breaking with tears.

And the circle of childhood was broken.

CHAPTER II

HOW LITTLE WHITE HEART WENT TO CROYLAND

NEXT morning at sundawn Turketul rose, crossed himself, repeated his paternoster, and came to lead little White Heart away to the cloisters of Croyland. A long, broad-shouldered man, on whose back for forty years the burdens of the kingdom had fallen, the old chancellor sought, with an old soldier's pride, to carry himself erect and lift the stoop that age was pressing on him. His great head of hair fell in gray beauty over his shoulders, and his snow-white beard over his breast. The first Chancellor of England with whose career we are tolerably acquainted, he was still full of strength, and as noble as he was great.

A grandson of Alfred, Turketul united integrity to power, and through four reigns served his country memorably, on the field of battle and in the nation's councils. To his skill was due, in great part, the memorable triumph of Brunanburh where Athelstane broke up the mighty confederacy

THE SINS OF A SAINT

of Danes, Anglo-Danes, Scots, Cambrians, and Welsh with great slaughter. "No greater carnage," sings a poet in the Saxon Chronicle, "has been in this island, by edges of swords, since from the east hither Angles and Saxons came over the broad seas."

The enthusiasm the victory has inspired in the poetry of later times was felt by the old chancellor with all its glory. Even now, though wearing the garb of peace, the fire would kindle in his eye at the mention of Brunanburh. He had, however, forsworn the pomp of the world for the peace of the cloister, and was drawing to himself, at Croyland,¹ many saintly men and women world-weary

¹ "While employed in the pacification of the north, Turketul stopped in the course of a journey at Croyland Abbey, which had been devastated in the first great irruption of the Danes, and still lay in ruins. Of that once flourishing community three old monks alone remained, who had constructed a humble home and oratory amid the fire-scathed walls of the church. They accommodated their visitor for the night, together with his train, according to their ability, told him their story, and besought his intercession with the king for the restoration of the abbey. The interview made a powerful impression on the mind of the guest, and on returning to court at the close of his northern mission, he astonished his royal master by avowing his intention to become a monk. Edred remonstrated, unwilling to lose his services, but the chancellor adhered firmly to his purpose. Accordingly he caused proclamation to be made in London, by the public crier, that he was anxious to

WENT TO CROYLAND

and feeling for rest in prayer.¹ The face of the man was a revelation of hope, an evangel of peace, a proclamation of the love of God to weary souls. Pity, thrice pity, he had not stayed at court!

Coming for little White Heart, sweetest and saintliest of maidens then at court, he found her weeping in her mother's arms. Ethelgiva pressed

discharge at once his debts, and, if he had wronged any man, willing to restore him threefold. Having resolved to spend the rest of his days at Croyland, and devote himself to its reedification, he proceeded thither and was followed by the king in person, who witnessed his formal assumption of the duties of abbot."—Milner's History of England, p. 103.

¹ “. . . Nowhere else did Christianity make a deeper or more lasting impression than in England. Not only do we see the high nobles and the near relatives of kings among the bishops and archbishops, but kings themselves—warlike and fortunate kings—suddenly and voluntarily renouncing their temporal advantages, retiring into monasteries, and abdicating their crowns, that they may wander as pilgrims to the shrines of the Apostles in Rome. We find princesses and other high-born ladies devoting themselves to a life of celibacy, or separating from their husbands to preside over congregations of nuns: well-descended men can not rest till they have wandered forth to carry the tidings of redemption into distant and barbarous lands; a life of abstinence and hardship, to be crowned by a martyr's death, seems to have been hungered and thirsted after by the wealthy and the noble—assuredly an extraordinary and an edifying spectacle among a race not at all adverse to the pomps and pleasures of wordly life, a spectacle which compels us to believe in the deep, earnest, conscientious spirit of self-sacrifice and love of truth which characterized the nation.”—Kemble's Saxons in England, vol. ii, p. 363.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

her daughter fondly to her breast and kissed her many times. Pious mother as she was, she feared to part with this frail, heavenly child.

The old king, Eadred, old before his time by reason of inward pain, looked on with shriveled, anxious face, liking little this bereaving of his court of its saintliest and best.

The feet of little White Heart faltered. The deep things of that old-world nature surged in her soul. All night long a subtle mysticism had colored her dreams. A hunger for the spiritual world beset her, and a mystic realm, sometimes gracious, but chiefly awe-inspiring, as real as the breathing world, only more wonderful and more powerful, surrounded her. Voices and visions came to her from this unseen. And a Great Presence overshadowed her.

She clung to her mother lovingly and lingered. She gazed into her blue eyes and waited. And as she gazed a Vision of the Mystic Realm came and thrilled her.

Away in the depths of Ethelgiva's blue eyes a misty figure appeared and wended his way toward little White Heart. Tiny and hazy at first, the figure grew in stature and clearness, till

WENT TO CROYLAND

he advanced and stood at last on the very threshold of Ethelgiva's eyes, and seemed as if about to step from that world of vision into this world of sense. He smiled on little White Heart, and showed her his hands and his feet.

Little White Heart crossed herself, smiled back on the Vision, and became quiet as a soothed child.

The figure lingered a while, and then slowly turned and glided away into the depths of blue. Far in the distance he looked back, raised his hand an instant, and waved it to little White Heart. Then he became a mere speck in the blue and vanished.

Little White Heart waited till her Lord had passed. Then, with a great struggle, she roused herself, kissed her mother thrice, bade the king adieu, placed her hand in Turketul's, and firmly walked away.

But at the manor-gate a royal thane stood waiting. And White Heart faltered once again.

“Eadmund!” she cried.

And the love-light leaped in her eyes.

“White Heart!” he answered, with desolate voice.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

And the "world" pulled strongly.

"Stay, White Heart! For love's sake, stay!"

And her tears flowed freely.

"And we will serve Him both together!" he pleaded.

And little White Heart wavered.

A new hope sprang into the young thane's eyes. He leaped forward and laid hold of her hand.

But through her tears little White Heart saw again the Vision of Ethelgiva's eyes.

And she left all, and followed Him.

OH, NAZARENE! Great is thy love and thy power.

CHAPTER III

AT THE SHRINE OF WODEN

AT noon next day the sun shone brightly on Virginia Water. The fish sported in the sunlight and the wild fowl spread their wings lazily on the shore. On the northern reach two lovers emerged from the forest. A score of wild swan rose and beat the air with throbbing wings. And a stag, that was drinking at the water's edge, shot its head erect and scampered away.

The lovers walked along the shore. They were young and their smiles came freely. They kissed each other and laughed at the wild fowls' fright. You have seen them before—the fair Prince Eadwine and the beautiful Elgiva. And there would be no need to discover them now, but for a strange adventure which befell them on their homeward way.

Passing through the forest, they heard the sound of distant music. They listened, and a wild chant fell on their ears. Drawn by the weird

THE SINS OF A SAINT

music, they left the beaten path and plunged deep into the forest, and came at last to an open space where was an ancient temple-grove.¹

An old Saxon priest and priestess were chanting a wild, weird song. Prostrate before a rude cromlech, they sang praises to Woden. And the music held the listeners captive till the worship ceased.

Then the withered old priestess rose, and lifted up her voice, and sang this strange creation song:

When Ymer dwelt here, 'twas the dawn of time :
Cool streams were not, nor roads, nor seas :
Earth was not, nor o'er it heaven :
Yawned the gap, and grass was nowhere.
Then spake the Sons of Bur,
And out of chaos came forth order ;
The sun shone southward on the sea
And all the earth was green.

¹ Our Saxon forefathers "were not without an organized system of religion, which, though imperfectly recorded, seems to have been identical in its leading features with the better known creed of Scandinavia. It recognized fictions wild and extravagant, which yet displayed more vigor of mind, and distincter traditional traces of primeval truth, than the fables of classical mythology, and were more calculated to impress the mind with the idea of supernatural power and future responsibility, and less licentious in their tendency, though directly adapted to strengthen the ferocious passions."—Milner's *History of England*, p. 54. See also Kemble's *Saxons in England*, vol. i, chap. xii.

AT THE SHRINE OF WODEN

Last man, the gods created,
His bones from stone,
His flesh from earth,
His blood from water,
His heart from wind,
His thought from cloud,
His sweat from dew,
His hair from grass,
His eyes from sun,
And breathed in him the breath of life.

But, in the closing of the ages,
In the twilight of the gods,
When the powers have burst their fetters,
Then shall change this present order.
Black shall wane the sun,
In waves the earth shall sink,
From heaven shall fall the friendly stars ;
Round the tree red fire shall rustle,
High heat play against the sky ;
Eastward the ship shall shape its journey,
Muspell's sons the sea shall travel,
O'er the lakes shall Loki steer her ;
Sun and moon shall be destroyed.

A second time will ruin perish,
And from fire new creations spring.
Then the sun shall shine more brightly
And the moon shall wane no more ;
Then shall joy the vast creation
And the waiting race of man

THE SINS OF A SAINT

In the realms where death and evil
Never wander, can not enter,
Where the blossoms e'er are fragrant,
And in the grass the golden tablets.

Drawn by the wild notes of the singer and the strange words of the song, Eadwine and Elgiva had ventured out into the open, and were so absorbed they did not notice the old priest start and creep stealthily in their direction. All eyes on the face and movements of the quaint old priestess, and all ears for her song, they were not aware till she had done, that the old priest was gazing into their eyes and seeking to read the book of their life. They drew back with a cry when they saw him, as if conscious that his piercing eyes were seeing into the depths of their souls.

Leaping to his feet, he followed their retreating forms. And, fixing his eyes on Eadwine's, he wailed in a low, deep voice:

The Weird is at hand,
So near that she might
Lay hold of the doomed.

Keeping his eyes riveted on those of the spell-bound Eadwine, the old priest drew slowly up to him, piercing his life with his keen sight, and

AT THE SHRINE OF WODEN

wailing forth this prophecy in a voice that quivered with pain:

Now is the bloom of thy strength :
Soon will it be that sickness, or the sword,
Shall part thee from thy power,
Or clutch of fire,
Or wave of flood,
Or gripe of sword,
Or javelin's flight,
Or glance of evil eye,
Shall oppress and darken thee.

Meantime, the dark prophetess had been looking deeply into the eyes of the beautiful Elgiva and scanning her fair face. Her eyes glistened with admiration as they fell on those lovely features, then filled with dread as the vision of that life lay before her gaze. And thus she sang:

Yea, the Weird doth pursue,
Hard and grim in hate,
Spinning and weaving the life of all,
As maidens do from worm the yellow silk
For garments beautifully form.

Still gazing into the terror-stricken eyes of the fair princess, she went on, in a voice that shook with pity and increased in pain and passion:

Prince and princess went to the wood,
The world from ocean wondrous green,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

And in the grass the golden tablets.
Princess stooped to pluck a flower,
And loud the war-fiend howleth.
Wrench of bone, and wrench of blood,
And wrench of limb ;
Bone from bone, and blood from blood,
And limb from limb,
As if a life were torn asunder.

Then the key changed, and the old priestess proceeded, in a voice that sang of final victory, still weird and other-worldly :

I see her rise a second time,
The world from ocean wondrous green,
And in the grass the golden tablets.
Lo, she stands, than sunlight fairer,
In Gimli's hall, with gold all covered,
Where the just shall joy forever,
And in pleasure pass the ages.

Speechless, Eadwine and Elgiva heard the strange words that fell upon their ears, and felt the pain that rang in the voices of the old priest and priestess.

But all was not yet ended. Pointing to the sky and then to the earth, the old priest continued :

Woden calls us to be faithful,
Crowned with gold, or whited helmet,

AT THE SHRINE OF WODEN

Face the foe, and brave the danger,
Enter gloom with smiling eye.
Hell for rebels he created, hell
A dwelling deadly cold, winter laden ;
Water he sent there, and snake homes,
Many a beast, with horns of iron,
Bloody eagles, and pale adders ;
Thirst, and hunger, and fierce conflict ;
Mighty terror, joylessness.

This done, the old priest raised the statue of his god from the rude cromlech, and plunged into the dense forest. And, with a look of pity on the beautiful Elgiva, the dark prophetess followed.

Bewildered, and not a little terrified, Eadwine and Elgiva fell upon their knees together, hand clasped firmly in hand, crossed themselves, and prayed to their God in the heathen temple. And when they rose they picked their homeward way with silent steps, wondering much of what portent might be the strange words they had heard.

CHAPTER IV

THE KISS OF A MAIDEN'S HAND

THE youths of the royal court were eager keeping tournament when Eadwine and Elgiva returned from their eventful journey. The contest had nearly ended when they took their seats beside the feeble king. The final combatants were entering the field amid the plaudits of the excited throng.

They were both noble and both masked—one with mask of gray silk, a tall and powerful youth, the other with mask of red silk, a lithe-limbed, assertive youth of medium height and great cunning. They were clad with byrnies of ring-mail, and bore on their left arms a round linden shield, in their right hands a long two-edged sword, while in their waist-belts hung a short seax in jeweled sheath.

The contest was a triangular one, consisting of throwing the long spear, wrestling, and fencing.

The gray knight had won the first item, the

KISS OF A MAIDEN'S HAND

red knight the wrestling bout, and now they came with naked swords to the decisive issue.

The prize was the kiss of a maiden's hand.

They crossed swords and began. It could be seen at once they were closely matched. Eagerly they feinted and cleverly they parried. Cunningly the red knight sought to gain an opening. Skilfully the gray knight kept him at bay and forced him to look to his honors. The excited thanes watched and cheered. Backward and forward the combatants strove for the mastery. Fire leaped from their swords and flashed from their eyes. But the cunning of the red knight at last found an opening and hacked an ugly wound on the gray knight's left shoulder. Bravely the wounded man fought on and sought to win the prize. But the cunning of the red knight again prevailed. Parrying a deadly thrust, he pierced the right arm of the gray knight, and claimed the victory.

Amid the plaudits of the throng the red knight came to claim the prize. The Saxon maidens blushed and smiled, and sought to win the victor's choice. Slowly and tantalizingly the red knight walked before them all, then came and

THE SINS OF A SAINT

knelt before the beautiful Elgiva. And as he did so, he cast a look of hate at the fair Eadwine, and smiled a taunting smile.

With the quick passion of Saxon youth, the prince leaped to his feet and flung his glove full in the victor's face, and stepped out into the field of combat, amid the wild cheers of the royal thanes.

The red knight responded with fierce, flashing eyes and desperate mien. And the excited throng gave place, and held its breath, as the contest began anew.

The combatants selected their long spears and took the appointed mark. Again and again they hurled them farther, and farther still, a spear-head only separating them, and, do what they could, neither could gain advantage. At last, however, taking a mighty spring, and lifting himself high in the air, the fair prince cast his weapon and fell a full spear's length in front of the red knight, and claimed the victory.

Thus they came to the wrestling. Stripped for the fray, they took their positions. Round and round they wheeled, seeking the grip, press-

KISS OF A MAIDEN'S HAND

ing with might, forcing and drawing, lifting and whirling each other, recovering anon, and returning with zest to the throw. The reach and strength of the tall Eadwine were matched by the cunning and daring of the lithe-limbed youth. Round and round they wheeled, the excited thanes shouting and cheering them on, till at last the red knight got his grip and threw the fair prince to the ground, himself falling heavily on him.

Rising, they breathed awhile, then embraced each other once again. Cleverly they schemed for the grip, wheeled round and round, retreated and advanced, and beat lower and lower. The wild thanes shouted louder and louder, and danced round the panting, steaming combatants. On they wrestled, on and round, till, after long and strenuous efforts, the fair prince gained the mastery and bore the red knight heavily to the ground.

Rising again, the combatants came to the final bout, loudly cheered by the much excited throng. Long and furiously they strove together. Perspiration broke and streamed from their bodies. Every muscle played around its victim. Time and again it seemed as if one must go down. As

THE SINS OF A SAINT

oft he recovered and seemed to more than hold his own. At last, however, the mighty Eadwine lifted his wiry foe and strongly threw him. But as they fell the red knight cunningly twisted round, came down on the top of the fair prince, and claimed the fall.

Having rested awhile, and refusing to be clothed with byrnies of mail, the stubborn combatants came to the last decisive issue. Crossing their blades, they fenced very carefully for a time, neither seeking to claim the advantage.

Then the fair prince smiled, and looked as if he had taken the mark of his antagonist. A great hush fell upon the excited throng. The royal thanes watched the prince keenly, and Elgiva held her hand on her heart. And suddenly the long sword went flying from the red knight's hand.

“Victory!” shouted the great throng.

But the swordless knight clasped his stout seax, and refused to yield.

Declining to meet his foe with so great advantage, the fair prince cast his sword away, and met him with his own weapon. Round and round they circled, like wild beasts waiting for the

KISS OF A MAIDEN'S HAND

spring. Long and cunningly they fought, now one and now the other seeming to gain advantage, till, again, the superior reach and skill of Eadwine's swordsmanship brought him the victory. Leaping on his fierce antagonist, he bore him to the ground. But as the red knight fell, he plunged his seax deep into the prince's thigh. Ere he could recover, however, Eadwine was bending over him, and held him completely at his mercy.

"Bravo!" cried a voice at Elgiva's side.

She turned and saw it was Eadmund, the thane, that stood at the gate and pleaded with little White Heart. And in his bleeding hand was a gray mask.

"Bravo!" shouted the frenzied crowd.

And they cheered the victor loud and long.

Then, amid the plaudits, the fair prince came and kissed the hand of the beautiful Elgiva.

"Wait!" muttered the red knight as he crept away. "Wait, Eadwine! Soon shall I be revenged! Soon! The beautiful Elgiva will yet be mine!"

And lo! it was the voice of Oslac.

CHAPTER V

A FAINTING HIND

THAT evening Elgiva walked the royal gardens at Kingston, alone and lonely. The holy incense which perfumed the air with the saintly White Heart near, had gone, and a strange, bewildering force seemed to have entered the atmosphere. The weird portents of the heathen temple and the wild excitement of the tournament had combined to unnerve her. She felt not only lonely wanting little White Heart, but as if in her own life some dire event were fast impending.

From one window of the royal manor the old king watched her, in sympathy with her sadness and with reverence for her grief. From another window the wandering eyes of Oslac looked. And when Eligva turned aside and took the woodland path to the river, he hastened out and followed her unseen.

To and fro she paced the riverside, wondering much and nursing her dire forebodings, till

A FAINTING HIND

suddenly she became aware of the presence of Oslac. The look of him she had not liked of late: his eyes haunted her soul with dread. To-night, especially, she did not wish his company.

Turning quickly, she entered the wood again and hurried toward the manor-house. But Oslac outpaced her, and at a bend of the road stepped out on her path.

“How now, Elgiva, surely not running away?”

“I came out to be alone, Oslac, and merely wish to realize my purpose.”

“Nay, thou art lonely, fair cousin, and in need of merry company. The burden of thy grief will else prove too heavy for thy white shoulders.”

“Not so, Oslac. ’Twill only run its course if left alone. The bitter waters must rise and flow ere the sweet can come again.”

“Nay, cousin. Let me accompany thee, rather, and rout the gloomy specters. In merry love thou’lt find a way to laughter.”

“Not so, Oslac. Give way and let me be alone. No man can bear a woman’s sorrow.”

“Not even Edwy the fair?”

“Edwy! Ah, his soul is pure, with reverence

THE SINS OF A SAINT

in it. He would not wish to come between my grief and me."

"Have care, Elgiva. Thy surliness doth not overplease me."

"Then let me pass."

"Nay! I've come to woo thee, and mean that thou shalt come."

"To woo me? Oslac! Oh, speak not so! Thou must not. Let me go."

"Hath Edwy spoken?"

"What though?"

"This: that I love thee, cousin dear, and hate him, and must have thee for mine own."

"That can never be."

"Never? I have willed it, Elgiva, and never yet have failed to have my will. Come, fair cousin, come, be mine, and thou shalt fill the days with love and splendor. Thou may'st yet be queen with me as with the Fair."

"Queen with thee!" cried Elgiva, with fine scorn. "Queenship doth not woo me, but heart of purest love and noble deeds like Edwy's."

"Noble deeds, forsooth! What are they, of what use, and to what purpose—in this world? Of the next no man knoweth. Power is all I wish,

A FAINTING HIND

and all that men desire, how best they may attain it. Come, Elgiva, thou art mine; come and let me woo thee, or by the powers of earth and hell I shall compel thee."

He laid his hand on her. She screamed and struggled in his grasp. Laughing, he covered her mouth, and sought to force her from the path.

Making a desperate effort, she slipped from his arms and bounded away like a frightened deer running for life and liberty. Oslac darted after her, and was about to pounce on her again, when Elgiva stumbled and fell with a crash. Unable to stop, he rolled over her, falling heavily and cutting himself severely.

But in a moment he was on his feet and bending over her.

Just then the sounds of footsteps were heard hurrying through the wood. Oslac dived among the trees in the opposite direction, and fled with all his speed.

In a moment the old and feeble king, with two of his attendants, came running on the scene and found Elgiva, senseless and bleeding, lying on the path.

The courtiers lifted the fair form with gentle

THE SINS OF A SAINT

hands and carried her into the royal home. There they tended her till consciousness returned, an hour later. She awoke, with a shiver, crying:

“Nay, Oslac! Never, never! Let me go! Let me go!”

Then she started up, looked around with a frightened air, covered her face, and wept passionately.

Anon she fell into a quiet sleep, from which, however, she soon waked, starting up with wild, fearful looks, screaming:

“Never, Oslac! Never! Let me go!”

So all night long, till at dawn of day, deep sleep fell upon her, and gave her peace.

The king understood, and learned with anger that Oslac was the hound that was chasing this fair and trembling hind. Full well he knew, too, the hound had torn and rent her had not he been near to save. That Oslac should be held in leash henceforth, he swore, on the honor of his soul, in the presence of the fainting maid.

CHAPTER VI

FOR THE GOOD OF A SOUL

THE anger of the king was great. For some time the court had been filled with noise about Oslac, though he had closed his ears to loud-mouthed rumor, making many excuses. With his own eyes he had now seen for himself, and himself been just in time to save the comeliest maiden of the court.

It troubled him much and came to wear a garb of national importance. It was not only that the purity of the court was threatened, but the integrity of the realm. Oslac, he feared, would become a source of trouble in the land unless curbed in his wild career; and how best to curb him, the old king scarcely knew.

To let him follow his riotous strength and wilfulness would mean anarchy, intrigue, and folly. It was due to the late king, Eadmund, that no danger should stand in the way of his son Eadwine's succession.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Worn out by a life of continual suffering, and crushed by the cares and anxieties of the state, the good King Eadred felt the time might not be far ahead when his feeble hand would fall from the helm of the ship. The weal of his people and the interests of the nation demanded that a kingly soul should wear the purple. Oslac was ambitious and might have dreams of power that would clash with the rights of Eadwine. A man of his sort would fill the land with violence and teach the people to sin.

Yet the heart of the pious old king longed over Oslac for good. Had he not watched him grow up, and rejoiced with others in the strength of the youth? If only he could be taught to love the pure and noble, how great he would be, and how mighty for good! If by any means this could be effected, then would the throne be safe.

Thus the king came to think of the monastery for Oslac. At least, that might restrain him for good. There, if anywhere, he might turn to penitence and holy deeds, and save his soul at the cost of a kingdom. This the good king—tottering to his grave, tired of life's vanities, and disillusioned of the world's temptations—had come

FOR THE GOOD OF A SOUL

to deem was worth the fairest kingdom. So to the monastery Oslac would go, if only Dunstan would approve.

The minister and cleric was now at court and was summoned to the royal presence.

He came, a little man of feeble, sickly frame and pale face, some thirty winters old,¹ with eyes full of burning light and bounding life, and with a massive brow, broad and high, that told of extraordinary power and genius. Mark him as standing first in the long line of ecclesiastical statesmen, who counted among them Lanfranc and Wolsey and ended in Laud. Of great application and remarkable talent, Dunstan had proved himself capable of conducting the duties of ecclesiastic and statesman with uncommon skill and energy. Quick-witted, of tenacious memory, a

¹The date of Dunstan's birth is uncertain. The English Chronicle places it in Athelstane's first year 924 or 925, and is followed by most writers. But Green (*Conquest of England*, p. 282, note 3) would throw it back into the days of Eadward I, about twenty years earlier say, as he thinks it improbable that Dunstan would rise into power so early and become the guide and counselor of Eadred between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-one. The writer holds to the traditional date, and sees throughout a man of such brilliant and overmastering genius that he finds it easy to believe Dunstan reached the zenith of his power ere thirty winters old.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

ready and fluent speaker, gay and genial in address, an artist, a musician, he was at the same time an indefatigable worker, a man of stern self-will, great piety, and fervent devotion.

In early youth severe monastic asceticism and overstudy had deranged his brain for a time, and produced aberrations of intellect that were taken to proclaim intercourse with supernatural powers. Now his extraordinary talents, energy, and subtlety had come to their maturity and were all exerted for his own self-assertion, the advancement of ecclesiastical power, and the subjection of England to papal supremacy.

A fine dash of satanic force is ever at work in Dunstan's saintly soul. Lust of power and pride of place abound in him. It is born in him to have his way, to be first in everything, and to achieve his ends by fair means or foul. First in his father's hall he had been, and first among the scholars at Glastonbury, and first he would be in the state and in the Church.

Twice already had this assertiveness led to his expulsion from court, and roused enmity and jealousy among the royal thanes. But Dunstan could not be suppressed, and returned to displace

FOR THE GOOD OF A SOUL

every rival and take to himself, by virtue of his masterful genius, the first place in the realm. The brilliancy of his mind, the cunning of his counsel, the craft of his handiwork, and the force of his measures beat down jealousies and made him of transcendent influence in his time.

To him, therefore, by force of character, Eadred the king, bit by bit, had surrendered his conscience, treasury, and authority. To him he turned in every hour of need. And, beyond all doubt, Dunstan, pale and frail though he looks, must be reckoned one of the greatest men England has ever produced. Like Luther in the fifteenth century, he is the principal figure in the picture of the tenth. Throughout all its struggles he stalks before us in gigantic stature—glorious as an archangel or terrible and hideous as Satan!¹

When Dunstan entered the royal chamber the old king was murmuring to himself:

“The monastery! Ay, that will be best for Oslac. He is ambitious, lusty, overfond of maids and power. If only Dunstan will approve, and

¹ See Kemble's *Saxons in England*, vol. ii, p. 450 et seq., and Green's *Conquest of England*, p. 294 et seq.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

keep him from evil and from making mischief in the realm——”

The abbot started with surprise as he listened to the king's speech. The surprise gave way to pleasure soon as a cunning plan took shape in his eager brain. He drew the king's attention and bowed.

“Welcome, Dunstan! We have sent for thee once more to seek thy counsel.”

“The Lord King's honored servant. Speak on.”

“Concerning Oslac. His life of late has not been to our liking.”

“Nor to that of some of thy fairest maidens, sire, as they have proved to their sorrow.”

“We wish thy counsel, then, as to Oslac.”

“What thinkest thou, O king?”

“That the monastery would be well for him.”

“The monastery! Thou art wise in thy choice, Lord King. The company of holy men will better him and piety detract from his ambition.”

“It is his ambition, added to his sin, compels our action. Eadwine succeeds us on our death, and we must see to it, both for our brother's sake

FOR THE GOOD OF A SOUL

and his own noble-mindedness, that no danger lurks in the way.”

Dunstan bowed, and smiled approval, having, however, other thoughts of Eadwine’s noble-mindedness.

“Take him to Glastonbury,” continued the king, “and lead him to repentance. Make sure that he is kept from working mischief in the realm.”

“To-morrow some monks are traveling thither, and, if it please my Lord King, will take charge of him,” spake Dunstan, his quick brain delighting in the plan already formed.

“Well and good,” answered the king. “Call him now, that we may speak with him.”

Oslac, summoned to the presence of the king, came, wondering what the wrath of the throne decreed. Dunstan received him with a genial, perplexing smile. The old king looked on him with eyes that filled with pity and almost brought him to shame.

“Thy life hath brought us sorrow and threatens the purity of our court. For long we have shut our ears to rumors and made excuses. But yestereve we saw with our own eyes, and can not

THE SINS OF A SAINT

let thy follies pass unpunished. We have decreed that thou be banished from court and don the Benedictine gown. Thus mayest thou make retribution for thy sins and prove to all that purity is honored at the court of Eadred!”

The sentence fell upon Oslac like a bolt out of heaven. He staggered and reeled under the blow. He scarce could believe his hearing.

“The monastery!” he gasped, retreating from the king and cowering. “The monastery! Make a monk of me! Surely, oh surely, thou art jesting, sire?”

“Nay! Our decree is fixed. To-morrow some monks travel west to Glastonbury and take thee with them.”

“Surely——”

“Enough! Go, and in holy service wear away thy sin. Thy safety lies in noble deeds and life of pious effort. Only thus is there hope for thee. Take him away, Dunstan, and see that all is well.”

The pale-faced abbot, smiling slyly to himself, led forth Oslac staggering under the strange sentence the king had passed upon him.

CHAPTER VII

“ CHRIST AND KING ”

THE turn events had taken added zest to the schemes floating in the brain of Dunstan. For long his keen eyes had foreseen difficulties in the matter of succession. Not only were these to be found in the spirit and ambition of Oslac, but in dangers that threatened his own place and power on the accession of Eadwine. The integrity of the youth stood in the way of the cleric.

Accustomed for long to influence and force the feeble mind of the pious Eadred, the designing minister feared the self-determining temper of the heir. The ecclesiastical policy on which he had long set his heart, and to which he desired to direct, and then to subject, the powers of the state, stood in danger. The glorious possibilities of King Alfred's subtle phrase “ Christ and King ” had taken possession of Dunstan's brain and fostered dreams of sacred empire and papal dominion. The union of the scepter and

THE SINS OF A SAINT

the cross, with the symbol of the Church commanding the weapons of the state, took definite shape in the great ecclesiastic's mind, and led him to find in papal supremacy and temporal sovereignty the consummation of all his desires.

Thus Dunstan in his day headed a movement that turned its eyes eagerly to Rome, and pictured a celestial empire, with the Pope of Rome as universal emperor and his representative in England as king of England's king. To this end he sought to bring the English Church, that had long declined to recognize the full authority of the popes, into a closer alliance with Rome and to establish throughout the land monastic institutions, under the Benedictine rule, that united the monastic bodies into a grand confederation subject to Rome. Though long known in England, the Benedictine rule had been only very partially introduced, the different monasteries recognizing the institutes of their founders, or observing their own regulations, or openly defying all restraint, and insisting, with English force and spirit, on their rights of liberty and independence.

“CHRIST AND KING”

It is not to be wondered, therefore, that when Dunstan, with unswerving energy, brought the force of his genius and prestige at court to advance ecclesiastical power and to enforce celibacy on the clergy, with ultimate dreams of papal dominion, he encountered opposition.

Between the aristocracy and the clergy a close alliance always existed in England. Many of the servants of the Church were the sons of nobles great and powerful in the land. Hitherto they had exerted the right of private judgment on the subject of clerical celibacy, and certainly married in large numbers. Hence these men—“secular” clergy, as they were called contemptuously by Dunstan—men who desired to remain men and live as men in holy wedlock though priests of God—formed a powerful party by uniting with nobles who had become indignant at the haughty conduct of the chancellor.

The ranks were closing for battle, and Dunstan had determined to realize his dreams and secure the success of the Benedictine by methods nice or otherwise.

In the struggle that was impending the abbot saw that Oslac could be of service to him. The

THE SINS OF A SAINT

passionate love of the youth for Elgiva, his jealous hatred of Eadwine (suspected of favoring the "seculars"), and his unscrupulous ambition, all could be made to work out the will of Dunstan. Thus he heard with glad surprise the sentence of the king, and thus he left the royal presence smiling, leading Oslac by the hand, a tool delivered to his keeping to work his will, to realize his dreams.

What though in the conflict the tool should perish, soul and all, and the nation be thrown into tumult and blood? Blood and tumult, and ruin of soul, these are the steps by which "Christ" will climb the throne of the world and rule as "King!" But the name "Christ," in mathematical formula, must be put thus: "Christ" = Holy Church = Pope of Rome = Dunstan, Chancellor of England.

Ho, then, Oslac, welcome, for "Christ" hath need of thee, and Dunstan work—from which, in time, thou wilt recoil in horror!

When Oslac was led forth from the presence of the king he burst into tears and cried that punishment of another kind might be enforced upon him. To a man of his spirit the gown of the

“CHRIST AND KING”

Benedictine was the greatest hardship that could be imposed. He had sense enough, too, to understand the hypocrisy involved in his becoming a monk, and, to do him justice, he revolted from it. A man who is open in his sin is ashamed to don the garb of hypocritical piety. However bad, he would flee that added sin, in much the same way as a pure white nun would shun the gay costume of the foul coquette.

The prospect seen through tears was repulsive to the mind of Oslac. But seen in the light and color with which Dunstan's rosy mind surrounded it, the prospect opened up dreams of power and glory pleasant to the mind of the youth. The subtle flattery and humor of the abbot wiped away the tears and made the gown of the Benedictine seem the most desirable garb in the land.

“Thou canst not be expected to reform in a day, and thou need'st not fear thou wilt be hardly dealt by at Glastonbury. I will see to it that kindness is shown thee there.”

The abbot smiled as he saw the youth bestir himself as if a new hope were dawning.

“Thou must not think thou wilt be buried

THE SINS OF A SAINT

alive, cut off out of the land of the living. When the time comes thou wilt find scope for thy hands and room for thine ambition—as a faithful servant of Holy Church, I mean.”

And Dunstan smiled on Oslac again.

“At least thou wilt have cause to remember the fair Eadwine, and time alike to nurse thy wrath and weave thy rod of vengeance. Dost thou understand?”

Oslac did understand.

“Meantime the great forest of Selwood may keep thee from wearying and afford thee ample sport. There the great Alfred, when young like thou, wound the horn, bent the bow, and hunted the stag. There, too, in later years, he unfurled the banner of his fallen fortunes and issued forth to victory. The associations of the place may be pleasant, Oslac. As thou dost know, too, red deer sport on the Mendips and Glastonbury is not far away.”

The cleric smiled as he played upon Oslac’s love of the chase, and still more when he saw the smile spread over the face of the youth. That smile meant victory to Dunstan.

“But thou must be careful not to cause the

“CHRIST AND KING”

abbot anger, and ever ready to obey his will. Every Benedictine is pledged to that. Wilt thou swear?”

Oslac rose, and took the abbot by the hand and swore.

That grip of the hand and that oath meant death to the youth and ruin of soul, yet he did both with a smile, and with a new hope bounding in his heart. Thus gladly do we enter the gilded path of sin that leadeth to death, as if a new earth and a new heaven lay that way.

The prospect now seen in the light and color with which Dunstan's rosy brain painted it was more than pleasing to Oslac. What though death crouched at the end of the path? The youth saw not. All that appeared to him was that this path opened up a new life for him, and promised to lead to the goal of his ambition. The road to glory was the road to Glastonbury, wearing a Benedictine robe, and winning the favor of Dunstan. This he had never hoped to win, but could not doubt the abbot's smile.

Ho, then, a monk now he would be with contentment, hoping for the day soon to come, and praying for it too with heart and mind, if that

THE SINS OF A SAINT

were any use, when opportunity would sail along the stream of his desire.

Sooner than either Dunstan or Oslac anticipated that day came, blushing in its innocence as it leaped smiling from the east, but laden with woe as it fell weeping into the shades of the west.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO GREAT VICTORIES

THROUGHOUT his life Eadred the king had fought against sickness and weakness of body as nobly as he had fought against the Dane. But in the autumn of 955 the good fight came to an end. As the glory of the other world drew nigh and the golden splendor of its streets, his soul, death-smitten, longed for one thing. The royal hoard lay at Glastonbury, with its wealth of gold and priceless earthly treasures, and these the king desired to see once more ere he died.

Dunstan was at Prime-Song, on St. Clement's morn, when the messengers of the king came with the news that Eadred lay dying at Frome and wished to look on his gold again. The news touched a cord in the great chancellor's heart that wailed a note of sorrow for the friend he loved and ruled. So, to obey this dying wish, he rose hurriedly from his knees and made haste to bring the king his gold.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Late that afternoon Dunstan and the royal hoard drew nigh to Frome along the gray Somersetshire lanes that led to the town. The cold November blasts chilled his heart as he toiled along, and did not improve the prospect that presented itself to his far-seeing eye on the death of the old king.

The sun was sinking in clouds of darkness as the heavy wains bearing the golden treasures crept into the town. The death-howl of the women about the court told the abbot as he entered that the desire of the king had not been granted, and that his eyes would look no more on the gold and glory of an earthly throne.

The thanes of the court had already fled to the presence of the new king, and Dunstan entered the death-chamber to find the corpse forsaken, save by the women whose hearts led them faithfully to perform the honors of death no less than the duties of life. With sorrowful thoughts the great chancellor looked on death and kissed the cold brow of the king.

“Eadred, noble Eadred, pious and good, thou art now beyond the pain of life and strife of men. May thine eyes weep no more, and ever

TWO GREAT VICTORIES

look on thrones of shining gold. *Requiescat in pace!* ”

Alone next day Dunstan carried Eadred to his grave beside his brother Eadmund at Glastonbury. On the top of the hoard he laid him, in the heavy wains, amid his gold and treasure.

Behind the “Cæsar of all the Britons,” the “king of the Anglo-Saxons,” and his worldly splendor, walked the frail frame of the great chancellor, seeing dreams of empire and glory rise above the wains with their burdens of death and vanity. The pale face of the abbot was the playground of thoughts and fancies that leaped through his massive brain and found a way to life and victory out of death and seeming defeat. On the morrow he resolved to set out on the errand the thanes had gone, and gained consolation from the thought he would not arrive too late to have his will.

From Glastonbury, at dawn next day, Dunstan hastened to Kingston to attend the formal election of the new king. The system of hereditary succession to the throne was not strictly observed in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Though the succession was limited to one family, it was

THE SINS OF A SAINT

not, at this period or for some centuries later, regulated by the law of primogeniture. Sometimes younger brothers were preferred to the elder, or a brother of the last sovereign succeeded to the exclusion of the children. The inheritance of the crown, too, was in the election of the National Council, whose choice might be determined in favor of a particular claimant by consideration of maturer age, superior talents, or popularity. The finding of the council was absolute and final.

Taking advantage of this, Dunstan came to the great meeting of the witenagemot with his scheme of empire. In this assembly of the wise, Saxon and Dane were alike represented, the southern earls and ealdormen sate quietly with the grim jarls of the north, while the princes of Wales sate side by side with English thanes and bishops. It was a working parliament that lost no time in doing its business, and abhorred long speeches. Each man sate with his sword at his side and his spear in his hand; and for cheers they did not indulge in the incoherent mumblings of our modern assemblies, but by dashing their lances together each with his neighbor, standing

TWO GREAT VICTORIES

in the rude hall or under the arch of heaven, they showed their approval of the counsels.

The enthusiasm of the witan, Dunstan noted, pointed clearly to the election of Eadwine. Long wearied of the overbearing and haughty spirit of the chancellor, the English nobles hailed with joy the advent of a prince with independent spirit and fervent English sympathies. Fearful of Dunstan's power, the grim northern jarls eagerly clutched at any escape, till it served their purpose to bow to him again. Glad of Eadwine's love of the English Church and his care for its independence, the "secular" clergy greeted with ardor the mention of his name.

Athelstane, the hoary-headed ealdorman, knew the youth could throw a spear and wield the sword.

Alfric, another duke, was confident of victory under his brave and fearless lead.

Alfhere was proud of the manly spirit of his kinsman, and prophesied his rare and great ability would add luster to the English name.

Ethelrige, with a look at Dunstan, predicted peace at court and joy throughout the land.

Byrthelm, Bishop of London, with eyes also

THE SINS OF A SAINT

turned toward Dunstan, praised God the new king would not wish to deprive men of the rights of manhood or force on the English Church the shackles of Rome.

Gunnar, a grim northern jarl, proclaimed the admiration of the Danes for a son of the doughty Eadmund and the grandson of Athelstane.

Dunstan was biding his time. It had now come. Rising and lifting his hand toward Eadwine, he cried:

“Hail, Eadwine! Cæsar of Britain! King of the Anglo-Saxons! Hail! Long live the king!”

The clash of arms was deafening. Each man rose and dashed his lance at his neighbor's, shouting lustily:

“Long live the king! Long live the king!”

Ealdorman and jarl, thane and princeling, stood and made the rude hall ring with the clang of spears and the cry of “Long live the king!” Through the open door the words ran into the midst of the great throng without, a seething, excited mass of warriors and courtiers, and as the news fell upon their ears they shouted back again and again:

TWO GREAT VICTORIES

“Long live the king! Long live the king!”

Dunstan stood smiling at the wild enthusiasm of the throng, appearing to join in it all. He was well pleased at the success of his artifice, and waited confidently till the cry subsided. Then the pale face lit with gladness as the time had come for the expression of his subtle plan. He raised his head and motioned that he would further speak. A hush fell upon the assembly, well pleased with his former words and won by his wiles. Assuming his most genial manner, and speaking with great ease and fluency, with rich, pleasing voice, he began:

“Noble is the king, and fair of soul as fair of face, comely as the kingly Athelstane, and good as the great Alfred. Long live the king!”

The lances were dashed together with great enthusiasm by the excited assembly.

“Brave men are all his followers and worthy of such a king, brave as he is fair and noble. In field of battle you, each with each, vie in skill of arms, loving the place of danger, and smiling at the thought of cairns and barrows. Long may the king lead you on to victory!”

Again the lances were dashed together wildly.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“But we live in troublous times, and, as wise men as well as brave, must seek the safety of the realm and plan to win the victory. To bind the states together, the brave men of the north with the noble of the south, and make your arms invincible, you will safeguard the noble king on every hand.”

The shout that rose above the clash of arms told Dunstan victory awaited him, and added power to his eloquence and charm to his bearing.

“The gallant men of Mercia and Northumbria, far removed from the court of the king, especially will desire to link themselves to his person in some way pleasing to the royal house and contributing to the dignity of the throne.”

The excited cheers with which this cautious move was met, especially by the Mercians and Northumbrians, showed Dunstan that no suspicion was aroused.

“If the wise men of this great and illustrious council, considering the safety of the realm and the youth of the noble king, would appoint him a viceroy in those northern states, the sovereign would be benefited and the interests of the nation at large assured.”

TWO GREAT VICTORIES

The lusty cheers with which this suggestion was received assured the abbot the battle was won. The kinsmen of the king were the first to clash their lances.

“The fair and noble king hath a brother, whose glory is the joy of all the land, and whose heart is knit to the throne by the nearest and best of ties. Would not he strengthen the king and serve the country by acting as viceroy of the north? Yea? Then hail, Eadgar, subregulus of Mercia and Northumbria! Hail! Long live the king!”

Vociferous cheering again rang through the hall and clang of spear, as the wild throng approved the chancellor's cunning speech. Excited, four strong warriors seized Eadwine, laid him upon a shield, raised it upon their shoulders, and carried him round the hall and out into the midst of the seething crowd. The multitude greeted him with acclamation and loud shouts of:

“Long live the king! Long live the king!”

Eadgar, too, they raised upon a shield and carried among the people, his flaxen locks threaded with shining gold and his rich silken dress floating in the breeze. And all the air was filled with

THE SINS OF A SAINT

cries of "Long live Eadgar! Long live the king!"

Dunstan, from the hall, watched the scene without, exulting at the triumph of his cunning. The veins stood up on his massive brow, and the glow of victory illumined his pale face. Bounding joy leaped in his sparkling eyes.

"Ha! ha! They could not master Dunstan! The victory is mine, mine, mine, and Eadwine's in my power. Wait, Dunstan, wait: thou canst afford to bide thy time. The victory is thine! The vain young prince, 'whose glory is the joy of all the land,' ha! ha! will prove a tool ready to hand—when the time comes. Pomp and power he loveth, and a taste of these in Mercia will make him eager for greater show and splendor by and by. Wait, Dunstan, wait: thou canst afford to bide thy time. The victory is thine, thine, thine!"

Thus exulting, the crafty chancellor strode away.

CHAPTER IX

CORONATION GLORIES

THE dawn of the new year witnessed the celebration of Eadwine's nuptials with the beautiful Elgiva. The nobles of the land hailed the union with joy, well knowing the queenly character of the court's loveliest maid. Many of the leading prelates pronounced a holy benediction, looking with gladness on the spotless purity of her white soul. But in some quarters, influenced especially by Dunstan, an aloofness did not escape the eyes of the king.

Fresh from his wedding he came to his coronation surrounded by the princes and nobles of the land, amid the plaudits of the people, to the royal chapel at Kingston.¹ Here the assembled

¹ "Cynges tun," or "King's town," so called from its being a royal manor, or from its peculiar connection with royalty. The coronations of several of the Saxon kings took place here. After the ceremony they took possession of the kingdom by standing upon a great stone or fragment of rock, which was long preserved in the churchyard. In the year 1735 the scene of the inaugurations—an ancient chapel, ornamented with

THE SINS OF A SAINT

ecclesiastics received him with many awe-inspiring solemnities.

It was a holy service performed by the Church with ceremonial splendor. Clad in vestments of rustling silk, they led the king, with slow, dignified steps, to the holy altar. There, in the hush of the solemn throng and with his eyes upon the Son of Mary, he made his coronation vow to govern with equity and right. There, prostrate at the feet of the primate, his head was anointed with holy oil and he was consecrated to the service of the people. There, too, the crown of gold was placed upon his brow, while the prayers of the multitude went up to heaven on the incense with which the church was laden, as he was "hal-
lowed to king."

Rising at length, the new monarch bowed before the image of the Crucified King, crossed himself, turned, and passed from the church to the guest-chamber, where, for the first time, he sate amid witan and people in regal glory, clad in purple robes and girt with crown of gold, a solemnly consecrated king.

statues of the kings crowned—perished from decay.—Milner, *History of England*, p. 95.

CORONATION GLORIES

The Saxon mind turned easily from the solemn service of the church to the gay mirth of the banquet-hall. Which he loved better, smell of incense or smell of venison, our father great and good, is not for romancer to tell. But this he must say, that into the feast-chamber trooped earl, and thane, and cleric, with festive mirth and splendor, loving the venison no less than the incense.

The gaiety and grandeur of the scene captivate and dazzle the eye.¹ In the midst the stately king, towering in his strength, resplendent with purple and cynehelm of gold. Around him the princes, dukes, and ealdormen in garments gay with embroidery of gold and lined with costly furs. The luxury of their dress and personal ornaments is witnessed by every document of the time. The thane himself boasted of his gems, his golden bracelets, and rings, and the splendor of his attire. By the side of each hung a sword in a scabbard of gold that flashed in the hall ablaze with light and luster. Their long fair locks,

¹The coronation feast took place on the first or second Sunday after the Epiphany, 956 A. D.—Stubbs, *Memorials of Dunstan*, intro., lxxxviii.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

floating on their shoulders or wound round their heads, were plaited with gold and decked with jewels. And the silken vestments of the bishops outrivalled even the glory of the nobles.

If the gaiety and grandeur of the company captivate the eye, no less will the splendor of the hall dazzle it. Its rough walls were covered with silken hangings, wrought with figures and pictures from the life of Christ and the annals of the nation. Opposite a rough painting of the crucifixion was an embroidery of Brunanburh, wrought by the ladies of Athelstane's court, while facing a representation of the Last Supper was a mythical sketch of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Three great candelabra of wrought iron hung from massive beams of oak, and between them, two on either side, four quaintly shaped horn lanterns with painted glass, in which were burning brightly countless candles. The tables at which the king and ealdormen sate were of gold and silver. Round them were flashing silver mirrors and golden candlesticks, while cups and basins and chalices of the same precious metals were ranged on the tables before them. The floor was of tessellated mar-

CORONATION GLORIES

ble curiously wrought into a rich and quaint mosaic.

Most characteristic and beautiful of all, the doors of the banquet-room were open wide, and while the fire blazed and the hall was warm and the king sate at the feast amid his nobles, soft flakes of snow were falling in the moonlight, the minstrels round the doors were making melody, and the redbreasts in the rafters singing with merry hearts, safe from the winter storm.

The viands were of the richest and most savory kind. Honey such as the soul of a Saxon loveth and eulogizes as "excelling all dishes of delicacies and peppered broths." Oysters "on the coasts of Richborough, in Britain," bred, once the joy of the epicures of Rome, as Juvenal tells. Salmon and eels from the well-stocked Thames. Land- and water-fowl of various species. Vert and venison, royalest of dishes, from the king's own preserves; and roebuck, and rabbit, and hare. And with all, goblets of sparkling wine and tankards of foaming beer, served by youthful nobles, sprightly and gay, who vied with each other for the honors of the feast.

When the banquet ended the hoary-headed

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Athelstane, as first of the duces at court, rose, amid boisterous excitement, to propose the coronation toast. The vast assembly rose with him, drew their flashing swords from scabbards of gold, lifted them high above their heads, and waited for the stirring words.

“Fealty do we swear to the king. Long may he lead us to victory. Long may the candle of God shine upon his throne. Brightly burn the fire within his hall. Sweetly bloom the flowers beneath his feet. Drink, merry men, all. Long live the king!”

Then flashed the uplifted swords, and clanged, each man’s against his neighbor’s, as loudly they swore fealty to the king. Into their scabbards they plunged them anon, and quickly turned to the wine. Raising the goblets firmly in both hands, they held them a moment aloft, shouted with one voice, “Long live the king!” and drank deeply of the sparkling cup. “Long live the king!” they panted, as they drained the goblets and sat down amid the wildest enthusiasm.

Then rose the king in his pride and greatness, and, lifting his jeweled sword above his head, cried with his manly voice, rich and deep:

CORONATION GLORIES

“ And I swear fealty to my people, and drink to the honor of them all. Long may the land flourish and our arms win renown ! ”

Thus crying, he proudly clanged his sword against the hoary-headed Athelstane's, then sheathed it quickly in its scabbard of gems, and lifting a golden goblet, drank of the red wine, amid a scene of indescribable enthusiasm.

After this the hall was given up to unbridled mirth and revelry. The wine flowed freely and the merriment increased by leaps and bounds. The minstrels and gleemen were soon introduced to carry the boisterous fun to its wildest heights.

For long the king went among the crowd with winning graces. The Benedictines, in their long black gowns and cowls,¹ were not slow to note that he even deigned to smile upon the “ secular ” clergy. The nobles did not count that ill, knowing well their safety lay endangered in the celibacy of monks rather than the marrying of priests.

¹The Benedictine's dress consisted of a long black tunic or close gown, a white close waistcoat of wool underneath, and a shirt of hair, while a cowl either covered the head or hung back on the shoulders. The hair was shaven off the greater part of the crown. The feet and legs were encased in high boots.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

But Dunstan marked it well, and laid it up in his heart, biding his time.

For long the king joined in the mirth. But when the hour grew late and revelry reached its wildest pitch, tired of the gaiety and weary with the trying day, he passed from the scene, and sought the quiet and love of the queen's chamber.

CHAPTER X

HOW A SAINT BLEW OUT GOD'S CANDLE

THE retiral of the king was the signal for the execution of a subtle scheme. His absence might have been looked on by the lay guests as a gentle slight; but the clerics, loudly proclaiming purity and honor, might have been expected to regard it with approbation, and, remembering their own repeated prohibitions, to have withdrawn with advantage to themselves from the degrading exhibitions only too common at Saxon feasts.

Not so. The Benedictines, inflamed with hate, were ready to seize any excuse for a quarrel, and Dunstan's genius readily supplied the moving thought. It was with delight unfeigned he watched the king slip from the scene and make for the chamber of Elgiva. His pale face glowed with glee as there flashed through his brain the scheme of Eadwine's ruin.

Carried away by one of those ecstatic bursts of passion that eclipse the soul of man and make

THE SINS OF A SAINT

him for a time either maniac or devil, Dunstan looked on the love of these twin souls and determined that out of this should come their ruin. Carried by the brilliancy and subtlety of his scheme, he leaped with the light that danced in his eyes, and laughed at the pain of the strife.

His keen sight foresaw the line events would take, foresaw it as if already he were in the thick of the battle and felt the heated breath of the combatants. Transported from the beginning to the end, driven through it all by swiftly moving brain-power, every move distinctly visible in the lurid light of fancy, the crafty chancellor chuckled with triumph and smiled with exultation.

Turning among the throng, he encountered Oslac in the midst of the merriment, and called him without the blazing hall.

The candle of God was high in the heaven, brightly set in the vault of night, blue, deep blue, save for some black clouds that moved ominously in the sky. The fields and trees were covered with nature's whitest, softest robe, resplendent with the pale moonlight. But the chancellor felt not its

GOD'S CANDLE

cooling beams, and thought little of the purity of nature's whitest, softest robe.

“Ha, ha, ha, Oslac, holy monk of Glastonbury!”

“What now, Dunstan?”

“Thy time hath come, the time for which thou hast prayed so long.”

“What meanest thou?”

“The bark of opportunity sails along the stream of thy desire and waits for thee to-night. Embark, set sail, and it will bring thee to Elgiva's arms. The hour of thy revenge hath come and Fate hath laid thy foe prostrate at thy feet. Strike, and he will rise no more.”

“But where? I see not.”

“Hast thou, then, been so merry with the wine that thou hast not seen the insult he hath given us all? He hath back to the harlot! Nay! Do not start! It is not lawful for him to take his cousin to wife. The decree hath long gone forth that makes such marriage void.”

“‘Harlot!’ Elgiva the beautiful branded so? Nay, thou'rt jesting, Dunstan! And what of Holy Church? Will its ears listen to its own voice and its hands obey its own behest?

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Has the decree gone forth to make them do that?"

"Fire thy hatred, Oslac, and fan thine ambition, and all wilt be as thou dost desire. Thine is the voice that must speak. There are the ears of the bishops ready to listen, waiting only some pretext for strife. Now is the hour of thy revenge. The bark waits: soon the sails will set. Wilt thou embark?"

"Yea, Dunstan, with all my heart."

"Come quickly, then, and hiss it in the ears of Odo and the priests of Canterbury."

"Come, then, and thou wilt hear the 'holy monk of Glastonbury' hiss it forth with power."

And so speaking, Oslac led the way into the blazing banquet-hall.

"Let me join them first," whispered Dunstan, "and prepare thy way. Remember, Holy Church will fight thy battle, and bring thee to thy goal, if only thy voice is loud to-night against the sin of Eadwine."

And so speaking, Dunstan turned to join the priests of Canterbury.

Here was Odo, primate of England, an old and cunning intriguer. Mark his withered,

GOD'S CANDLE

shrunken face, plowed deeply with the sins that made him Archbishop of Canterbury. Mark, too, his restless eyes that gleam with baffled hate and search for vain excuse. A Dane, his heart is with his kindred in the land, as he proved in Eadwine's father's time by aiding the return of Anlaf, after his great defeat at Brunanburh, and by pressing on the English king's acceptance a treaty that parted the kingdom with the Dane. For Church and kindred he will attempt great things.

Of the rest note two. Kynesige, Bishop of Lichfield, the first bishopric in the province of Canterbury, a fleshy man, whose forte was not in fasting but in flattering the noble Odo; and Sigwulf, a youthful kinsman of the primate, and well named. Ready at all times to do the prelate's bidding, he will yet perform a deed that will make us stand aghast. A wild barbarian lurks beneath his Benedictine gown.

"'Tis a grievous insult, Odo," said Dunstan, as he joined them. "An insult offered to us all, and chiefly to Holy Church."

"Ay, Dunstan; and Kynesige here can not bring forth one avenging thought. Methinks he

THE SINS OF A SAINT

must have fasted all night long and now feels faint. What thinkest thou?"

"That Holy Church must act at once!"

"But how?"

At this moment Oslac came, and loudly hissed in Odo's ears:

"He hath back to the harlot! He loves her chamber better than banquet-hall graced by Holy Church. Have you forgotten? It is not lawful for him to take his cousin to wife. Why doth not Holy Church pronounce decree, and rend him from her?"

The prelates started and clapped their hands. The union of cousins the canons of the Roman Church prohibit, without the express dispensation of the Pope—a restriction which tended to augment authority, and which was freely used as a weapon of malice and extortion.

Under ordinary circumstances little would have been said of such a marriage, and the fact that it was approved by other church dignitaries is witnessed by a document of the time. Till now it had never been thought of as a pretext for strife. But a slight transgression of ecclesiastical law becomes a heinous sin in

GOD'S CANDLE

the eyes of a priest who hates the witless offender.¹

This, therefore, appeared to the prelates ample cause for urgent action against the offending king, and his retiral a specious opportunity for opening strife. They scarce needed the glowing approbation of Dunstan and his revelation of papal aggrandizement. The vision floated before their eyes and added the sense of right to the feeling of hate: now could they act with might, for was not "law," "right," upon their side? Even the fleshy Kynesige panted to begin.

"Let us away to the chamber, and drag him from her arms, noble Odo. Let us teach the sinner Holy Church must be honored. Send me, most noble Odo, and though they sleep on bridal couch I shall tear him from her and drag him to the banquet-hall."

¹ It is to be regretted that we do not know the exact degree of relationship between the royal victims. It may have been too close in the eyes of the stricter clergy; yet we can not close our eyes to the fact that it was long acquiesced in by the English nobles; nor, had Eadwig shown himself more pliant to the pretensions of Dunstan, might we ever have heard of it at all. History, deprived of all its materials, will here fail to do even late justice to the sufferers; but it will not fail to stamp with its enduring brand the brutal conduct of their persecutors.—Kemble, *Saxons in England*, ii, 409.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Yea, now is the time to strike,” urged Dunstan. And the Benedictines shouted loud approval.

The wrinkled face of the old primate puckered with glee and needed little exhortation.

“Go, then, at once. Bring him back to the feast. Overawe him with the judgment of Holy Church. Force him to come. Impose on him our will and make him obedient to our commands. Haste!”

Oslac watched them go with riotous delight. His eye caught Dunstan’s as he marched away, and he saw in it the same look of triumph that leaped in exultation after his great victory in the witenagemot. It pierced to Oslac’s heart and roused like exultation.

“Ha, ha, ha! The monk of Glastonbury shall have his day! Eadwine’s doom is signed and sealed to-night! God pity the man who stands in the way of a priest! Pray on, Oslac! It pays thee to say thy prayers! Cross thyself well, and one day thou mayest yet be king, with Elgiva for thine own!”

So saying, the holy monk stepped out into the night. The candle of God was out. Great banks

GOD'S CANDLE

of black clouds swept across the sky. Dense darkness was upon the face of the earth, broken only by lightning flashes that leaped from the frowning banks and made ghostly the mantle of snow. Oslac looked up into the sky. A big cloud right above him cracked and thundered, and the lightning blazed forth and blinded him. Superstitious as his times, he quaked with dread and hurried back into the blazing banquet-hall. It seemed as if the Lord God had clothed the heavens with sackcloth and sent avenging swords of light.

CHAPTER XI

DISPELLING A DREAM

THE king found the love and quiet of the chamber soothing after the noise and tumult of the day. The coronation, long anticipated by himself and Elgiva, had come and gone. Now it behoved them to put into shape the dreams that had long thronged their youthful minds, and to realize the brightly-tinted thoughts they royally had fostered.

The noble nature of their minds had crowded all their dreams with visions of love and mercy, while their pure hearts had clothed their aspirations with the white robes of innocence and good-will. The visions floated before their eyes to-night, and lingered sweetly while the angels struck their harps and wafted themselves away on the tuneful waves of their own angelic melodies.

Together with their dreams they lingered, smiling happily and stroking each other with lov-

DISPELLING A DREAM

ing hands. The love-light danced in their blue eyes, transfiguring each with a glory seen only by the soul of the other. Beautiful before, in this glory they were heavenly, each in the eyes of each. The cynehelm of gold lay at their feet, and words more precious to them than crowns rose from their loving hearts.

“Thou shalt be with me all the days, Elgiva, my beautiful. Thou art my spouse, and with me shalt share the glory. The light that falls upon the throne will kiss thy face, as I do now, and make thee a queen so fair that men shall envy the homage paid thy name.”

“Loving well, thou shalt reign well, Edwy, my fair. With love we came to know each other, and to be thinking ever for each other’s good. So must it be in the great world, methinks. The heart leads the way, and love illumines the path of duty. I know this, Edwy, for love hath taught me, my own fair king.”

“Thou art beautiful in thy love as in thy life, and hast said a beautiful thing and true, Elgiva. With love we shall reign, and win the hearts of the people and serve the Christ.”

“Then no strife shall happen in our time,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Edwy, and peace shall rest upon the land, like a heavenly benediction or an angel's psalm."

"More. Justice and truth shall stand around the throne. These are the rocks on which great realms are built, noble foundations that never fail. We have dreamed of them so oft, Elgiva, we should know them well, and lay them deep under the beautiful kingdom we hope to build."

"Thou art great, and wise, and noble, my king; and when the people come to know thee as I do—I and my heart—then will they love and honor thee like thine own fond wife and queen."

"My beautiful, thou art more to me than praise of man. Let truth be my guide through life and integrity my consolation! Then, come what may, with thy love life will be laden with summer flowers and the days be full of glory. But without thee the sun would sink in sorrow, and night with wintry storms come on."

"Loving thy people, Edwy, as thy queen, life will be full of happiness and peace. No evil will come nigh us, no sorrow weep in our hearts, and no blood stain the white flowers of our soul."

"Ah, my children," broke in the gray queen-

DISPELLING A DREAM

mother, looking up from her embroidery of gold, and smoothing with white fingers the lines of sorrow on her brow, "Ah, my children, your dreams are too bright for a treacherous world. Oh, that they might be realized! But my heart beats wildly."

"Oh, mother, do not be foretelling evil and break the frail cup of our dreams. To think we shall attain them brings us near their consummation, and gives us hope and pleasure as we dream. May not God send dreams to make us soar above the painful lot, and paint our lives with pleasing colors that we should enjoy while they last?"

"'While they last.' Thou hast well said, my child. But how long? The rainbow lifts its glory in the sky and shows its wonders for a little time, then vanishes away. The dewdrop nestles in the lily's breast, catches the crimson of the dawn, and laughs for a while with the golden sun, but is gone ere noon. So is it with the dreams of man."

"Surely, mother, life is not so sad. The sun, rising in splendor, sinks as oft in equal glory of crimson and gold, having laughed in the heavens all day long. May it not be so with life?"

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Is the beauty of its dawn, with all its bright hopes and visions, to be put to shame ere evening comes? Has life no enduring glory, no splendid sunsets, for those who hope and trust in God?"

"Life indeed may have a splendid sunset, yet is the journey made through circles of sorrow. The children of the sun look down on a world of woe. No daughter of Eve escapes the vale of tears. Many among the sons of God can not always pray."

"Thou art sad to-night, queen-mother, and dost sing us a dirge for our coronation ode," broke in the king. "We looked for a sweetened draft, but thou hast given us vinegar mingled with gall. Must a wearied woman become a weeping prophet? Hast thou no other song to sing?"

"I would not dishearten thee, fair Eadwine, but fortify thy heart against the evil day. There are dark paths for life's fairest children, and thorny roads for the tenderest feet. To know beforehand doth but garrison the heart, and fit it better to withstand the foe."

"But to take the golden cup, mix the sweet draft, and drink, ere it turns to gall, is surely good and pleasant?"

DISPELLING A DREAM

“It may be. But the gall may be nearer than we dream.”

The last word had scarce been spoken when sound of footsteps was heard in the corridor without. The king leaped to his feet and advanced toward the door of the royal chamber, while the queen started up and turned toward the queen-mother with eyes that told the fear of her heart.

The impatient intruders beat the door and flung it open ere the king reached it.

“Ho! Here thou art!” cried Dunstan, rushing into the private chamber. “Fie, sir! Fie! Leaving the company of bishops and nobles for a woman’s lap! Who would have thought that one so young would have learned so soon the way of life? Fie, sir! Fie!”

“Shame upon thee, sir,” cried the fleshy Kynesige, with much bravado. “Thou must learn to play the man among the people. The night is still young and the wine red. Shame, that thou prefer’st a woman’s kisses to the people’s mirth!”

“Fie, sir! Fie!” shouted some Benedictines behind, thick of speech and not oversteady of limb.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“What means this?” cried the king, drawing his sword. “Back, every one of you, on peril of your life! Such rude intrusion on our privacy is sore displeasing. Back!”

“Nay! We have come to bring thee back with us,” answered Dunstan haughtily. “The nobles call for thee, slighted by thine absence. The feast fails without thy royal presence.”

“My nobles know better how to treat their king than wish for Dunstan’s insolence. Go, and tell them Eadwine told thee so.”

“Nay, young sir, nay,” cried the fleshy bishop, moving threateningly toward the king. “The noble Odo, primate of all England, and greater even than its king, commands us to compel thee to return. So come thou must, young sir; come thou must.”

The beautiful Elgiva leaped forward at these daring words and flung her arms around the king.

“Back, sirs!” she cried, panting with anger. “Back, as the king commands you! Away, and let not your madness lead you to folly.”

“Peace, queen! They will not dare to harm us. Go, sirs, as we command you, or on the morrow ye shall rue this insolence.”

DISPELLING A DREAM

“‘Queen’? Harlot rather, who hath entrapped the king!” answered Dunstan. “Well must she know it is not lawful to be thy wife. The Holy Church hath long decreed it so and now commands thee to forswear the woman and return to thy people.”

“Hush, hound!” cried the king, flashing with anger and raising his sword to strike.

And Dunstan fell back a pace.

“Nay, sir, nay! Holy Church hath issued her decree, so come thou must,” roared the fleshy bishop, as he flung himself with all his weight upon the angry king.

“Come thou must,” echoed the Benedictines, as they closed around him.

Exerting his great strength, the king threw the bulky Kynesige from him. Dashing forward, he plunged his sword into one of the advancing monks. Withdrawing his blade, dripping with blood, he plunged it into another, and yet another. But they pressed upon him eagerly and sought the more to overpower him.

“Seize him!” shouted the bishop. “Seize him, in the name of God and Odo!”

Thus incited, the maddened monks fell furi-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

ously on the king. Sweeping his sword, he kept them at reach for a time, his eyes flashing like a stag at bay.

“Seize him!” shouted Dunstan and Kynesige together.

And the Benedictines rushed upon him from every side with oaths and curses.

Plunging his sword into the foremost, Eadwine loudly shouted defiance. But ere he could withdraw his weapon again they had seized and overpowered him.

In vain he struggled and tried to hurl them from him. In vain he shouted and threatened them with death. In vain the queen screamed and entreated them to go.

“Hold him! Hold him!” roared the angry bishop. “Drag him from the foul queen’s chamber!”

“Away with him!” cried Dunstan, flinging wide the door. “Away with him! He must be taught to do the bidding of Holy Church, or to feel the power of her anger!”

CHAPTER XII

VISIONS OF SORROW

WHEN they dragged the king from the royal chamber the queen uttered a heart-breaking cry, and fell to the ground as one stunned. In a moment the dreams of a life had been rudely chased away.

The anguish of her heart was piteous to behold. Bitter tears flowed from fountains filled with sorrow. Pain was written deeply over all her face. Her eyes, streaming with the bitter tears, glared around wildly. Her hands pressed hard against her ears, in which were ringing and echoing the foul words Dunstan had hurled at her.

Anon she rose, trembling and deaf-like, steadied herself a moment, flitted hither and hither in a paroxysm of grief, ran toward the door, shrieking "Edwy, Edwy, my king, my king!" then fell and swooned away.

Her dreams that night were strange, and

THE SINS OF A SAINT

many: wild fancies of the brain entangled in the web of destiny.

She seemed to come to herself on a wild stretch of sea where all was dark; and the winds of hell were howling on the shore. Anon the sun rose and the sea calmed. Suddenly countless children appeared upon the beach and sported in the water. And the air rang with their cry of boisterous mirth.

Their voices anon blended in a song of plaintive melody. It floated over the waters and was carried by the winds away over the sunlit sea. And as it died away it seemed as if it were calling her to follow. The children, sporting in the waters, smiled on her and urged her to come. But when she dipped her white feet in the water, lo, the sea had turned to blood!

And as she recoiled from the awful visage, lo, and of a sudden the air became laden with countless spirits, mocking her and fluttering round her on tiny feathered wings. Each had the face of Dunstan, and every one was crying: "Harlot-queen! Harlot-queen!" Unable to listen, she covered her ears firmly with her hands, and with a shriek fled along the shore of the sea.

VISIONS OF SORROW

Running at full speed, she seemed to flee for hours pursued by the spirits crying "Harlot-queen." On, till at last she came to the end of the sea, where their cries ceased. Exhausted, she fell, and the sun set in the far-off waters, blood-red and angry.

Then a long darkness came on, in which she lay as if asleep. Slowly the moon rose over lofty mountains, and filled the valleys with its silvery light. The fields were covered with frosted snow that sparkled in the pale-blue night.

Anon great tall women strutted about, clad in weird costumes, with stately, awing mien. Their feet did not seem to touch the ground, for they left no prints upon the snow.

And as she looked they changed from weird women to sweet, pale-faced nuns, softly clad in whitest raiments with golden crosses on their breasts, and diadems bejeweled on their brows.

Suddenly they knelt upon the snow, and looked every one with clasped hands toward the lofty mountains. On the summit of a peak was a figure with arms outstretched, lurid against the moon. Slowly it descended the mountain, moving

THE SINS OF A SAINT

steadily and surely toward the spot where the queen stood.

And as it came near, lo, it was White Heart, pale-faced and stricken with sorrow. Her white robes were torn and her eyes red with weeping. And as she came through the snow her feet were bleeding: and the footprints she had made, as far as eye could reach, were seen to be stained with blood. From her hands, too, drops of blood were falling, and as they fell they cried as with a human voice: "Vengeance! Vengeance!"

The kneeling nuns, sweet and pale-faced, unclasped their hands and held them up before the queen's eyes. On each was written in blood: "Avenge her! Avenge her!"

Silently, without word or speech, save the prayer each lifted on her hands, the pale-faced nuns then rose, and slowly moved away over the mountain. And as they went, each planted her feet in the blood-stained footprints of White Heart, and moved in a long line slowly up the mountain, till they reached the summit. There they all stood still a moment, lifted their hands again toward the queen, and cried with one voice: "Avenge her! Avenge her!"

VISIONS OF SORROW

And ere the distant sound reached Elgiva's ears they had disappeared on the other side.

Then the queen turned to speak to little White Heart, pale-faced and stricken with sorrow. She touched her torn robes and found her own fingers become stained with blood. She looked into White Heart's eyes and read a great sorrow. But she could not speak one word of solace. And the blood kept dropping from her hands, crying louder and louder still: "Vengeance! Vengeance!"

And while she gazed she did not notice that by White Heart's side stood an old warrior clothed with the garments of vengeance and clad with zeal as a cloak. His sword was on fire with wrath, and his helmet a flame of indignation. Taking her by the hand, he led her slowly away, whispering softly: "Fear not, White Heart! God will avenge thee!"

And as the old warrior led little White Heart away, the queen burst into violent tears and woke; she felt as if her heart were breaking, and her sobs sounded piteously in her own ears.

Anon she fell asleep again and dreamed once more.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

She seemed as if she were lying in a field of flowers. The larks were singing in the heavens and the blackbirds fluting their rich, deep notes in the wood near by. She rose in the bright sunshine and played with the flowers till her life bounded with gladness.

Stooping to pluck a pale-pink rose from a wild bush on the wood's edge, she pricked her finger with a thorn. Pulling it out, she lay down again among the flowers and slept.

And as she slept she dreamed a dream within a dream.

She lay in the field of flowers, but every rose she plucked pricked her and every flower she culled was stained with her own blood. Tiny drops lay in the heart of each.

And lifting her eyes across the field, she saw the king coming, riding on a restless charger, white as driven snow and covered with beauty spots. And in his haste he made as if he would ride past her.

Calling to him, he stayed his rein, dismounted, and stooped to kiss her. But suddenly he drew back, his face white with anguish, crying: "O God! God! God!"

VISIONS OF SORROW

Hastily mounting, the king rode away, wailing a wild song of war, and vengeance, and death.

But ere he left the field of flowers his steed fell under him, dead. And, lo, it was no longer white, but jet-black and glossy, with all its beauty spots marked with blood!

Then round the royal charger came a great company of Saxon children with long flaxen curls, their gold shining in the golden light. And they lifted up their voices to heaven, crying:

“Avenge, Lord, avenge!”

And they wept sorely.

And suddenly the children turned to Saxon warriors, old and gray and scarred and blood-stained. Their eyes were red with weeping and no man among the rough company sought to hide his tears. Each grasped his spear strongly, looking steadily in front, and wailed the same wild song of war the king had sung as he rode away.

And when the queen's eyes turned from the weeping warriors to where the charger lay, lo, the steed had changed to a long shield on which lay an angel clothed in dazzling raiment. And as the queen looked on her, the angel rose on the

THE SINS OF A SAINT

shield and beckoned the warriors to follow her even to death.

On her brow was written in flaming gold, "JUSTICE," while on a soft, white arm she raised to the warriors was written "VENGEANCE"—written in blood that spread over her arm like letters on paper that will not carry.

Drawn by the beckoning arm, the wondering queen approached the angel.

And lo, as she drew near, the angel lay as if dead upon the long shield. And her garments seemed as a shroud. And by the side of the shield sate the king, bent with pain.

And when the queen drew near, she knelt by the head of the dead angel, and, with trembling hand, lifted the cover from the angel's face.

And lo, it was her own face, set in an agony of death!

With a scream, she started up right on her couch, and awoke, not knowing whether she were living or dead.

For a long while she lay tossing on her bed, dozing and starting upright many times. At

VISIONS OF SORROW

length, wearied and fearful, she fell asleep again, and dreamed once more.

She lay on the long shield in the place of the angel. Edwy sate by her side bent with pain. The Saxon children stood around her weeping. Their long flaxen curls lay on their shoulders and glistened in the golden light.

Anon, they knelt in the field of flowers and sang a hymn, plaintive and sad, whose words she could not hear, save its loud refrain, oft-recurring:

Son of Mary, in thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send.

And then the old warriors' voices rose in her ears. Looking round, she could not see them in the field of flowers. Their music fell faintly on her spirit as if sung by souls afar off. Straining her ears to catch their song, lo, it was the hymn the children sang. Deep, low, sepulchral, came the wild refrain, breaking with passion:

Son of Mary, in thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send.

And when the last echo fell faintly on the queen's ear she turned upon the long shield, surprised to find herself no longer clad in the

THE SINS OF A SAINT

shroud of death, but wearing the robes of eternal life. She raised herself on her elbow and listened. And the far-off music of the old warriors entered her soul. Leaping upright, she lifted her hands toward heaven, and joined in the loud refrain:

Son of Mary, in thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send.

Then she awoke to find herself standing upright on her couch. A splinter of oak was in her hand. and her face was wet with tears.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR THE HONOR OF THE KING

THE morrow showed the king the insult could not be regarded as due to excess of wine. The overbearing insolence of Odo and Dunstan proved the active operation of a plot to separate him from Elgiva and subject the kingdom to the spiritual powers. Young as he was, he was not slow to apprehend the pretext of the clerics and to foresee the manner in which the Church would seek to have its way. The continent furnished an object-lesson to England, during the preceding years of the century, of the Roman pontiff's desires for temporal supremacy. It was evident the same desire had reached England's shore and entered the hearts of Odo and Dunstan.

The pretext for strife roused the indignation of the king. His righteous spirit stood aghast at the hypocrisy of the monks, many of them burdened with lives shamefully immoral, presuming to damn him for a marriage pure and holy in the

THE SINS OF A SAINT

sight of God, if not strictly according to the will of Rome. Fires of anger burned in his heart, and the flames would fain have leaped at once on the priestly offenders. With difficulty the king restrained himself, and gave his mind to meeting the subtle movement with the care demanded.

The pure soul of Elgiva pointed out the path of honor. The kindred spirit of the king saw it, and chose for himself and his queen the way of blood and battle rather than the path of base humiliation. The strength of his nature arose as the strength of the foe appeared, and the danger that threatened the nation. Just liberty of action and independence in religion his native English spirit demanded, and would maintain, against all the wiles and movements of the Roman party.

The tears of the queen laid bare the stones of the road along which her tender feet must travel, yet would she follow the king with heart and courage. For there had also settled deep in her breast the sense of wrong and outrage. There was breaking from her soul a cry for punishment, just and terrible, only death could silence.

Upon Dunstan as the genius of the plot and

HONOR OF THE KING

the leader of the party of revolt the king determined first to act. The move was beset with peculiar difficulties, but, if successful, would probably defeat the policy of Odo and the Church for a time. The strength of that dominant spirit, Eadwine knew, led and controlled the whole movement against the throne. The withered primate and the fleshy bishop would change their policy, if only for lack of brilliant thoughts and powers of administration, could the clever chancellor be driven from the scene of action.

But how to do this? The court was crowded with Dunstan's friends. Throughout the reign of the pious but feeble Eadred they had held undisputed sway, greedily seizing every office death laid open or force could gain. The royal counselors were men Holy Church could trust to look after its interests and push its claims. The whisper of the great chancellor became the will of each. His genius had inspired his friends with confidence in his powers to win the day.

Among those friends were the hoary-headed Athelstane and Alfhere, the king's own kinsman, with many other great and powerful men. In all their hearts beat the hope that Dunstan would lead

THE SINS OF A SAINT

them on to greater power, and carry them, with him, through any mountain that might for a moment block the way.

On certain other nobles, great and good, the king felt he could rely. And they were not few. They had watched through two reigns the growing arrogance of the Church, and felt the time had come to seek to check its progress. The haughtiness of Dunstan particularly had exasperated them. There were men among them who had fought with the fair Athelstane at Brunanburh, and well remembered that "great fight" for independence. There were young earls, too, whose swords leaped from their scabbards in defense of the rights of manhood and the independence of the "secular" clergy. They had listened to the cry of brothers and kinsmen serving men in holy things, and recognized their social sanctities. They had noted, too, the cunning of the sentence against the king. The chivalry of their hearts closed their ranks round the fair form of the persecuted queen, and formed a square that glittered with lances good and true.

Among these loyal nobles mark especially Eadmund, whose love for the king may only be

HONOR OF THE KING

likened to that of Jonathan for David, and Alfric, and Ethelsige. To them must be added that jewel in the Saxon crown, the king's *comitatus*, composed of men of honor, sworn to sacrifice life itself in the service of the king. Stewards, cup-bearers, chamberlains, and grooms, in time of peace bound to perform the most menial of services, they formed in time of war a body-guard for the king, pledged to fight for him every battle, and to die with him, if need be, rather than leave him among the slain. The sense of honor was keen among them and was proof against bribery or intrigue. Whatever the fortunes of the king, they would share them all, choose death gladly for his sake, holding "death is better for every warrior than a life of shame."

The anger of these men, nobles by service and nobles by birth, was roused by the hypocrisy of the Holy Church into holy scorn of it, that made them unjustly cynical as to any good thing coming thence.

"Pity the day," said Eadmund, "that Gregory in Rome looked upon the fair countenances of our captive ancestors, and sent Augustine to make the Angles coheirs with the angels of heaven.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

From the time the good saint came, chanting litanies and elevating the silver cross, we have lived in fear of sorcery and craft, like Ethelbert of old.¹ From the first they have cared more for Romish supremacy and ecclesiastical advancement than the cure of souls or the making of angels!"

"What else could be expected," added Alfric, "of men who have ever put fraud before truth, and built up the fabric of Holy Church on foundations of artifice and superstition? Like Laurentius, the good saint's wily successor, they have endured stripes, whether inflicted by apostles or priests, if only the 'last attempt on the mind of Eadbald' might prove effective."²

¹ The king, Ethelbert, apprehending sorcery under a roof would only consent to meet Augustine under the open sky.

² Laurentius, having lost control of Eadbald's will, was on the point of retiring to the Continent when the event was averted by stratagem. On the eve of his departure he ordered his bed to be prepared in the church at Canterbury. That morning he appeared before the king with the marks of stripes upon his person, and on Eadwald inquiring whence they had come, he said that, in the dead of night, the apostle Peter had visited his couch, and scourged him for thinking of deserting his flock. Dismayed at the spectacle and apprehending a similar visitation, the king submitted to the waters of baptism. Lingard, the Roman historian, aware of its fraudulency, converts the transaction into Laurentius making "a last attempt on the mind of Eadbald."

HONOR OF THE KING

“Had the Northumbrian ealdorman known,” cried the dark-eyed Ethelsige, “of the craft behind the new doctrine he would have thought him twice ere he made his pretty speech¹ to the fair king’s namesake of the north and have voted against its adoption in the realm.”

“And, to speak truth,” continued Alfric, rubbing his scarred brow, “their crafty schemes have proved effective with other kings than Eadwald. The cloister and the good Saint Swithin taught the weak-brained Ethelwulf his duty to the Holy Church!”

“And to the good Saint Swithin,” broke in Ethelsige. “For was not one of the first acts the

¹ This speech deserves quotation, not merely for the appropriateness of the image employed, and the high poetic feeling, but as a vivid sketch of ancient manners: “Thou hast seen, O king, when the fire blazed, and the hall was warm, and thou wast seated at the feast amidst thy nobles, whilst the winter storm raged without and the snow fell, how some solitary sparrow has flown through, scarcely entered at one door before it disappeared at the other. Whilst it is in the hall it feels not the storm, but after the space of a moment it returns to whence it came, and thou beholdest it no longer, nor knowest where nor to what it may be exposed. Such, as it appears to me, is the life of man—a short moment of enjoyment, and we know not whence we came nor whither we are going. If this new doctrine brings us any greater certitude of the future, I for one vote for its adoption.”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

cloister-made king performed to make his tutor Bishop of Winchester and chancellor of the realm? The good saint had taught him well, no doubt!"

"Cramped in native force," went on Alfric, grimly smiling, "captivated by superstitions, and enslaved to papal dominion, he served the Holy Church right well, presented her with a tenth of the royal domains, and freed all ecclesiastical lands from secular burdens!"

"Then went on a holy pilgrimage to Rome," broke in Ethelsige again, "squandered his country's wealth in ostentatious gifts to the Pope, the clergy, and the churches, and was paid back with the papal benediction! But on his way home, to show how good and pious the heart of the Church's darling really was, he forgot to remember his Saxon wife, Osberga, and her four sons and daughter, and contracted a marriage with Judith, daughter of Charles the Bold, then only twelve years old!"

"But justice did not forget," put in Eadmund. "His action roused popular resentment, and forced him in the weakness of his sin to divide his kingdom. Then he died, denounced by

HONOR OF THE KING

the Church and hated by the people. But his sin lived and grew. Judith, casting her net for a king, drew in Ethelbald, the eldest son of the cloister-king. He married his youthful 'step-mother,' incurred public disgrace, and ended his days soon amid storms of indignation. So the sin worked itself out, in shame and confusion, before the eyes of the people."

"Nor Osberga, in her shame, did justice forget to honor," broke in Eadwine the king. "For one day she happened to show her children a book of Anglo-Saxon poetry, saying: 'Whichever of you can first learn this book shall have it as a gift.' Drawn by the beauty of the illuminated capitals, the youngest applied himself to the task, won the prize, and thus acquired his taste for reading. So was Osberga honored in her shame. For posterity will not forget her when it thinks of the great Alfred, her son, and the father of English literature."

"Nor will it forget thee, O king," answered Eadmund bravely, "for daring to resist the power of popes and prelates unscrupulously used. Monks may defile thy memory, but truth will out and justice triumph in the end. Long

THE SINS OF A SAINT

have they used this marriage law to suit their own purposes and extort the price of dispensations. Long have they brought the innocent and ignorant to wretchedness and shame. Long have they entered the private sanctuary of home and torn asunder, at the holy altar there, men and women truly wed according to the laws of God and the dictates of humanity. But the day of retribution must come! And happy thou, my king, if thou dost lead the way. Strike, and fear not, for justice fights for thee. Strike, and the spirits of men and women, saddened and ruined by Holy Church, will pray for the victory. Thrice blessed will be the day that sees men free to live according to the noblest impulse given by God to the human heart!"

The king listened, well pleased, to the speech of Eadmund. And when preparations for the conflict were complete, he entrusted to him the task of bringing the chiefs to judgment.

To begin, sentence of outlawry was pronounced against the wily Dunstan. Driven from court, he took refuge at Glastonbury.

And thence the king determined to banish him the realm.

HONOR OF THE KING

With a troop of the king's guard, Eadmund made ready to carry out the royal will.

“Go!” cried the king. “Remember his insult to the throne and his insolence to all the nobles. Remember our queen and avenge the outrage on her. In the name of God, and of all that is pure and noble, strike, and spare not!”

“Aye,” cried the queen, “let your swords be on fire, and your helmets aflame with indignation! Strike, and spare not!”

Thus commanded, the brave young champions of justice mounted their steeds and rode away, bent on executing the king's commands with heart and might upon the mischief-making head of Dunstan.

CHAPTER XIV

A BENEDICTINE GOWN

RIDING hard, Eadmund and his troop came, on the evening of the second day, to the broad expanse of Salisbury Plain, and encamped amid the ruins of Stonehenge.¹ The sun was setting, and the long shadows of the mystic pile lay across the land. Far over the vast space the fading light touched the distant mounds, and lifted them to passing view. Then the crimson turned to gray and gray to blackest night. And in the darkness naught was heard save the hoot of the owl and the lonesome screech of the bird of prey.

Drawing their cloaks around them, the king's

¹The stupendous ruins of Stonehenge, situate in Salisbury Plain, that vast graveyard of generations long since passed away, were formerly supposed to be the ruins of Druidical temples, but they are not mentioned by any ancient writer. It is quite uncertain to what age we should refer these and other rude stone monuments of the prehistorical Britons. In the compound word "Stone-henge," the latter part, "henge," probably signifies the impost, which is suspended on two uprights.—Guest in Proceedings of Philological Society, vol. vi, p. 33, quoted by Hume.

A BENEDICTINE GOWN

troops lay down within the mystic circle, and waited impatiently for dawn. The dense darkness muffled the sounds of the night and stark loneliness startled the mind with fear. The ear pricked itself at every movement, and the eye vainly sought to pierce the great gloom. But weariness and sleep pressed more clamorously than hoot of owl or screech of vulture, and soon the whole troop slumbered. Another day, and they hoped to have the saint in hand.

At midnight Eadmund was roused by a loud, piercing cry and the sound as of two men running. Leaping to his feet, he strained his eyes in the gloom and listened.

Suddenly the sound of runners ceased, and a noise as of two men struggling for life came through the darkness.

“In the name of the king!” shouted a voice strangely familiar.

“Never!” rang the answer, loud, defiant.

And a great curse echoed and reechoed throughout the mystic pile.

Then a pale, ghostly light glowed in the darkness whence came the sounds, and a broken shout of agony trembled in the air.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Eadmund hastened toward the ghostly light, and came to a stand at the western stone of the mystic pile. He lifted his hands and stood aghast at the sight which met him.

A trooper lay huddled against the stone. His face and shoulders were glowing with pale, phosphorescent light. His eyes were strained with sudden agony, and his body limp in death. And in the grip of his right hand was a Benedictine gown.

Stooping to lift the gown, Eadmund was conscious of a strange and powerful odor. In a trice he felt his senses reel, and he would have fallen had not the strong arms of Alfric held him.

In a few minutes the whole troop had roused itself and gazed on the ghostly light that lay on their dead comrade. And as many as stooped to touch the Benedictine gown reeled and fell. And the fingers of all who touched it glowed with the pale phosphorescent light.

“A Benedictine spy!” shouted Eadmund. “Scour the Plain and find him!”

Away the troopers sped over the broad Plain; and their fingers, pale and phosphorescent, shone like glowworms in the night.

A BENEDICTINE GOWN

Far and wide they scoured the vast expanse. But no sight or sound of the owner of the Benedictine gown could they find.

“To Glastonbury!” cried Eadmund. “Quick, or we may ride in vain!”

And leaving the Benedictine gown in the grip of their comrade’s hand, the king’s troops mounted their startled steeds and galloped away.

CHAPTER XV

A SAINT AT HOME

ON the wings of the wind we come to Glastonbury before the king's troops arrive. At once we are on enchanted ground and tread lightly as we gaze on places hoary with age, sacred, and romantic. Home of saints, and burial place of kings, the air is laden with prayers or beating with martial deeds.

Situated in the midst of beautiful fen-land, Glastonbury was an island town in those old romantic days. "Ynyswytryn," our British fathers called it, and when they had hewn down the thick underwood and found apple-trees grow luxuriantly round, "The Isle of Avalon" or "The Isle of Apples." Encircled by streams and well-watered lands, the place possessed many natural charms. Unforced fruits and willing comforts met on every hand. Beauty in profusion and food in plenty lay along the valley. Nature, sang the poets, had enchanted the land, poured

A SAINT AT HOME

out her wealth upon this spot, and cultivated it herself, despising rustic hands. Thus—

The fertile plains with corn and herds were proud,
And golden apples shone in every wood.

Home of saints, and burial-place of kings,
first came to this enchanted land, tradition sayeth,
Saint Joseph of Arimathea to preach the gospel
of the *Nazarene*. Here, in the course of days,
the arms that laid the dead body of the *Saviour*
in the rich man's tomb found a resting-place with
many tokens of his *Master's* presence.

Here was born the good *Saint Patrick*—
whether certainly the same as gave poor Ireland
peace no man knoweth—and labored long in weary
age, till like a patriarch he died.

Here, too, came the good *King Arthur*, first
breathing war and vengeance on *Meluas* for the
sake of *Guinevere*, and then, after many battles,
to heal him of his grievous wound. At Camlin,
sorely hurt in fearful fray, he bade *Sir Bedivere*
farewell and turned his clouded eyes—

To the Island Valley of Avalon,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

And bowery meadows, crowned with summer sun,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

But, in place of healing, *Arthur* found a tomb, and lies with sweet *Guinevere*, sleeping peacefully in much-beloved Avalon.

Here, also, *King Alfred*, in his broken fortunes, found a home, and got the new vision which gave him victory. Humbled by grief and brought to want, he entertained an angel unawares, and was blessed to find him *Cuthbert*, the *Soldier of Christ*, henceforth his shield and friend. Issuing forth from Glastonbury, he restored his broken fortunes, and won the title of "England's greatest king."

In this watered paradise, hallowed by such memories, Saint Dunstan was born, son of Heorstan, a man of wealth and noble blood, kinsman of three bishops of the time and of many thanes of the court, if not of the king himself. In his father's hall the fair diminutive boy, with scant but beautiful locks, caught his passionate love of music, the vain songs of ancient heathendom, the trifling legends, and funeral chants, which afterward gave color to the charge of sorcery raised against him.

A SAINT AT HOME

At the abbey the boy received an education and laid the foundations of a scholarship surpassing that of any other in his time. The wandering scholars of Ireland left their books in the monastery of Glastonbury, as they left them along the Rhine and the Danube, and Dunstan plunged into the study of letters, sacred and profane, till his mind reeled with learning and his brain broke down with delirium.

Tradition tells that as a schoolboy he had a vision of himself as abbot, and of the abbey, which then lay stripped of former splendor, restored by his energy to vast magnificence. Founded at a very early date, the monastery had once before fallen into decay and been rebuilt with great splendor by Ina, king of Wessex. Enriched by the liberality of successive princes, it flourished till the period of the Danish devastations in Alfred's early years, when, with many other architectural wonders, it was almost completely ruined. Of cruciform shape, some three hundred and eighty feet long by seventy across the choir and aisles, it was restored by Dunstan according to the plan in the vision sent him, with the munificence of the kings and saints he controlled.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Here at home, Dunstan is great and beautiful, a man loving and beloved, a scholar and artist of brilliant achievements. Mark him well in his loveliness, in the great church of his dreams and the college of his genius, far away from the seductions and temptations of the court that pandered to his lust of place and power and led him to tarnish his fair name with the guilt of atrocious crimes.

Leading the way in the work of teaching, tradition tells of the kindness with which he won the love of his scholars,¹ the psalms sang with them as they journeyed together, and the vision that comforted Dunstan for the loss of one little scholar as he saw the child borne heavenward in the arms of angels. Guiding the Church in the crusade of Benedict, the same tradition tells of his youthful love of a royal maiden and that

¹ At Canterbury, a hundred years after his death, Dunstan was regarded as the patron and protector of schoolboys. Once, in Anselm's time, when the yearly whipping-day arrived for the Cathedral school, the poor little wretches crowded weeping to his shrine and sought aid from their "dear father Dunstan." He it was, so every schoolboy believed, who sent the masters to sleep, and then set them quarreling till the whipping blew over.—Green's *Conquest of England*, p. 294.

A SAINT AT HOME

throughout his life he ever won the love of fair and saintly women.¹

Mark him well in the glory that here rests upon him, that you may love and reverence him now, even if in aftertime you come to scorn and pity him for his sins.

The day Eadmund and the king's troops came to Glastonbury Dunstan was in his cell, after the Midday-Song. Round it were specimens of his own artistic labors. Over his private altar was a beautifully wrought iron cross with the Saviour upon it, and on the altar a tiny censer in which sweet incense was smoldering—both made in his rude hermit-smithy long ago, when he practised earnestly the austerities of a simple monk. On an easel was an exquisitely painted picture of the Holy Virgin, awaiting his finishing touches. On a rough oak table was a book of Ovid's Art of Love which jostled oddly with an English homily on the Invention of the Cross, and a

¹ In one pleasant tale of these days a lady summons him to her house to design a robe which she is embroidering ; and, as Dunstan bends with her maidens over their toil, his harp, which he has hung on the wall, sounds, without mortal touch, tones which the startled ears around frame into a joyous antiphon.—See Green's Conquest of England, pp. 281-287.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

charter, obtained by him from King Eadmund, written in letters of gold, in the book of the Gospels, elegantly adorned.

The abbot was copying, in beautifully illuminated characters, Ovid's Art of Love, and dreaming of the royal maiden whom he had forsaken for the cloister. The vision of her lovely face floated before his eyes to-day and stirred the natural feelings he had long crucified. Leaving the manuscript, he rose, lifted his harp from the floor, and sang to himself, passionately and fondly, one of the old vain songs of ancient heathendom:¹

Weland for a woman knew too well exile !
Strong of soul that earl, sorrows sharp he bore ;
To companionship he had care and weary longing,
Winter-freezing wretchedness. Woe he found again, again,
After that Nithhàd in a Need had laid him—
Staggering sinew-wounds—sorrow-smitten man !
That he overwent ; this also may I.

¹ See Stopford Brooke's History of Early English Literature, vol. i, pp. 7, 8, 9. Of this poem, The Lament of Deor, he says: "Its form is remarkable. It has a refrain, and there is no other early English instance of this known to us. It is written in strophes, and Sweet thinks that it may be a solitary remnant of a number of English strophic lays which belonged to the same class as some of the old Scandinavian lays which were rudely strophic. One motive, constant

A SAINT AT HOME

Not to Beadohild was her brother's death
On her soul so sore as was her self-sorrow,
When that she was sure, with a surety far too great,
That with child she was. Never could she think,
With a clear remembrance, how that came to be.

That she overwent ; this also may I.

Of this meed of Hild we've from many heard ;
And so bottomless was the passion Geat felt,
That Love-sorrow stole all his sleep away !

That he overwent ; this also may I.

For a thirty winters did Theodric fast
Hold the Maerings'burg. Many knew of that.

That he overwent ; this also may I.

We in songs have heard of the wolfish thought
That Eormanric had ! Far he owned the folk
Of the Gotens' realm. Grisly was that king.
Many a warrior sat, with his sorrows cloaked,
Woe within his waiting ! Wistfully he longed
That the kingdom's king overcome should be !

That he overwent ; this also may I.

So engrossed was the abbot in his song, he did
not hear the sound of hurrying footsteps without.

throughout, is expressed in the refrain. This dominant cry of passion makes the poem a true lyric, and we ought to look upon it with pleasure, for it is the Father of all English lyrics." Sweet conjectures that it may have been composed before the English migration from the Continent, but Stopford Brooke thinks it was "made in England," and some authorities put it so far on as the eighth century.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

The music that floated down the corridor sent no thrill through the soul of the coming monk. Knocking loudly at the abbot's cell, he startled him from his reverie and called for speed.

Harp in hand, Dunstan flung open the door of his cell.

“Ho, Oslac, what haste?”

“Thy life is in danger and thou must flee. The cry has gone forth at last.”

“Danger? Whence?”

“The king sendeth troops to seize thee. Already the sound of hoofs is heard approaching. A faithful Benedictine has come, who, having gasped the news, has swooned away. He had ridden all night long.”

“‘Sendeth troops to seize me’? Who would have thought the youngster would have dared? Close the gates and saddle the horses, and Eadwine will learn how vain it is to try his strength with Dunstan's. Make speed. We must over the rolling waters—the gannet's bath, the whale's domain—and bid the king farewell! Haste and make ready!”

Oslac hurried away, and Dunstan paced his cell in great excitement. Though long on guard,

A SAINT AT HOME

he scarce expected Eadwine would enter into open strife with him and range the state against the Church.

“The daring youngster must have underrated the forces the priests can command! To dream of quelling the Saint of Glastonbury! To fancy he would be so easily caught! To-day he must flee, but—to-morrow!”

At the thought the Saint's pale face set firmly. Then would Eadwine and Elgiva feel the power of his anger! Then would this humiliation be repaid with agony untold! And hope was sweet to his heart as blood to the lips of a leopard.

Taking his harp again, he struck it, and sang with new force and passion:

Weland for a woman knew too well exile!
Strong of soul that earl, sorrows sharp he bore;
To companionship he had care and weary longing,
Winter-freezing wretchedness. Woe he found again, again,
After that Nithhàd in a Need had laid him—
Staggering sinew-wounds—sorrow-smitten man!
That he overwent; this also may I.”

Force and passion, fury and threat entered into Dunstan's voice and broke loose in the wild refrain. He swooped down upon it, and shook it, like a lion the sheep it would rend.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

His joy was delirious. He saw victory from afar as if already it had come. His hands moved nervously as if clutching at the heart of the queen. His eyes leaped with bounding glee at the agony of the king. His pale face shone with the glow of victory. His whole frame quivered with an ecstasy of exultation. To dream of slaying Dunstan! To fancy he could be caught! To forget his power! To smile at his cunning!

“Ha, ha, ha! Wait Eadwine! Wait Elgiva! On the third day, Dunstan, like the Christ, will rise again!”

The words had scarce escaped him ere Oslac came bounding back into the cell.

“Quick, sir! Quick! The troops are thundering at the gates and must soon find entrance. Quick! or we shall be taken!”

“Never, Oslac, never! To-day we must flee but to-morrow we shall pursue. Yea, though the kingdom be crushed to win us victory, though the Danes be let loose in overwhelming flood upon the south, though England herself perish at our hand. Lay it well to heart, Oslac, that when the day comes a laurel may rest upon thy brow. Lift up thine eyes, and behold the queen in her beauty,

A SAINT AT HOME

and know that she shall be thine, when Eadwine is no more.”

“Aye, Dunstan. But the horses wait, and the king’s troops clamor for thy life.”

And while he spake there was a loud crash, and a shout of triumph that drowned the voice of Oslac. The Saint rushed to the window of his cell and looked out. The royal troops had forced one of the gates, and were pouring into the nave, and through that into the cloistered area.

“Quick, sir, quick,” shouted Oslac, “else they will seize us!”

And hastily crossing himself, Dunstan hurried from the cell and fled in the wake of the fleet-footed Oslac.

CHAPTER XVI

OVER THE MENDIPS TO THE SEA

TAKING a secret passage, they ran toward a side-gate in the northern wall of the abbey, and leaped into the saddles of their impatient steeds. Wending their way swiftly by a sheltered bridle-path, they came, in the course of an hour's hard ride, to the great road that led by Wells to the ancient port of Bristol. They dug their heels into their horses' sides and urged them on.

"May the king's troops search for us long," cried Dunstan.

"And rest their weary souls in our cells awhile," answered Oslac.

"And may the devil confound their counsels!"

"And lead them back to Kingston!"

"Else give us a good start, Oslac."

"And hold hard on to them, Dunstan."

And the good Saint smiled grimly, and gave his horse its rein.

Away, for their lives, they galloped as fast

THE MENDIPS TO THE SEA

as their steeds would carry them. On, on, mile after mile at breakneck pace, over rough road and marshy ground. On, through Wells and up the Mendip Hills, making straight for the sea.

And from the summit they discerned, to their dismay, the king's troops fast in pursuit of them.

Spurring their panting steeds, they slipped down the slopes of the hills, and galloped on for their lives.

A red deer dashed along the road that led past Dundry, and Oslac, forgetting for a moment himself was pursued, dashed after it, with the overcoming instinct of a sportsman.

On, on, the abbot closely following, over the marshy plain, pursued and pursuing. On, till they came to Dundry hill, where the red deer found a covert.

And looking back, they saw the better-mounted troops were slowly gaining.

It was a terrible ride over that rough country. Could their horses keep it up? Already they began to slacken and fail. Only a few miles more, and they might yet escape!

Plunging their spurs into their panting steeds, they urged them on, and on.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“But what if no ship were ready to sail?”

“May fortune favor us!” they prayed.

On, on, on, the king's troops gaining fast.

On, on, till the ships of Bristol hove in sight,
and darkness crept along the sky.

On, till at last they came to the quay, only
to find to their consternation that no ship was
ready to sail!

They rushed to and fro, from ship to ship,
earnestly seeking some one who would sail forth-
with.

“Away at once,” cried Dunstan to a captain,
“and thou shalt have this bag of gold.”

But the old salt shook his head, and pointed
to the tavern, where reveled his drinking crew.

In vain were all their tempting offers. In
vain their earnest blandishments. And they
turned, fearful, baffled, lest they should be
caught, like birds, in a snare. For the king's
troops were close upon them, and the clatter of
their hoofs rang loud and clear. Another minute
and they galloped in hot haste upon the quay.

“This way,” whispered Dunstan, refusing to
be taken.

“No, this way, rather,” answered Oslac, taking

THE MENDIPS TO THE SEA

the Saint by the gown. "We can pass through and escape them still."

And Oslac led Dunstan into the shade of a neighboring tavern. They entered and passed hurriedly through. Three guests rose to give them welcome. But they placed their fingers to their lips and passed on.

"A strange pair!" muttered the tavern-keeper.

But they had gone before he could impede them.

Passing through the tavern-yard, they found themselves in some open fields, and halted a moment to determine their bearing. The angry voices of the baffled troops came to them through the crisp air. A moment only they waited, then pressed on with frantic, eager zeal.

Taking a long circuit, they made for the woodlands beyond Clifton, on the shore of the sea, hoping there to hide themselves a time and finally escape by hailing some passing ship. On they pressed, with rising hopes, and climbed the heights of Clifton. But on the downs they heard again the clatter of the king's troops in hot pursuit. And they cursed their evil fortune.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

On they scampered across the downs as fast as their limbs would carry them.

On, on, the king's troops coming nearer and nearer.

On, till they dimly saw the woodlands in front, and heard the panting of the steeds behind.

On, till they leaped into the darkness of the wood, just as the bent figures of the royal troops could be darkly discerned rising in their saddles.

“Dismount! After them and seize them!” cried the clear voice of Eadmund.

A loud mocking laugh answered him from the darkness of the wood.

“This way,” shouted Eadmund. “We are sure to grip them now!”

But Dunstan felt he was safe.

Pushing through the darkness and the thick underwood, the fugitives lighted on a narrow footpath, and struck along it eagerly a full mile. Then they left the beaten way, and took to the thick brushwood again, and bent down toward the sea. A mist rose from the river and added to the darkness. The farther they advanced, the thicker grew the mist, till they could scarce see each other

THE MENDIPS TO THE SEA

a yard apart. They thanked God and took great heart.

They halted a minute and listened. No sound of their pursuers could be heard. They joined hands, and pressed forward again, fearing to lose each other in the thick darkness.

On, till they heard the music of water lapping the shore.

On, hand in hand together, till they advanced almost to the edge of the wood, and stumbled and fell headlong into a deep hollow overlaid with rushes.

They gathered themselves together, greatly shaken but little the worse, and set out to explore the hollow. A big hole, some seven or eight feet long by four or five feet wide, they discovered it was only a crack in the bank on the wood's edge, right by the river's side. They could hear the trip of the water as it flowed to the sea, and they could dimly see the flicker of a light, now and then, as if of some passing bark.

"Quite a godsend, Oslac. The very place to hide ourselves."

"Aye. But it might have introduced itself with less imposing ceremony," answered Oslac.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

All night long they lay huddled together, covered by the rushes. Again and again they were conscious of passing footsteps. And again and again they heard voices calling, and faint sounds of answering cries. But they dared not move, and feared much that even now they would be taken. Their hearts beat loudly and prayed for the dawn.

At length, after weary waiting and endless scares, rosy-fingered dawn appeared, and the mist rolled away. Then, cautiously lifting his head above the rushes, Oslac looked along the shore. He whistled a low, shrill note of surprise, and sank to the side of Dunstan.

“Caught like rats in a trap,” he whispered.

For sentries of the king's guard were posted right along the shore.

CHAPTER XVII

A CORACLE AND A SKULL

ALL day long Dunstan and Oslac clung to their hiding-place with much fear. Again and again the royal sentries marched past them, so that they could almost touch their long spears, and many times they came and stood right in front of the hollow. The abbot held his breath and trembled.

Twice during the day a ship glided down the stream with sails set. Twice the fugitives came to the edge of their retreat and cast eager eyes to sea. But the royal sentries kept eager watch.

In constant fear and hazard, the long day passed and night descended.

“Might the darkness bring escape!” they prayed.

But the sentries redoubled their watch.

Thus till midnight—the hearts of the fugitives slowly sinking.

Then they were stirred by a light in the river,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

the moan of a beast in pain, and sound of rowing. They strained their eyes and stood alert. The light glided swiftly toward the shore. They opened their mouths in terror. It was a lighted skull on the prow of a coracle! And the coracle came straight toward their covert and grounded itself, with a loud grating noise, only a few yards from their hiding.

Instantly an old man, clad in long flowing robes of white, leaped on shore. He listened a moment, then lifted something white from the coracle and advanced toward their hiding. In his left hand was the lighted skull, held weirdly aloft, while with his right hand he drove a milk-white calf before him.

“The priest of Woden!” gasped Dunstan.

Immediately the old priest halted. He turned the lighted skull all round, and let it fall on their covert. He placed his hand to his ear and listened, then stroked the milk-white bull and drove it hurriedly into the dark wood.

“Thank God!” breathed Oslac, as the old priest’s receding footsteps fell on their ears.

And a minute later they heard the feet of the royal guards following.

A CORACLE AND A SKULL

The old priest drove his milk-white calf to an open circle in the midst of the wood. He placed the lighted skull right in the center and tied the white calf to an old oak-tree. He made a garland of leaves and built a rough stone altar and adorned it with branches of oak.

Then he came to the lighted skull and lifted it and made with it a great circle of light, singing the while a low, weird litany. Anon, muttering incantations, strange and many, he placed himself in the center of the circle of light, and made with the lighted skull endless configurations, mysterious and tortuous. Slowly he wrought with the lighted skull an intricate series of symbols of light upon the dark-green sward, and solemnly prostrated himself many times. And then he lifted his eyes to the stars and sang again his low, weird litany, and bowed himself to the ground in rapt and reverent worship.

Anon he took from the girdle a knife of gold, and went to the old oak-tree and took a flowing white robe and laid it at the root of the tree. Then he climbed the oak, and with the knife of gold cut a clump of mistletoe with great form and ceremony. And he lifted the mistletoe and flung

THE SINS OF A SAINT

it on to the flowing white robe and slowly descended.

Then he kindled a fire in the midst of the circle of light and took the milk-white calf and slew it, and laid it on the rude stone altar. And its blood dyed the greensward.

And he took the berries of the mistletoe and put them in a pouch in his girdle beside the blood-stained knife of gold. And then he lifted the lighted skull again and took a glowing ember from the fire and placed it in the skull, and raised it, with his eyes toward the stars, and wailed his low, weird litany.

“Prepare to take him now,” whispered Eadmund to the guard.

Immediately the old priest started. He stood erect and listened. Then muttered—

The Weird is at hand,
So near that she might
Lay hold of the doomed.

He placed his hand to his brow, and his eyes filled with terror. Then he turned, uttered a shrill, despairing cry, and darted into the darkness of the wood.

“Stay!” shouted Eadmund.

A CORACLE AND A SKULL

And a score of the king's guard barred the old priest's progress.

"Whither away, friend?"

The old priest sank to his knees, and the look of terror left his face.

"Methought ye were the enemy of the river's side," he answered.

"What enemy?" asked Eadmund.

"The priests of the new God, the Christ, who came a stranger to our land and now rules the world of men, whose servants fight and kill the worshipers of Woden."

"Where saw thou such?"

"Hiding in the hollow by the river's side."

"Lead us to them then, and thou shalt have thy freedom."

"My freedom?" he ejaculated in surprise.

"Aye, and the king's thanks."

"Praise be to Woden," he cried. "Come!"

At that moment a loud shout rent the air, and answering voices reechoed through the wood. And the old priest led them swiftly toward the river's side.

When Dunstan and Oslac heard the feet of the guards in the wake of the priest of Woden,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

they looked at each other and smiled. They stood up and stretched themselves joyously, and the fresh, free air tasted sweet.

There was no mist, and through the darkness they could see the stars gleaming in the water, while away up the river another light flickered fitfully and glided slowly down the stream.

“A ship!” cried Dunstan.

And Oslac laughed with glee.

“Thou wilt come on board,” said Dunstan, “and we shall drop thee farther down the stream. Then wilt thou be free to work our will. Remember! She shall be thine when he is no more. Dream of her loveliness, think of her caresses, and fear not. Dunstan will reward thee. The bark of opportunity sails along thy sea once more. If thou wouldst steer thy life to fortune, leap on board and seize the golden helm and point it whither Dunstan tells thee. Make straight to Odo, and call on him to launch the Church against the erring throne. Sail then to the north, and open the flood-gates of the Danes. And amid the rush of waters thy bark will reach the shining bay. Dunstan trusts thee now. To-morrow he may crown thee! Swear, Oslac!”

A CORACLE AND A SKULL

And standing on the river bank beneath the stars of night, Oslac lifted up his hands to God and swore.

“Ship ahoy!” hailed Dunstan.

“Well, well?” came the answer, as the bark glided past them.

“Stay and take us on board, and thou shalt have a bag of gold.”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

And in a twinkling the rudder was turned, and the ship’s sails flapped loosely in the wind.

“Hark!” cried Oslac.

And he strained his ear toward the wood.

“They are returning! Into the coracle, quick!”

And they ran swiftly toward the water’s edge, and leaped into the coracle and lifted the paddle and pushed from the shore.

A minute later the lighted skull appeared above the hollow.

“Gone!” cried the old priest. “Look!”

And he held the skull aloft.

Away down the stream they looked, and saw through the darkness the dim outline of the coracle steering straight toward the waiting ship.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Shoot!” cried Eadmund.

And a hundred arrows flew across the waters.

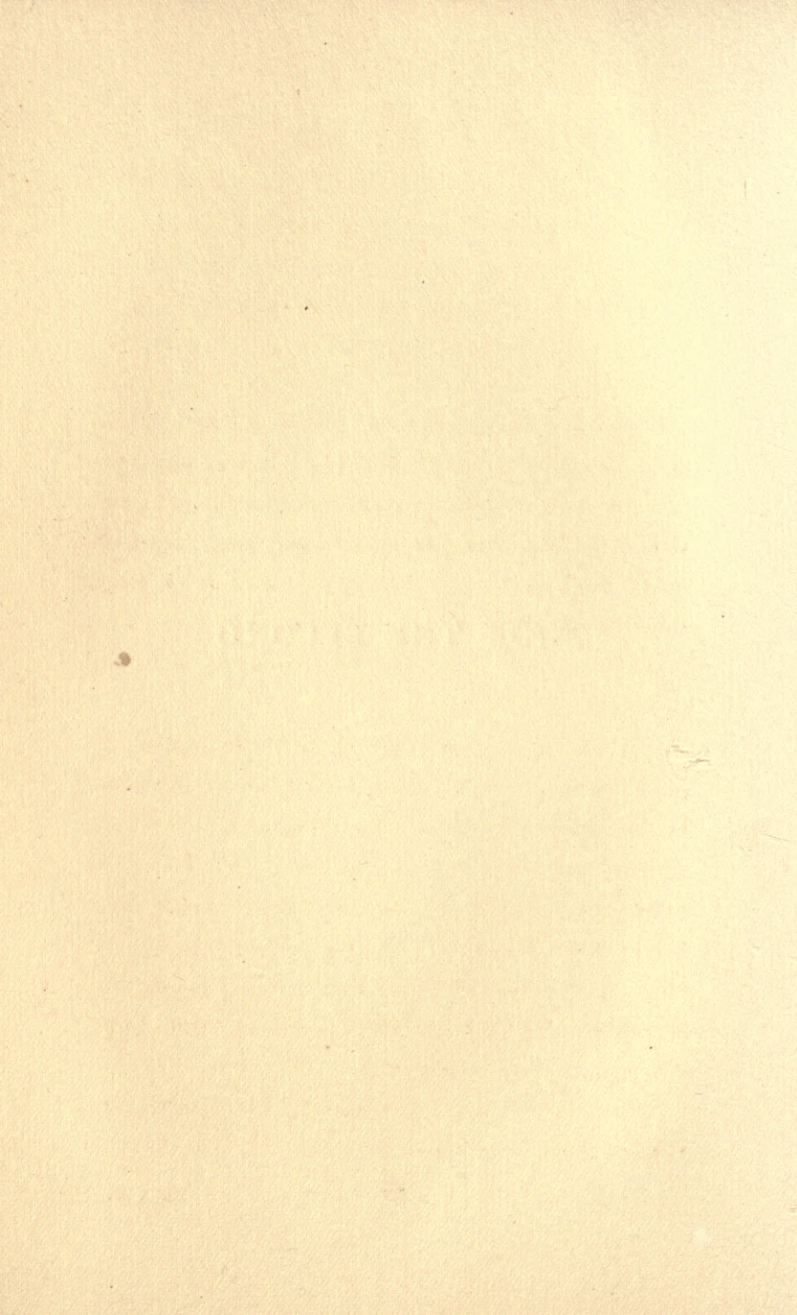
“Farewell!” came a voice from the darkness.

“Go and tell your royal master Dunstan will return and wreak his vengeance. Then *woe to Eadwine!* Farewell!”

And loud above the noise of the paddle rose the laughter of the Saint.

Then the coracle swept to the side of the bark, the sails filled, and the ship glided out to sea.

BOOK THE SECOND



CHAPTER XVIII

THE CRADLE OF CHRIST

THREE hours after the events related in our last chapter a young monk looked from the window of a Bristol tavern and gazed upon a company of the royal guard quarreling without. Their rage, and that of Eadmund especially, when they spake of how the Saint had escaped them, made a merry sight for the gloating eyes of Oslac.

In the hands of the young monk the commands of Dunstan were safe. His hatred of Eadwine was second only to the abbot's, and cried with a strong voice for action, swift and decisive. He would be satisfied only when Elgiva had been forced from the king or Eadwine had been driven from the throne. His passion for the queen was so masterful, and his sense of virtue so feeble, that it scarce mattered which to him.

Come what may, the heart that panted for Elgiva must be quieted.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

What though he stroked her beautiful face with hands stained with blood? He loved her blindly, with all the strength of a passionate nature, and would count all things as naught to win her love. Had not he endured the lonely life of a monk and held himself in check at Dunstan's bidding, in the hope held out by him of winning her by and by? With Elgiva, beautiful in soul and face, he might even be good.

Dunstan's banishment did not disconcert the hopes of Oslac. It seemed rather to bring him nearer the goal of his desire. Like the men of his time, his faith in the subtle brain of the cunning chancellor to find a way from seeming ruin to ultimate victory was strong and deep. The strife could only end, he fancied, in favor of the Church. What could the youthful, inexperienced king do against the craft of old and practised prelates? How could he cope with a foe that would outnumber him on field of battle and out-manuever him in strategy? The thought fanned Oslac's zeal and swelled the hope that even yet he would embrace the beautiful Elgiva.

The dream that rose before his eyes was gazed on long and lustily. Had not the crafty abbot

THE CRADLE OF CHRIST

bathed it in colored lights of passing glory? “Dunstan trusts thee now. To-morrow he may crown thee!” No claim to the throne had Oslac, and others beside Eadwine stood in the way. But had not Dunstan promised, and would not he perform? Then Elgiva would be queen—a second time! She would sit at his feet, and call him “king”! He would cover her neck with jewels and rouse the envy of the gods!

“On board, Oslac, on board! Haste and away for the golden strand! The counsel of Dunstan will guide thy bark from the troubled waters to the shining bay! The flood-rush of the Danes will carry it high up the golden shore! Then? Elgiva and the crown!”

Thus dreaming, Oslac leaped into his saddle and set out for the holy city of Canterbury.

It was Christmas eve when he rode over the downs and came to the city. The angels were out with the stars of heaven, and their song was floating over the plain—song heard new in every land by men watching and keeping the night-watches of heaven: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men and good-will.” The brightness of God shone round about Oslac, but

THE SINS OF A SAINT

he feared not with a great fear, beheld not the glory, and heard not the praise of the heavenly host proclaiming once again the saving mystery of the Manger-Child. Instead he saw, or fancied he saw, though now it was black night, the gilded dawn of Dunstan's dream creeping over the towers of Canterbury and crimsoning his life with love and splendor.

A service was proceeding when Oslac arrived. The great church rose out of the darkness full of light and praise. The spacious choir was filled with worshipers glorifying the God of Peace, as he entered, breathing the breath of war. He seated himself and listened. The words of a well-known psalm were being chanted: "O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye peoples. For his mercy is confirmed upon us, and the truth of the Lord remaineth for ever." Psalm cxvii, *Laudate Dominum*.

Then the puckered primate rose in vestments of silken splendor and proclaimed to all the evangel of peace. Not a few heard it gladly and saw the glory again. Joseph once more went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth unto Judea, to the city of David, which is called Beth-

THE CRADLE OF CHRIST

lehem, with Mary his espoused wife, great with child. The shepherds once more came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they understood the word that had been spoken to them concerning the child. And all that heard it wondered.

But Oslac smiled as he listened to the story. A pretty fancy simply indulged, thought he, laid to heart by weak and beaten men ready to place their faith in any tale that offers ease or comfort! To him it seemed absurd that God should manifest himself in any shape or form, or contribute aught to the weal or woe of men. Was not God content to dwell in his heaven? In any case, "Give him power, the beautiful Elgiva, and the crown now worn by Eadwine, and he would risk his weal against the powers of *hell* and *heaven!*"

So thought Oslac in sound of Bethlehem's bells, while shepherds wondered, and Mary kept the words, pondering them in her heart! So said he, while the worshipping host glorified God for the things they had heard and seen!

The service over, he wended his way to the

THE SINS OF A SAINT

primate's chamber. Odo started, and lifted high his wrinkled brows as he entered. Tidings from Glastonbury were always exciting.

"Ho, Oslac, what cheer?"

"Cheer that calls the Church to action."

"In good cause her holy men neither faint nor grow weary. What news?"

"News that throws Holy Church in peril and strikes at her growing power."

"What dost thou mean? What has happened?"

"'Tis not only what has happened, but what will happen soon."

"Out with it then! Is the world turning upside down? Has the lamp of God gone out forever?"

"No, but Dunstan has been turned out of England!"

"By whom?" the primate quickly queried.

"Eadwine, the Saxon king," subtly answered Oslac.

"The untamed cub!" cried the Dane. "But how?"

The subtlety had gripped his heart.

"Driven by troops sent by Eadwine with

THE CRADLE OF CHRIST

orders to slay the abbot, having first put out his eyes. Forced to flee from Glastonbury, he scarce escaped alive. Hunted, like a fox by the royal hounds, he ran till he took the water at Brystyngestowe, and went for hiding to Flanders."

"By God, and that is news," panted the primate, as he paced the floor with great excitement. His puckered face twitched with nervous eagerness, his bead-like eyes started and flashed, while his whole frame quivered with passion.

"And he bade me tell thee 'tis the foul queen's doing," went on Oslac, well pleased with the primate's anger.

"Haste thee, Oslac," cried the holy abbot, "haste thee to the venerable Odo, and rouse the people, that Holy Church may punish the offenders. Bid him prick the vanity of the king, lay his pride low, and tear the beauty from his arms."

"It shall be," shouted Odo. "It shall be. We shall tame the young cub and wound him sore. We shall make him feel the power of Holy Church. We shall teach him to obey and purge his sin with penance. We shall pluck the sullied

THE SINS OF A SAINT

lily from the throne and hurl it from the land. Then what of the pride of the Saxon king? What of the wrath of his queen?"

Oslac answered not, but waited till the whirling brain of the Danish primate brought forth his scheme of vengeance.

"'Tis an insult we can not brook, a blow struck at our power to be returned with greater force. His spirit must be broken. I tell thee, Oslac, methinks 'twill come to war, and Holy Church be forced to fight the battle of her Lord. To make strife at court and rouse rebellion in the land must be our constant aim. To stir the people and proclaim to all that Holy Church must be supreme, must be the effort of us all. What thinkest thou, Oslac?"

"That thou speakest bravely, and wisely too, most noble Odo, even as Dunstan when the hounds panted at his heels!"

"Then, on the morrow, thou must get thee to Eadgar, and tell him Holy Church demands his sword. Say to him if Eadwine fall, his head shall wear the crown. Urge him, by the pomp of power and vanity of earthly throne, to make speed and rouse the north, and issue forth to battle for

THE CRADLE OF CHRIST

‘Christ and Holy Church.’ Make sure that he obeys.”

“On the morrow, as thou commandest,” answered Oslac, uplifted with the prospect.

“And our messengers will see to it not a stone is left unturned south of the Thames. Then woe to the king of the Saxon realm and his harlot-queen!”

So, on the morrow, while the Day of Peace was yet young and scarce had lost its crimson blushes, Oslac leaped into his saddle once again and rode away laden with the mandate of war.

CHAPTER XIX

A DREAM OF SILK AND PURPLE

THE errand on which Oslac found himself was pleasing to his mind. The action of the primate was all his heart desired. The notorious Odo, he well knew, would not rest now till Eadwine put away the queen and humbled himself before the Church or was swept from the throne. The prospect of either was pleasing to Oslac. No matter that Odo had thought only of Eadgar as Eadwine's successor. Had not Dunstan said: "Dunstan trusts thee now. To-morrow he may crown thee"? And were there not ways of bringing that about? Would Eadgar be able to stand in the day of battle?

With a merry heart Oslac rode away to Mercia. If only Eadgar could be induced to revolt and open the flood-gates of the north, his bark would rush amid the waters into the shining bay and run high up on the golden strand! But would

SILK AND PURPLE

Eadgar revolt and lead the Mercians and Danes against the fair king?

Once his love for Eadwine was greater than his love of dress and vanity. Would it prove so now? Or would the taste of power and splendor in Mercia make him, as Dunstan fondly hoped, long for more?

Power and splendor the vain prince loved, and with these baits, therefore, Oslac would tempt him. Dreams of silk and purple, gold and glittering gems, the monk resolved to place before his victim's eyes. And if the dream lured Eadgar to his doom, then would Oslac's shoulders wear the silk and purple, and his head the crown of gold! His eyes filled with pride as he gazed on himself in the glory of his dream and beheld, above all, the lovely form of the beautiful Elgiva.

With the dying of the year Oslac came to the court of Eadgar. The fire burned in the hall while the wintry storm raged without. Upon a dais, amid his nobles at the festal board, the young prince sate perfumed and jeweled. He was gay with the outward emblems of royalty, resplendent with a purple robe, and crowned with a coronet that rested on his long flaxen tresses plaited as

THE SINS OF A SAINT

ever with shining gold. Round his waist was a silken belt richly studded with gems, while by his side hung a Saxon sword in a scabbard of gold. Of inordinate vanity and love of splendor, his fair but womanish face, weak and sensual, showed he had not yet learned to hold the scepter of his heart.

Through the open doors of the banquet-hall, frank signals of Saxon hospitality, birds were flying from the storm. By one of them Oslac entered, covered with snow, and scarce concealed his smile of contempt as he looked upon the vain prince in all his glory.

“A song! A song!” cried the nobles as he entered. “A song from the oldest minstrel.”

“Yea, a song,” simpered Eadgar.

In response, an old and white-haired minstrel rose, struck his harp with fingers that long had swept the strings, and sang this plaintive ballad:

Once in western Fen-land
Lived a doughty princeling,
Near the vale Avalon
Hallowed now by Joseph.
Sorrow-laden was his heart,
For that he had gotten
Troubles many-edged
Biting at his vitals.

SILK AND PURPLE

Rough were all the billows
Of the flowing river ;
Slowly wailed the waters
Rolling on the shingle ;
Cold the freezing North wind
Swept across the valley,
Blowing out heaven's candles,
Waking up the Spirits,
Mocking e'en the moonlight.

Then of all a sudden
Silent grew the billows,
Eastward rose pale Luna,
Beacon bright of God,
Showing to the princeling
Far-off windy rock-walls.
And, of wonders greatest,
Floating in the river
Face upturned to Heaven,
Maid of piercing brightness,
Beautiful and dazzling,
Paling e'en the moonlight.

Roused him from his sorrow
To behold the wonder,
Floating in the river,
Glowing in the water.
Swift she floated toward him
Like a whitèd spectre
Shining bright and weird-like,
Lighting all the darkness,
Paling e'en the moonlight.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Swiftly swam the princeling
Down the shining river,
Making for the maiden
Bright and burning wonder.
All his might he wrestled
With the glowing water,
Seeking hard to reach her
Smiling sweet upon him,
Wooing with her eyelids,
Lighted with a glory
Paling e'en the moonlight.

Silently she floated
Down the shining river,
Till they reached a rock-wall
Lit with heavenly light.
There her lips were opened,
And a song she sang him,
With a voice of honey,
Laden with delight,
Sweetly sang of gladness
In a Land of Beauty
Paling e'en the moonlight.

Down here is my dwelling,
Underneath this rock-wall,
In a mighty cavern,
Where are all my treasures,
Passing wealth of man.
Follow me, brave princeling,
Deep down through the waters,
Till we reach the splendor.

SILK AND PURPLE

There in love and gladness
We shall pass the ages
In a glory dazzling,
Paling e'en the moonlight.

Deep down through the waters
Dived the gallant princeling,
Following the maiden
Clad in robes of light.
Deep down through the waters,
Swimming fast, and wrestling
With the glowing surge,
Till he reached the cavern
In the windy rock-wall
All ablaze with light.

Wonder upon wonder
Lay in splendor round him,
Gold and glittering jewels,
Vessels of old time.
And, of wonders greatest,
Banners, all engoldened,
Woven round with magic,
Gleaming all with light,
Beautiful and mystic,
Paling e'en the moonlight.

Long upon the maiden
Gazed the gallant princeling,
Smiling sweet upon him
Shining weird and bright.
Long upon the treasure,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

And the mystic Banners,
Woven round with magic,
Gleaming passing bright.
But, as he did touch her,
Darkness fell around him,
Darkness full of fright.

Then of all a sudden
Changed the smiling maiden,
And the shining treasure
Turned to ash and dust,
Gaunt and creeping monsters,
Skulls and dead-men's bones,
Covered all with weird-light,
Pale and phosphorescent,
Mocking e'en the moonlight.

Wherefore, all ye nobles,
Learn ye well this lesson :
Life is such a dream,
Full of many sorrows
None on earth can lighten,
Gold and glittering jewels
Tempting men and princes,
Turning soon to ashes,
Gaunt and creeping monsters,
Skulls, and dead-men's bones.

So, resist the evil,
Though adown the river
Luring floats a maiden
Beautiful, and dazzling,
Paling e'en the moonlight.

SILK AND PURPLE

The cheers that greeted the white-haired minstrel's song had scarce died away, when Oslac, clad in Benedictine garb and covered with melting snow, showed himself to Eadgar.

"Room for Holy Church," the princeling cried, with move of scented hand.

"The Son of Mary's peace be on you all," answered the monk of Glastonbury.

"Oslac's voice! Yea, Oslac's face! Welcome, Oslac. I had nigh forgotten thee. 'Tis long now since we met, not since that bright May-day long ago when we danced around the May-pole with Elgiva. Dost thou remember her, being now a monk? Nay, frown not so: we spake in jest and meant to win thy smile. But what thy coming? Art thou a messenger sent of Holy Church? And is it peace?"

"A messenger of war and not of peace am I, sent to sound the trump of battle in the name of Holy Church, and to hold this lighted cross before the prince's eyes and those of all his nobles."

"Ho, what now?" together cried the nobles and the prince.

"He hath driven Dunstan from the land and holds still to the beauty against Odo's commands.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

His sin cries out to heaven and foully taints the people. The Church must needs enforce her laws, even on the king, and calls you now to fight her battle and sweep him from the throne."

"And if Eadwine fall in battle?"

"Then," said Odo, "Eadgar, princeling now of Mercia, will be king of all the realm! Then will Mercia be honored much and the brave Danes of the north enter into freedom."

The cheer that greeted these words moved Oslac to proceed to storm the hearts of the nobles, with much hope.

"'Tell the nobles all,' cried Odo, 'Holy Church will reward them well when they have driven the foul queen from the land. Tell my fellow-Danes a kinsman calls them to the battle who will fight for them, as fought he has in the court of England's king.' 'Tell them all,' cried Dunstan, as the ship that carried him to exile sailed away, 'tell them all, brave men of the north, jarls and caldormen, Dunstan will not forget them when again he rules the realm. Glory and honor will be given to those who turn on Eadwine and drive him from the throne!'"

The flashing of swords and clanging of spears

SILK AND PURPLE

showed Oslac the Danes and Anglo-Danes, ready ever to strike a blow at the Saxon realm, were won. Smiling broadly, he turned from them to Eadgar, amid a scene of growing excitement. The hand of the prince was on his jeweled hilt, but hesitated to pluck his sword from scabbard of gold.

“What the treasures of the mystic cave, O Eadgar, to the silk and purple of England’s king? What the gold and glittering gems that turned them soon to dust to the crown that awaits thee, with all the pageant of a king’s court and the splendor of life? ’Tis the promise of Holy Church, if thou wilt fight for her. Think! Thou wilt then outrival Athelstane with thy beauty and dress and grandeur!”

The vain prince hesitated a moment, then looked upon the dream Oslac placed before his eyes, and fell.

Merely viceroy of the north, now he caught at the hope of independence and sprang at the bubbles of pleasure and power. What opportunities for glory as king of the realm, what pageants and titles, what silk and purple, what gold and precious gems! The dream intoxicated him and made him greedily grasp at the cup Oslac held up

THE SINS OF A SAINT

for him. What matter there was blood in it? War and death are nothing to a man in such a mood. Out from that golden scabbard sprang his gleaming sword. High above his head he waved it, crying:

“Long live the Holy Church!”

“Long live Eadgar, our king!” shouted Oslac, waving the Benedictine cowl.

“Long live the king!” cried the nobles, carried away, clanging their spears and waving their swords.

Then placing Eadgar on a shield, they carried him round the hall, shoulder-high, lustily shouting: “Long live the king!”

Oslac's heart leaped with joy. His bark was now on the crest of the wave that would carry him to the shining bay and the golden strand! Fool that Eadgar was to dream of silk and purple already claimed by one who had renounced the world! If Eadwine fell in battle, Eadgar also would be found among the slain! Then would the silk and purple be Oslac's, and the beautiful Elgiva his fond queen! And then no power on earth would drive him from his throne!

So cried the exulting heart of Oslac.

CHAPTER XX

THE SWORD ON THE ALTAR

PREPARING for battle, yet unsteady and uncertain in his mind, Eadgar came to Croyland in secret, to win the counsel of Turketul. The brave old chancellor, no longer surrounded only by three old monks, had restored the fallen fortunes of the monastery, and drawn to himself many saintly men and women, world-weary and feeling for rest in prayer. The fire-scathed walls the Danes had left behind them, as they swept across the land, burning, pillaging, destroying,¹ had already taken

¹ The fen-country was the scene of the most fearful devastations. Leaving Bardney Abbey a heap of smoking ruins, covering the mangled remains of its inmates, the invaders passed to Croyland. Fugitives announced their approach soon after midnight, while the monks were performing matins; and fires in the distant horizon drawing nearer and nearer, confirmed the south of the tidings. The Superior resolved to remain at his post and was slain at the altar; the aged, and those of tender years, who could neither flee nor resist, and whose appearance might have excited compassion, were slaughtered with the exception of a single child; the stronger part of the community found a hiding-place in the neighboring marsh, from which they emerged to bury the dead, and attempt to extin-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

to themselves most of their ancient wealth and beauty. The eyes of Eadgar were met by a new and ornate abbey as he walked up the primrose way that led to the grounds. Would Turketul help him? Would the old warrior cry "peace" or "war"? Would he condone his brother's fault or rise with Holy Church and demand his punishment? Or would he champion the cause of love and humanity?

The aggressive policy of the Church found no sympathy at Croyland. A loyal subject of the king and country, Turketul looked with suspicion and alarm on Rome's untiring efforts to subordinate the temporal to the spiritual powers. The coming conflict he had long prophesied, but none the less was it painful to him. The wreck of the kingdom it foreshadowed filled the old veteran with sorrow. Had not he fought at Brunanburh for the unity and independence of the land?

guish the conflagration of their monastery, as soon as the barbarians had retired. The storm passed on to Peterborough, and was there more fatal, the survivors of Croyland having to proceed thither to deposit the bones of the abbot and eighty-three monks in a common grave, none being left on the spot to perform the office. Ely, Thorney, and Ramsey experienced a similar fate, Date 866 A. D.—Milner's History of England, p. 79.

THE SWORD ON THE ALTAR

The notorious Odo he specially feared, for had not he once before proved treacherous to his sovereign and urged the partition of the realm when Anlaf, the old, beaten tiger of Brunanburh, returned to the country in Eadmund's time? Would not he do so again, himself a Dane in favor of the Danes?

The heart of Turketul feared for the young king and scorned the pretense for strife.

"Nay, my child!" he cried to Eadgar. "If thou wouldst win the kiss of God thou wilt not put thy hand to such a task. Since first the fallen angels rose in heaven no good hath come of rebellion. The land is peaceful and prosperous. Let it remain so."

"But what of Holy Church?" asked Eadgar, like an unstable man beginning to defend the thing denounced, on which he fancied he had need of counsel.

"The Church must be left to win her way by deeds of love and mercy. Not of this world is Christ's kingdom, else there would have helped him legions of heaven. The Cross loves not the sword like the Crescent."

"But he has sinned against the Holy Church."

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Not against the Holy Father! Elgiva, as thou dost know, is no harlot-queen, but beautiful in life as in form, and pure as Ethilda, the whitest nun of Croyland. Canst thou cast the stone at Eadwine?”

“But what of Dunstan?” queried Eadgar, wincing under the question of the white-haired abbot.

“To my influence was due the first rise at court of the brilliant, fair-haired youth, and my love he ever had, till power made him giddy and ambition dimmed his eye. Was it for this I withstood the anger of the nobles and pleaded for the youth? Was it that piety might be choked by the growth of power, and honor fall a prey to foul ambition? Ah me, that court and cloister are so far apart! The anger of the king is justly roused against him.”

“But the rebellion will proceed whether I lead or no. Then why not join the winning side?”

“He is thy brother. Flesh crieth to flesh and blood to blood. He is the king. His person must be honored and his rule maintained. Eadgar, if thou wouldst win the crown of life come rather to thy brother’s help and to thy sister’s aidance.

THE SWORD ON THE ALTAR

If not, and thou dost wet thy feet with Eadwine's blood, the crown thou'lt gain on earth will bring thee sorrow and fall from thy head at last with oaths and curses."

"Thou speakest as an old man, Turketul, from whose eyes have passed forever the golden visions of life's glory. Canst thou not see the splendor of a throne and feel the pomp of power? Has winter come and laid its hoar upon thee, benumbed thy heart, and frozen all thy fancies, so thou must cast snowballs at my dreams and show me broken ice? Dost thou not remember the sunny summer-time, the flowers and fruits of early life? Is the brave old warrior dead?"

"Nay, the warrior lives and sometimes calls me to wars again to wield the sword for right. Even now my hand wanders to the place where my scabbard hung. But holier battles claim my zeal. I tell thee, Eadgar, thou shouldst not dream these dreams. The winter may have come, yet I warn thee lest another than Turketul be leading thee to the broken ice, ready to cast more deadly balls than snow, full at thy life."

"What meanest thou?" cried Eadgar, with sudden fear rising in his heart.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“This. Oslac may have dreams as well as thou, and lead thee to thy ruin.”

“Nay!” laughed the prince, with growing reassurance. “Another old man’s fancy. It is impossible. He is the Church’s messenger sent but to beg my help in her hour of need. Nay! The monastery has taught him better things than dreams of the vain world with all its pomp and glory!”

“The monastery can not work a miracle on a man, or change a heart forced against its will to watch and pray. Take the word of an old man for it that Oslac loves silk and purple better than a Benedictine gown. Beware, Eadgar, beware!”

But in vain. Wooed by the vision of right, and then by the power of fear, the young prince resisted. The dream of silk and purple filled his mind. He saw not the pool of blood that lay around the throne or the sword of justice that swung over it. He heard not the cry of sorrow, but the sound of music and dancing. He felt not the spirits beating at his heart and crying with scorn: “Is this foul heart and vain the champion of Holy Church?” He felt only the hope of victory, heard only the peal of laughter, saw only silk

THE SWORD ON THE ALTAR

and purple, a crown of gold, and jewels, all for him.

So, chiding Turketul for his gloomy counsels, he bade him farewell and went away.

But the old abbot lingered in his cell, stricken at the heart. The cloisters passed away and the years came stealing back to him. And he sat on and gazed at the setting sun and heard not the vesper bell. Full forty years had he tended the state, nursed it like a living soul, cherished it, and led it at last to greatness. Full forty years the angel of the realm had held his heart, and won the great love of a great soul. Like a spirit that could not be resisted, an angel that called forth the strength and glory of his manhood, the voice of his country had come to Turketul, and he had spent his life-blood for her sake.

He unbared his breast and counted a score of wounds and named their battles, one by one, with quick-beating heart. He uncovered his right arm and smiled as he played with a scar—his last great scar—that gaped still in its faded glory, that scarce had closed two years ago. And the angel of the realm came to his cell and beckoned him. She lifted up her voice, the same sweet voice, clear

THE SINS OF A SAINT

and thrilling as of old, the same fair spirit, yet pale and frail, he thought, as of one in sore need of aidance. And her voice called him above the song of vespers.

And when the monks came to his cell an hour afterward they found him deep in prayer before his private altar, with a sword grasped firmly in his hand.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE

AT the cry of the state the old warrior woke. He looked on her pale face, the frail form of the tottering realm, and then to heaven, with flashing eyes. He thought of the king and his hapless queen. He dreamed of Dunstan and the wanton Odo. And a prayer burst from his soul steeped in the passion of the Hebrew king, breaking with pain and trembling with wrath.

“O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself. Arise in thine anger and hurl thy thunderbolts against the evil-doers. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth, and come to the help of thy little ones. Come in thy chariot of fire. Pursue the schemers with thy spirit and overtake them with thy curse. Pour out thine indignation upon them and slay them in thine anger. For under their tongues are mischief and vanity, and in the secret places they lurk to murder the daughters

THE SINS OF A SAINT

of God. Oh, let not thy little ones be put to shame. Let not their white souls be trodden like snow. Let not their cry rise up to heaven in vain. Awake, Lord, awake, and pour out thy wrath upon them!

“Let the mischief of the wicked return upon their heads and their counsels come to naught. Thrust them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they rebel against thee. Let not the righteous be confounded or their armies put to flight. O Lord, make haste to help them. Oh, give me back my youth, and strengthen my limbs, that I may fight for thee. Just for one year renew me, Lord of all might, that I may hurl the spear full at the foe, and drive the rebels from the throne. Oh, let this withered hand rejoice and find its cunning once again!”

So prayed the old warrior in his grief and anger. Eadgar's perfidy stirred his soul. His whole being rose at the wantonness of Odo and the foulness of the forces leagued against the king. To what a depth Holy Church had fallen to seek the aid of such men—Oslac, whose life polluted the court, and Eadgar, whose vanities even the cloister could not conceal! How unscrupulous

HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE

had Dunstan become ere yet the summer of his life had gone, after the promise and hope of spring! How little the withered primate had changed, plotting and scheming as ever for his own hand and his kinsmen's good! What hypocrisy they all were showing!

Roused by the sorry sight, the old chancellor longed to be at the helm of state again, if only to champion the cause of purity and integrity in the realm. His passion and fervor gave new force to his life. The withering spirit drank of the wine of strength and leaped into fresh vitality. His wasting eyes flashed with fire and sent the heat of life rushing through his limbs. Voices woke in his soul, urging him to leave the abbey and go to the help of Eadwine.

But had not he done with the world and its sorrows, and won a well-earned rest? "Nay," cried the voices of his soul, "man must not ever close his ears to the cry of the stricken and oppressed! To stand aside were folly! To fight and die, if need be, the only alternative offered! Better defeat, ruin, death, fighting for the right, for the sorrowing and oppressed, for virgin souls that weep and cry to heaven for help, than base

THE SINS OF A SAINT

submission to wrong, heartless inactivity, diplomatic coquetry, and cowardly acceptance of dangerous circumstances! Death were sweet, and final victory sure for such a cause!”

With these thoughts a great force entered Turketul's life, like as if legions of angels had given up their strength to him, and the old warrior rose with conquering might and left the cloister and went forth to champion the cause of the tottering realm.

“To succor the queen on the day of battle, I pray thee let me come with thee,” prayed little White Heart.

And the old warrior he could not say her nay.

So they twain set out together, and came the third day to the palace of the king. The sun was sinking behind the Surrey hills in glory of burning gold when, travel-stained and mourning, they entered Kingston. The old retainers recognized the face of the courtly chancellor as they ushered him into the royal presence with reverent excitement. Entering, he bowed himself at the feet of Eadwine.

“Welcome, Turketul, thrice welcome. Arise, thou art worthy to stand before the king.”

HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE

“And bound to bow before the successor of Athelstane and great-grandson of Alfred.”

“What thine errand? ’Tis seldom now the court is favored with thy presence.”

“An errand befitting the old Turketul rather than the new. Ah me, that he were young again!”

“The old Turketul had never need to be ashamed. His gold hairs were as honorable as are his gray. And now thy life is crowned with loving kindness that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s. But thou seemest sad. What news?”

“News that saddens the Son of Mary and the Mother of God. War is being plotted against thy throne, revolution and rebellion, fomented by Holy Church.”

A wild shout of passion broke from the listening thanes as each man drew his sword with flashing eyes.

“Ah! That is news in sooth,” cried the king, leaping to his feet. “Yet as we feared. Dunstan will not die. Like Grendel’s mother of the sea, his flesh is charmed. The war-beam will not bite. Oh, for the magic sword with which Beowulf at last prevailed!”

“The gold-charmed hilt hangs no more in

THE SINS OF A SAINT

mystic caves, O king, but is given of God to all who fight for him. Hallowed by victory is the war-beam of God, doughty of edges, a pride of warriors, able to grip on the throat of the monster, piercing the bone-rings. Greater than most men can wield in the war-play, seize it, brave king, and thou'lt find it will bite."

"God give us grace, then, to wield well our weapons and conquer like heroes. But how didst thou hear it?"

"Eadgar thy brother came over to Croyland to ask for mine aidance, led astray by vainest flattery and dreams of purple, pomp, and glory. Wo is me that he ever left the abbey! And Oslac is busy stirring up the Northmen in name of Holy Church and Odo. Ere autumn comes thou'lt hear the clang of battle!"

"So the wrinkled primate thinketh still of kindred and maketh excuse to overcome the Saxon. The Holy Church's mandate must be backed by force of arms. 'Tis well we are ready. Poor Eadgar, he was ever vain as Oslac vile. But wo to all who rise against our throne! I tell thee, Turketul, intrigue and villainy have filled the court since thou didst leave it, and the throne ever

HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE

been in peril. But it stands till now in its integrity, and shall, God helping me, even though Church and kindred rise against it. What say ye, my brave men?"

"It shall, O king!" shouted the excited thanes, as they waved their swords and clanged them each man against his neighbor's. The blood-red glow of the setting sun fell on them; and it seemed as if every man had soaked his sword in blood.

"Thou hast spoken well, O king," answered the old warrior, athirst for the battle. "Not in vain did thy father beget thee, he who with Athelstane, all-glorious, routed the Danes and the Scots there by Brunanburh. Thy cause is just and heaven will not deny thee victory—in the end. The air is laden with its legions and the wicked are wounded they know not whence or how. Be strong, O king, and generations yet unborn will honor the name of Eadwine the fair!"

"Thou speakest like Turketul the mighty warrior rather than Croyland's peaceful abbot. Thy blessing, at least, the king is sure to have."

"Call me no longer abbot!" cried Turketul, uncovering his cloak and showing his shining armor. "God has given me back my strength and

THE SINS OF A SAINT

sent me here to fight for thee. Not my blessing only wilt thou have, but my sword and my life!"

The enthusiasm of the thanes knew no bounds. Wildly they shouted and loudly clashed their swords, each man's face aglow with admiration for the old warrior in the abbot's dress, standing with sword and eyes uplifted to heaven, his face shining with glory and his long white hair and beard touched with the crimson of setting sun. The sight of him was an inspiration to the king and his thanes. His presence and spirit gave strength and hope to every man.

"Honor to Turketul, the king's noble champion!" cried Eadmund, leading the cheers.

"The hero of Brunanburh," broke in the dark-eyed Ethelsige, lifting his lance and cheering frantically.

"The faithful chancellor," continued the scarred Alfric, "and the mighty warrior. The tender-hearted courtier and fear-stirring soldier."

"Who will lead us to victory as our fathers at Brunanburh and other well-fought fields," cried the king's thanes with one voice. "Honor to Turketul!"

"Our hearts are stirred, my brave men," cried

HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE

the king, towering above all in stature, and inspired more than all by the sight of the brave old warrior. "Our hearts are stirred and eager now for battle. What say ye to a war-song, loud and bloody?"

"The Song of Brunanburh," shouted the nobles with acclaim.

"Strike on thy harp, minstrel, and loud sing anew of the glories of Brunanburh," commanded the king.

The white-haired minstrel stepped into the midst, and, striking his harp with energy, loudly sang the great Song of Brunanburh.

Athelstan King,
Lord among Earls,
Bracelet bestower and
Baron of Barons,
He with his brother,
Eadmund Atheling,
Gaining a lifelong
Glory in battle
Slew with the sword-edge
There by Brunanburh,
Break the shield-wall,
Hew'd the lindenwood,
Hack'd the battle-shield

Sons of Edward with hammer'd brands.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Theirs was a greatness
Got from their Grandsires—
Theirs that so often in
Strife with their enemies
Struck for their hoards and their hearths and their homes.

Bow'd the spoiler,
Bent the Scotsman,
Fell the ship-crews
Doom'd to the death.
All the field with blood of the fighters
Flow'd from when first the great
Sun-star of morningtide,
Lamp of the Lord God,
Lord everlasting,
Glode over earth till the glorious creature
Sank to his setting.

There lay many a man
Marr'd by the javelin,
Men of the Northland
Shot over shield,
There was the Scotsman
Weary of war.

We the West-Saxons,
Long as the daylight
Lasted, in companies
Troubled the track of the host that we hated,
Grimly with swords that were sharp from the grindstone,
Fiercely we hack'd at the flyers before us.

HOW THE WARRIOR WOKE

Many a carcase they left to be carrion,
Many a livid one, many a sallow-skin—
Left for the white-tail'd eagle to tear it, and
Left for the horny-nibb'd raven to rend it, and
Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it, and
That gray beast, the wolf of the weald.

Never had huger
Slaughter of heroes
Slain by the sword-edge—
Such as old writers
Have writ of in histories—
Hapt in this isle.¹

¹ See Lord Tennyson's translation of this remarkable old poem, from which the above quotation is made.

CHAPTER XXII

GRAY HAIRS AND GOLDEN

WHILE the minstrel sang and the men prepared them for the battle, the women wept together and prayed.

The pale-faced nun sate by the side of the beautiful queen and told her love. What a change had come over the lives of these two since that bright May-day, only two years ago, when they sang together around the May-pole tree! Then White Heart had wept as she broke the circle of childhood and bade the world adieu. Now she wept as she lay in the lap of her mother, her trembling hand in the queen's, and heard her breaking sorrow.

Look on them with tears in your eyes, three fair women fated to sorrow! Look on them till your heart is stirred and fain would shelter them! Look on their tear-stained faces, and mark their chastened beauty, as the gold hair of the pale nun and the fair queen mingles with the gray of

GRAY HAIRS AND GOLDEN

their pain-bearing mother! Look, and listen to their sobs and the falling of their tears! Turn not away, but yield them your hearts. Their souls are crying, breaking through their tears, and, rising above their sobs, speeding their flight to God!

“O God, send down thy curse upon them and execute vengeance. Consume them with fire from heaven. In thee have we trusted, yet are we put to shame. To thee have we looked, sad Son of Mary, yet do our hearts break. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake, Lord God, awake! Why sleepest thou?”

So cried the queen in agony.

“Yea, Holy Mother. Yea, Son of Mary. Yea, Lord God Almighty. Rise for our help and save us. Hide us in the covert of thy wings. Awake, Lord God, awake!”

So wept the pale-faced nun.

“Peace, children, peace!” whispered the gray queen-mother. Her tears were many, but her tones confident the Lord of all the earth would avenge with a terrible vengeance! “Peace, children, peace. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep!”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLE OF THE VER

ERE autumn came the sound of war was heard in the land. On the eve of battle, a pale June evening in the year 957, the lights were burning in the camp outside the old-world city of St. Albans.

The royal troops were lying on the site of the ancient Verulamium, separated from the shrine by the quiet waters of the Ver, romantic and historic tributary of the winding Colne. The rebels were in possession of the monastery, the abbey, and the three fine churches built by the abbot Ulsinus on the three principal roads leading to St. Albans. Long after the moon appeared the young king and the old warrior surveyed the scene and planned the mode of battle.

What generations of men had trodden the streets they now trod! How many bloody battles had these ruins seen! For back, far back in the dark and misty past, beyond the vision of any historian, were laid the deep foundations of this

THE BATTLE OF THE VER

British city of Verulam. It may have been ancient when Nebuchadnezzar stormed Jerusalem, or Romulus founded Rome, or David danced before the ark.¹

From the time prehistoric Britons hewed the site out of the forest, built their wattled huts, and dugged ditches round them for defense, the city had known the sound of war. Tribe after tribe fought for supremacy round it ere Cæsar came and hoisted the flag of the Eternal City. In vain did Cassivelaunus defend his wattled huts. In vain did Boadicea redden the streets with the blood of seventy thousand Romans. The invincible legions returned with greater slaughter. Destroyed times without number, Verulam rose from its ashes, phenix-like, again and again, taking to herself each time greater and yet greater splendor.

The first Roman stronghold built in Britain, Verulam was made a municipium or free city by Nero, and favored by many emperors till it became a place of great wealth and beauty. Its spacious streets were lined with luxurious villas, in which,

¹ See St. Albans: Historical and Picturesque, by Charles H. Ashdown, F. R. G. S., and F. G. Kitton, whence part of the following description is drawn.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

with scented baths and savory dishes, the proud Romans recalled their sunny Pompeii. The great Forum spread its columned space in the heart of the city, where gaily dressed citizens discoursed together and managed municipal affairs. Near by rose the massive walls of the Basilica, with its law courts and attendant halls, while the summits of temples reared their columned façades in the chief streets around. Anon the clank of metal would fall on the ear as companies of mail-clad warriors, led by grim centurions, tramped along the streets, the sun glinting on their burnished helmets. The iron grasp of Rome had closed upon the city, with the blessings and curses of the highest civilization the world had yet seen.

But soon the scene is changed again. The Romans depart to prop a tottering empire and leave the Britons in possession once more. But vice and luxury have weakened them. Picts, Scots, Irish, Saxons, and Danes now sweep over the city in swift succession, and the clustered crowds of luxurious Britons can not say them nay. To Verulam with its costly palaces, painted temples, triumphal arches, and Corinthian columns, as to an enchanted city, came every foe, till at last came

THE BATTLE OF THE VER

a great horde of savage Angles and utterly destroyed it.

Down came the great Forum and massive Basilica. Tottered and fell the sumptuous Greek theater with its frescoed walls and marble-girdled spaces. To earth crashed stately piles, fluted columns, and carved capitals, grinding priceless works of art to worthless fragments. Fire completed the work. And so, amid the shout of conquering Angles, the crash of cyclopean masonry, and clouds of rolling smoke, Verulamium, the proud mistress of southern Britain, the favored choice of Imperial Rome for long centuries of wealth and glory, passed from sight of man, no more to rise in splendor as of old.

Time, however, had been kind to the blackened ruins of Verulam, and as Eadwine and Turketul surveyed the scene and planned the coming battle their eyes fell on garlands of ivy depending from arch and wall, and trailing networks of flowering convolvulus, and sweet-smelling honeysuckle clustering in masses over broken columns and fading frescoes. But within the ruins wild beasts held undisputed sway, and the pale moon looked down upon a weird scene as the boar and jackal left their

THE SINS OF A SAINT

haunts to seek their prey, while silently the wary wolf crept across the moonlit Forum of the deserted city.

The grim memories of the past entered the minds of Eadwine and Turketul, and gave them fight on the morrow. Sweet smelled the eve of battle to the nostrils of the old warrior, panting to strike for king and country once again.

At sunrise the king harangued the royal troops, calling upon them for the honor of queen and throne, the glory of home and country, the purity and freedom of life, to scatter the quaking rebels, womanly monks, and treacherous Danes. The fierce cheer that ran along the line betokened a bloody conflict, terribly fulfilled.

Waving their spears in the blood-light of dawn, they went to the battle singing this war-song:

Forward to battle,
Sons of the Hengist,
Sons of the Ash-tree,
Death-smiting warriors,
Noble and brave :
Forward to battle
To do or to die.

Fleet rides the leader,
Mounted on stallion,

THE BATTLE OF THE VER

Snow-white and eager,
Sniffing the war-breeze,
Thirsting for blood :
Forward to battle
To do or to die.

Girt with our armor,
Helmit and seax,
Shield white and dazzling,
Spear sharp and biting,
Panting we run :
Forward to battle
To do or to die.

Better the barrow
Bloody with battle ;
Laden with warriors
Leaping to death,
Choosing to enter
Heaven by that portal,
Rather than womanlike
Die on a bed :
Forward to battle
To do or to die.

Forward to battle
Sons of the Hengist,
Sons of the Ash-tree,
Death-smiting warriors,
Noble and brave :
Forward to battle
To do or to die.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

The churches of St. Stephen and St. Michael were first attacked, the former under a company led by Turketul, the latter by troops captained by the king. After a keen defense the rebels were driven from these and fell back on the abbey across the Ver, with much loss of life.

On the slopes commanding the abbey and monastery the revolutionaries were in great force, led by Eadgar, and Alfhere, ealdorman of Mercia, and Oswulf, earl of Northumbria. Behind them, armed and eager as any for the fray, was a great body of Benedictines, led by Dunstan (recalled for the battle), and Oslac, and the hoary-headed Athelstane, now himself a monk. Among them moved the withered primate, blessing and cursing. The old gray-beard cursed the king and his troops, but proclaimed the hope of heaven to all who fell fighting for Holy Church.

To reach the rebels, the King's Fish-pool and Ver had to be crossed, where from their fragile coracles the ancient Britons had fished, and miniature Roman galleys, driven by sturdy rowers or gaily painted sails, had flitted with freight of finely dressed ladies once upon a time. Now the bosom of the lake bristled with fierce warriors

THE BATTLE OF THE VER

on roughly made rafts, on which they vainly sought to reach the abbey side. Time after time they tried to cross, only to find themselves tossed into the waters or driven back with heavy loss. Cheered by Eadwine, and inspired by Turketul, they rallied again and again and leaped on the troubled rafts.

Everywhere the young king rushed, stirring and leading the royal troops. All day long he sought to reach the other side in vain. But at sunset he rallied the weary warriors for the last attempt, and, crossing all together with a rush, succeeded in gaining a footing.

Here a desperate hand to hand encounter took place. The rebels, vastly superior in numbers, bore down upon the royal troops and sought to hurl them into the river. Loudly the king cheered his men and led them on. Bravely did Turketul show them the way. In the thick of the battle his white hair was seen, ever to the front, ever at the place of danger: he seemed to lead a charmed life. Stoutly the rebels resisted. Once or twice they wavered before the terrible onslaught, but the monks behind secured them from retreat.

The success had been earned too late. Dark-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

ness soon came on and forced the king to retire from a vantage dearly bought. All day the carnage had lasted and night mercifully came to the help of the weary warriors.

Ah me! When the lights were lit at Verulamium that night many were missing who sat round them twenty-four hours ago, and many looked into them now with pale faces, smitten with the wounds of death!

On the morrow the struggle was resumed, and at noon the royal troops forced a passage across the waters. Then, as yesterday, a desperate hand to hand encounter took place on the rising slopes. Early in the fray Turketul was wounded, seeking to force his way through the ranks of the rebels. Refusing to leave the field, he continued to direct the fight, bound as to his wounds and carried on a shield. Bit by bit the king, towering above all others in strength and stature, forced his way up, and beat the rebels back, hurling anathemas at the cursing monks. Every inch of ground was fought and every step meant loss. But as the day wore on the defense lost its fearlessness, and ere sunset came the revolutionaries fell back upon the abbey itself.

THE BATTLE OF THE VER

Here all attempts to drive them from their vantage proved unavailing. Confident in the strength of their position and numbers, the monks loudly urged the rebels to drive the foul queen's followers down the steep. Elated with victory, the royal troops strove hard to carry the stronghold. But in vain.

Darkness crept between the warriors and left the battle still undecided, with the king, however, in possession of the left bank of the Ver.

That night the royal troops camped on the field of battle amid the dead and the dying. Their wounds were honorable, every one. Against great odds for two long days they had fought and won. The morrow, they hoped, would crown their arms with victory.

Securely they laid them down to rest under a canopy of black clouds that swept along the sky and made night dark as pitch. Cheerfully the king waited for the dawn. That, he hoped, would see the rebels flying from his sword.

But he reckoned without understanding the resources of the foe, and without giving a true explanation of the activity of the monks all night long.

CHAPTER XXIV

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

WITHIN the abbey the rebels nursed their wrath and chafed under wounds Saxon swords had hewn. Except for the lights around the altar and shrine of St. Albans, the old British-Roman church lay in darkness. Through the shadowy, dimly lighted building black-cowled monks were moving, holding the crucifix before the dying and pointing the wounded to the Crucified hanging above the altar.

There their eyes fell on a lifelike representation of the dying Saviour, carved out of a huge block of oak and nailed to a rough wooden cross. The body of the sufferer was gaily painted: blood trickled from his hands and feet and spurted from under the crown of thorns. His great sad eyes looked down upon the crowd as on that woful day: On the tiers of the nave also were seven quaint frescoes of the Crucified, with St. Mary and St. John on either side, which the blood-stained hands

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

of King Offa had caused to be painted. Everywhere the Saviour looked down upon the throng.

The living cursed and heeded him not. The wounded cast plaintive glances at him, in case soon they might need his help. The dying turned their faces toward him and gazed with rapture on the crown of thorns. Grim Dane and fierce Mercian alike found their hope in him.

Within the monastery monks cursed the valor of the king and trembled. Bit by bit he had driven them from their ground, lustily though they had cheered the rebels and damned his men. Their nervous fingers quickly ran over their olive beads and played with their pendant crosses.

They looked forward to morning with much misgiving. Was Holy Church indeed to be humbled before the evil-doer? Had it not been certain of sweeping the young king from the throne? Were its fondest wishes of empire and prestige to be indefinitely postponed? Would its power and aggression be checked for a time? Must priests be tolerated who dared to love and wed the sisters of Mary? They groaned. Oh, for victory, Holy Mother of God!

In the abbot's chamber sate the leaders of

THE SINS OF A SAINT

the revolt staring at the prospect with brows wrinkled and stern. The hope of the dawn was dark as the night. Black clouds swept across the sky and mocked their woe. The sting of defeat rankled sore in their breasts. In the hearts of all passionate hatred of the king grew with the strength and swiftness possible only under such circumstances. Malice, wrath, dread, were writ on firmly clenched mouths, deeply knitted brows, fiercely flashing eyes, and pale or flushed cheeks.

The puckered primate's withered features trembled with passion. The battle had not gone as Odo had expected. Dane was not yet a match for Saxon. What would the morrow bring forth?

The pale face of Dunstan was white to-night. The bright eyes danced in their sockets as ever, searching for the way to victory. But for one hope his spirit would be beaten and exile alone remain for him.

Eadgar played with the jeweled hilt of his sword and sighed. To do him honor, he had played with it right bravely through the day. Was not Turketul right? What a pity dreams of silk and purple were so hard to realize! Would the mark of blood be on the crown, as on his sword now, if

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

he should ever win it? Was that the voice of Croyland crying for vengeance? Better keep an eye on Oslac!

The treacherous Alfhere, ealdorman of Mercia, ground his teeth in rage. Who would have thought his young kinsman would have been so hard to beat? The flower of his army had perished before the terrible onslaught of the king. Would the remnant be able to laugh defiance on the morrow? Or would they flee?

The grim jarls of the north, Gunnar, Oswulf, Rold, and Dragmel, sate in a cluster together, and cursed both the Church and the king under their breath. Fierce and silent men, they liked the sight of blood and loved the sound of war. But was it worth while lifting the sword to force a king from the side of a woman? And they say she is beautiful and good. Yet, what freedom and power would victory bring them!

“If only Ethelwold would come with the brave East-Anglians victory would yet be ours,” Dunstan sighed, breaking the silence.

“Aye!” answered a dozen voices together.

“Where can he be?” asked one.

“What can have happened?” queried another.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“What if the young king has entrapped him?”

“If only he would come!”

As Dunstan uttered the hope again, a monk came running from the church of St. Peter and announced the approach of the long-delayed Ethelwold.

A shout of triumph rent the air and startled the slumbering king on the slopes without.

Faces that were wobegone a moment since shone with joy now. The clenched mouths opened, the knitted brows lifted, eyes flashed with glce, and pale cheeks glowed with sure hopes of victory.

“What now? What now, my merry men?” asked the puckered primate, his white hair shaking with excitement and hope.

“Shall we wait for dawn to hurl him down the slopes,” asked the treacherous Alfhere, “or attack him now?”

“Now!” cried the grim jarls, leaping to their feet and drawing their blood-stained swords. “Now, while we are strong with anger and furious with hate!”

“Nay, not now!” cried the wily Dunstan, his

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

deep-set eyes dancing with delight. "This rather, ye brave jarls: Let the East-Anglians make a circuit in the darkness and stealthily creep across the Ver. Then at dawn he will wake to find himself out-maneuvered, surrounded, entrapped. With Ethelwold behind, and you in front, he may gnash his teeth and curse his folly, but will have to choose, and that right speedily, between your death-smiting swords and the terms of Holy Church."

The cheers that met this bold suggestion showed the wily abbot had conquered once again. They came from all the chamber, loud, long, wild, and full of passion. They rang through the darkness and fell on the slumbering ear of the king. He started up and listened. What could the monks be doing, he wondered.

"But what if Eadwine will cut his way out and laugh at your terms of peace?" queried Eadgar, who knew his brother's spirit, and feared still the issue of the fight.

The grim jarls growled at the thought and Mercia's ealdorman mocked the fears of the prince. But Odo felt the king could not be played with.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“We must force him, at least, to agree to the rending of the kingdom,” he answered, frowning. “We must make it easy for him to yield, else the lion may fight to the death. For the present, methinks, there has been enough of that. We can afford to bide our time and wait for more. If we win the freedom of the north, we must be satisfied—for the present. Then hail Eadgar, king of the north! What think you, ye grim northern jarls?”

Mercians and Danes alike were pleased with the terms of Odo. The battle had been sterner and bloodier than they expected. Power and liberty they loved and often had fought for. To win them thus would more than atone for the blood they had spilt.

To Dunstan and Oslac, however, the prospect was not pleasing. Such terms would put the goals of their ambition indefinitely out of reach. The king would not fall as Oslac had hoped, and Eadgar would not be numbered among the slain! The waters of the north would not, after all, carry his bark to the shining sea and the golden strand! Not yet would the beautiful Elgiva receive his fond embraces! He rose impatiently from his

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

seat and looked toward Dunstan. Had the abbot no way better than this?

“Nay, not so!” cried Dunstan for the second time that night. “Rather this, most noble Odo: Fight it out to the death. Compel him to submit. Teach him now to obey. Show him death and he will shrink from it. Offer him life, in the name of Holy Church, and he will perform the penance she requires. Hath not she issued her decrees? May her words be spurned by a boy? Must not they be obeyed and that right speedily? Is it for no holy end these swords were bared? Fear not, Odo, and use them to exalt the Holy Name!”

“But how?” answered Odo, well enough pleased with the rending of the kingdom. “If the temper of the young cub will not yield to our commands, what can we do? Is it nothing to have wrested the north from his power and to have weakened him in the south? Can not we afford to bide our time? Surely in the end Holy Church will have her way.”

“Are there no ways of making him obey without commanding him? Can not Holy Church have her way now, this very night, by one more

THE SINS OF A SAINT

move in the dark?" asked the wily abbot in reply.

The bishops pricked their ears and waited, expectant of another bold suggestion.

"What meanest thou?" queried Odo, with interest.

"This: The queen now sleeps at Kingston. Let Holy Church send and take her! And then, will not her commands be sure to be obeyed? Will not Holy Church herself enforce her own decrees? Will not the king be powerless to disobey and all men taught the Church must be supreme?"

The fleshy Kynesige, who sate by Odo's side vainly hunting his brain for a thought, smiled broadly and roared approval. The puckered primate smoothed his wrinkles and raised his brows as the pleasant plan took possession of his mind. For the second time that night Dunstan had scored.

"Good, Dunstan, good!" cried Odo, smiling triumphantly. "But how can it be done?"

"Leave that to me," answered Oslac advancing, "and I will see the will of Holy Church performed. A few fleet horses, and we shall be at Kingston ere dawn, then carry Elgiva far from

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

the reach of Eadwine. Speak the word and I will away."

"Away, then, and may victory attend thee. Take her and banish her from the realm forever, as the law of Holy Church commands. Good, Dunstan, good! No more will the harlot sleep in the rebel's arms. No more will he vaunt himself and laugh at the orders of Odo. Now will Holy Church have her way. Away, Oslac, away, and make our wishes sure!"

So cried the primate, carried away with delight at this fresh prospect of victory opened up before him. This was vengeance beyond his fondest dreams.

Thus encouraged, Oslac rose at once and went out into the night. The grim northern jarls and Alfhære quickly followed to execute their maneuver. There were smiles on the face of every man as the joy of victory, certain it seemed, entered them. There was triumph in the heart of Oslac. At last, at last, the queen was delivered into his power!

When they had gone Odo exulted, chuckled, and rubbed his hands with glee. The floods of hate overpowered him and carried him on to the

THE SINS OF A SAINT

scheming of a deed that brands his memory with guilt and shame. With victory within his grasp he thought only of fiendish revenge. Had not the king laughed him to scorn and mocked at the Church's hypocrisy? Had not the queen hurled her anger at the priests? What consummate revenge could he have? And as he queried the fiend entered into his soul.

“Was not the queen beautiful? Rob her of her beauty!” whispered the fiend, “and laugh at her calamity!”

The primate of Holy Church started, hesitated a moment only, then gloated over the deed, and opened his eyes with glee, vengeance-satisfied.

“Go thou also, Sigwulf,” he cried to his youthful kinsman—the same who sate at his feet at the coronation feast—under whose Benedictine gown, we said, a wild barbarian lurked. “Go thou also, Sigwulf, and see that Oslac fulfils our commands. Seize the queen, and soon as thou canst, rob her of her beauty! Brand her with red-hot irons! Let the scars be deep! Make sure no one interferes! Then banish her to Ireland! So will Holy Church triumph, and Eadwine and his queen come

TWO MOVES IN THE DARK

to feel the power of Odo! Away, Sigwulf, away, and brook no tarrying!"

Into another soul the fiend had also entered. So, when Sigwulf went away on his barbaric errand, Dunstan's dark eyes danced with diabolic joy.

CHAPTER XXV

A PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

WHEN the king lay down amid the dead and the dying, and Holy Church planned her two moves in the dark, the women at court prayed. A messenger had come from Verulamium, and while the fate of the men hung in the balance, the hearts of the women trembled.

In the queen's private chamber the white nun of Croyland stood beside the altar, holding high a handsome golden cross, while the beautiful Elgiva and sad queen-mother, her hair now white as snow, knelt and sang this hymn of prayer:

Through Thy wounded heart and weary,
Through Thy bleeding brow and sad,
Through Thine agony and passion,
Joy of angels, Hope of men,
Come our feet that now are torn and bleeding,
Come our hearts that now are sore with weeping,
And Thy Cross our piercèd hands uplifting.

For our lov'd ones faring far
Girt about with dangers drear,
Father, husband, brother, child,

PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

Bone of bone, and blood of blood,
Lord, Thou see'st our feet are torn and bleeding.

For the wounded, rent, and sore,
Lying on the battle-field,
For the weary and the worn,
Lifting tearful eyes above,
Lord, Thou know'st our hearts are sore with weeping.

For the dying and the dead
Giving back their souls to God,
For the fated of the fight
Gazing at the starless sky,
Lord, Thy Cross our piercèd hands are lifting.

Grant that from danger our dearest be guarded,
Grant that to triumph their armies be led,
Grant that the teeth of death-wingèd arrows
Slip from the shields of our brave-fighting men,
Strengthen their sword-play, and
Give them to feel the might of the Lord-King,
Maker, and Saviour, and Slayer of men.

Let not the white-tail'd eagle descending
Swoop on the carcass of heroes well-slain,
Let not the hungry war-hawk be rending
Faces now set in the cold grip of Death,
Hover around them, and
Let the pale moonlight, light of the dying,
Lighten their souls to the Broad Burg of Heav'n.

That night the sad queen and the pale nun
stayed up late communing with one another. They

THE SINS OF A SAINT

sate in the chamber whence Eadwine was dragged on coronation eve. Three quaintly shaped lanterns lighted it dimly. The memory of that dream-dispelling night came back to Elgiva like a flood of rushing waters, and beat against the hope in her heart.

“My heart fails me to-night, White Heart. The light of faith has burned low: shadows flit in the gloom and frighten me. Where is God, White Heart? Will he hear our prayer? Can he? Or does it enter the great void and fall on no listening ear?”

“So asked I Turketul once when sorely tried,” answered the soft-voiced nun, crucifix in hand. “‘My child,’ he said, ‘come with me.’ He took me by the hand and led me to the cell of an aged nun.

“It was dark, and she beheld us not, but by the light from her lamp I saw the tears streaming down her face. She seemed to be laden with a great sorrow and wrestled long in prayer. ‘Wilt thou not answer me, O Lord?’ she cried again and again in great agony of soul, so that I was glad when Turketul took me by the hand and led me away. Her agony was so great.

PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

“ He took me into the night. ‘ Look up there,’ he said, and pointed to the heavens. I looked up, and beheld myriads of stars and countless worlds away in the deep, cold spaces. Near by was an old man with a star-glass, through which he was looking at the far-off worlds. ‘ Seest thou aught?’ I asked. ‘ God,’ he answered. ‘ Look for thyself.’ And I looked. The deep, cold spaces were covered with the dust of stars. Myriad upon myriad of shining worlds, unseen before, met my gaze. But all were cold and speechless, and I could find no comfort. Sadly, therefore, I turned away from the sky.

“ Then Turketul took me by the hand again, very gently, and led me slowly straight back to the cell of the aged nun. ‘ Look,’ he said. The tears were gone! It seemed as if the sun were shining from her face! ‘ I thank thee, Holy Son, that thou hast heard me,’ she was crying, in an ecstasy of joy. Again and again the words came from her heart, steeped in boundless praise, and accented with the note of certain triumph. ‘ There,’ said Turketul, ‘ there in that cell, as in the shining worlds, is God, in the heart of thy sister, whose prayer, thou seest, he hath answered.’ ”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“But how do I know he will answer mine?” asked the queen, feeling for her crucifix.

“So asked I Turketul when we turned away and passed out into the night again. ‘With the answer thou hast nothing to do, my child,’ he replied. ‘Thou hast only to pray, nothing doubting, leaving God to mind his own affairs. The prayer is thine. The answer is God’s. In his own time and way he will perform it. Not now it may be: his wisdom knoweth best. Not in thy lifetime, perhaps. Not in a thousand years: who knoweth? But surely will he perform it at the right time.’

“‘See,’ he cried, as he pointed heavenward and then swept his hand over the moonlit fields, ‘behold the myriad stars. Look at the fair, solid earth, and listen to thy soul’s prayer; for I tell thee that prayer shall endure, and its answer endure, long after the stars and the earth have perished! Is it not written: “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away”? And hath he not promised to answer thy prayer? Though of the day in which he will answer, and of the hour, no man knoweth, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only. Ask what thou wilt, my child, and

PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

leave the rest with God. He will not close his ears, but will answer in good time, in good time.' So Turketul told me, Elgiva."

"Yea, White Heart, and told thee truly, I would say, if fear and darkness did not crowd my soul. But last night I lay and dreamed of Edwy, and my heart is sorely troubled. For in my dream, lo, countless black figures crept out of the darkness, and stole across a river, silently and softly, as if walking on the surface of the water. And when day dawned, lo, they were all warriors clad in mail and armed with spears and swords. In the midst of them lay the king. And as they lifted their spears to hurl at him I cried aloud. He seemed to hear me, rose hastily, and ran down a long slope into the river, pursued by an army behind and awaited by one in front. They flung their spears at him and wounded him. And when I saw the blood I awoke. What can my dream portend, White Heart? Does it not weaken your hold on God? Is that his answer to my prayer?"

"Have not messengers come from the battle to say that the king hath beaten the foe and waits but to put them to flight on the morrow? Is not thy dream vain? Thou art weary and sad, and

THE SINS OF A SAINT

full of forebodings struck on the anvil of thy love. Fear not, Elgiva! To-morrow the king will conquer!”

“And when I slept again, White Heart, lo, out of the darkness came the sound of horses. Nearer and nearer they came, till at the palace gate the dark riders dismounted. Slowly they crept to where I lay, and came and bent over me. The hot breath of one beat against my cheek and made my heart beat loudly. But I could not move or speak. Slowly his features were disclosed to me. They were those of Oslac, with the wild look that filled his eyes that day he hounded me in the wood. His hot breath came faster. His eyes opened wider. A smile—O God, what a smile!—covered his face. ‘Thou art mine, Elgiva, mine at last,’ he whispered, ‘come away with me!’ And he stooped to kiss me. But ere his lips touched mine I awoke with a cry, and, lo, I was shaking with terror. I slept no more. Oh, what can these dreams portend, White Heart? Will he hear, and save me, if I pray to him?”

“Pray, my sister, pray, and he will answer thee.”

“Good night, White Heart. It is late and

PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

slumber must be sought. Good night! Remember me in thy prayers, and forget not the king. Where is he now? And how? May He answer us! Good night, White Heart, good night!"

The queen retired to her bedchamber, and laid herself down to rest by the side of her sleeping child. For long she tossed on her couch, troubled and anxious, till at last, worn out, she fell asleep.

And as she slept she dreamed. Out of the darkness crept countless black figures and stole across the river, silently and softly, as if walking on the surface. Anon day dawned, and, lo, they were warriors clad in mail and armed with spears and swords. And in the midst of them lay the king. And as they lifted their spears to hurl at him, the queen awoke, crying: "Edwy, Edwy, awake! They surround thee! They entrap thee! They rise to hurl the spear! Awake, Edwy, awake!"

She was frightened, and looked around her dark chamber fearfully. Black clouds were sweeping across the sky, through which the light of the moon glinted now and again. Her dream troubled her and made her still more anxious. The darkness

THE SINS OF A SAINT

closed around her soul as the lights of faith went out. A cry of passion broke from her heart against God, a cry steeped in pain and bitter disappointment. From God she turned to her child and wept.

“Was it for this thou wast born, my child, my darling? To bitterness and sorrow? To see thy father hounded of Holy Church and thy mother blaspheming God? Why will he not answer me, my child, if only for thy sake, pure white soul, still scented with the breath of heaven? How long will the wicked triumph?”

The child slept peacefully and answered not, nor woke when the hot tears fell on its face.

Was God's benediction of peace on the face of the child? How else did a quiet peace steal over the queen's soul and lead her to kiss her crucifix with a sigh of repentance? How else did she lay herself down again to sleep with the babe on her breast and a new hope in her life, as if the angels of God had entered to garrison her heart and mind, through Christ Jesus? How else did she fall asleep whispering to her child: “Hush, my soul! The answer is God's! Not in my lifetime, not in thine, perhaps; but surely at the right time!”

PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

And as she slept pleasant visions of childhood passed through her brain and lit her face with joy. The last shadows of sorrow fled before the light of her dream.

As she lay thus, the window of her room opened and a monk crept stealthily in. At that moment the moon broke from behind a black bank of clouds and flooded the chamber with its pale pure light. Its beams fell on the beautiful face of the queen and glorified her wealth of golden tresses that partly hid the babe quietly sleeping on her snow-white breast. Her face still shone with the joy of her dream. The monk opened his eyes in admiration, and came and bent over her.

Suddenly the light passed from her face, and pain settled on every feature. The monk started at the change. Anon her lips began to move. He knelt down to catch her words. His hot breath beat on her fair cheeks.

“They come! They come over the river again! Fight on, Edwy! Fight on! Make no peace. Strike, and spare not. Fight till the wicked flee, or thou dost fall fighting for the right. Fight on, Edwy! Fight on! Hark! The sound of horses again. They come. They come. Nearer,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

nearer. Save me, Holy Mother. Save me. It is the face of Oslac! Oh, what eyes! Save me, Son of Mary. Save me. Edwy! Edwy——”

So crying, the queen woke with a start.

“Hush! or it will go ill with thee,” hissed the monk as he knelt over her and stifled her screams. “Hush! Edwy is not here, but Oslac come to claim thee for his own. Come, Elgiva, come. Thou’rt mine at last. No power on earth can save thee from me now!”

The queen struggled in his unholy arms as for her life, but could not free herself. Her smothered cries did not reach far. Her frantic efforts were unavailing. In a moment some armed retainers of the primate, awaiting Oslac’s call without, came leaping into the chamber. Quickly seizing her, they lifted her out through the window and carried her away to where their horses stood. Binding her hastily to Oslac’s saddle and casting a robe round her, they mounted their steeds and bounded away at a gallop.

No sooner had they gone than White Heart and the sad queen-mother came running into the queen’s chamber, only to find traces of the struggle and the room empty—save for the babe that

PRAYER AND GOD'S ANSWER

still lay sleeping on the couch from which its mother had been torn. Through the open window came the distant sound of retreating horses, bounding away to the west. On the floor was a Benedictine cowl, and inside it was written the name of Oslac.

The women wept with anger and sorrow.

“O Son of Mary!” shrieked White Heart, trembling with passion. “Is this thine answer to her prayer? Is this thine answer?”

She fell on her knees and looked on her crucifix with eyes pained, perplexed, and full of tears. Then, starting up, she hurled it into the darkness after the flying monk, crying:

“Pursue him! Pursue him! Thou Son of Mary! Pursue him! And avenge the queen!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

RECEIVING A CROWN OF GLORY

WHEN day dawned the king found himself out-manuevered and entrapped. Never was man more surprised than he when morning light revealed the rebels still in front, and a fresh force across the Ver, hemming him in. The activity of the monks during the night was in preparation for head-long flight, he fancied, and not in execution of this surrounding maneuver.

So this was the cause of the cheer, loud, long, and full of passion: this the end of all his fighting!

The situation was bewildering. To still attempt to storm the abbey with a foe in front and a foe behind was well-nigh impossible. To retreat across the river, menaced in the rear, was equally so. Yet there was nothing for it but to die making the attempt, or to capitulate. The rebels waited while the king considered, their long spears glittering in the morning sun, confident the victory was theirs.

A CROWN OF GLORY

Looking at the brave dead that lay around him, for his sake pierced with many wounds, and at the feeble force that still remained to him, the king frowned. Looking at the overwhelming numbers opposed to him he frowned still worse. His courage was undaunted and his soul-strength undiminished. To sound the battle-cry and court victory, even in the face of such fearful odds, was his first impulse. Every man in the camp would follow him to death, and laugh at the fiend, he knew, if only he lifted his spear. But what should be done? For their sakes should he come to terms? Or fighting die?

The king and his captains gathered round the wounded Turketul, while the armies waited for the signal of death or life.

“Fight it out to the bitter end!” cried the old warrior, raising himself feebly on his shield. “Better defeat, wounds, death, fighting for the right, for the sorrowing and oppressed, for virgin souls that weep and cry to Heaven for help, than base submission to wrong, crafty diplomacy, feeble acceptance of dangerous circumstances. Death is sweet, and final victory sure, for all who suffer for such a cause. Fight it out

THE SINS OF A SAINT

to the bitter end; suffer together with Christ now, and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

As he finished, the old warrior sank back on his shield exhausted. The black angel was hovering round him even now. He was smitten sore with the wounds of death and breathed quickly, but his face pointed to the foe. His eyes were dim and filling with the strange weird light no man can mistake, yet his vision of truth was clear and the integrity and strength of his soul unshaken.

His words fell on the ears of brave and admiring men, and stirred the enthusiasm of the royal warriors. Every man grasped his spear more firmly, and felt a new strength enter his soul.

"Sound the battle-cry," shouted Eadmund, "and we will fight to the bitter end. For virgin souls that weep. For the honor of the queen. For king and country!"

Ten thousand spears flashed in the morning light and waited the word to hurl them.

The dark-eyed Ethelsige and the brow-scarred

A CROWN OF GLORY

Alfric, however, remained silent, and waited till the enthusiasm stirred by the old warrior's words had cooled a little.

“What think you, ye silent men, what think you?” asked the king, turning toward them. “Is death too much to pay for the honor of a soul? Is life endurable under any circumstances? Are the ties of home and kindred, wife and children, too dear? It can not be that ye are both afraid?”

“To court death rather than endure shame is the wish of every true warrior,” answered the brow-scarred Alfric. “For my king and country I have never failed in battle, and have won these scars. Life is not so sweet to my taste that for its sake I would give up a warrior's honor and earn the name of coward. But is there no such thing as peace with honor? With cunning diplomacy may not we save our lives and maintain the honor of our fair names?”

“And we know not what terms may be offered,” broke in the dark-eyed Ethelsige. “Why make haste to build a barrow before we learn the terms of peace? Many a one now morning-cold the harp shall wake no more. The raven, fiercely eager o'er the fated, shall soon be full

THE SINS OF A SAINT

of talking and to the earn shall say how it sped him at the gorging, when, with the wolf, he robbed the slain. And why, if peace can be arranged with honor, may not we spare our carcasses till another time?"

The wounded warrior turned him on his bier with a groan and sternly pointed to the foe.

Even while Ethelsige spake a messenger was seen to leave the abbey and approach the royal ranks. As he drew near, Eadwine recognized the fleshy Kynesige. He came toward the king stalking with proud and overbearing mien, haughty and insolent as ever. Within twenty paces of the king's men he lifted up his loud voice and shouted:

"In the name of Holy Church and the most noble Odo, I command you to surrender.

"Free pardon and remission of sin is promised to all who will lay down their arms, on the following terms:

"Firstly. The king to renounce Elgiva and banish her from the realm, even as Holy Church hath commanded.

"Secondly. The territory north of the Thames—namely, the ealdormanry of Mercia, and of Northumbria, and of East Anglia, to be given up

A CROWN OF GLORY

to Eadgar as independent sovereign, in punishment of the king's sin.

“Thirdly. The king to be handed over to Holy Church and held as hostage of war till the terms of peace are duly ratified and performed.

“One hour is given you to consider and repent.

“In the name of Holy Church and the most noble Odo, I call upon you to hearken and obey, on pain of death and eternal shame! Amen.”

Having thus delivered himself, the fleshy bishop gathered his robes in hand and stalked back to the abbey, glad withal that he had not received a spear for answer and had spoken so bravely.

Ere he disappeared the notice of the king was drawn to a great commotion among the rebels on the other side of the Ver. Great numbers were running toward a point in the river beyond the church of St. Stephen. Soon a man was seen to plunge into the water and make for the king's side. Countless arrows splashed round him, and for a moment it seemed as if he must be slain. Strongly he swam, however, and reached the bank at length, not without many sores. Up the slopes

THE SINS OF A SAINT

he hurried, making straight for the king, and staggering under his wounds. And when at last he reached the royal presence he sank breathless and exhausted, and swooned away.

“Give him wine and bring him swiftly round,” the king commanded. “From his state we should judge he must have run hard and hath a burden to deliver—it may be from the queen.”

Wine was given the runner, and his wounds deftly bound by the king’s thanes. He recovered and swooned again. Would he ever speak?

Breathless with excitement, the king waited for the runner’s message. Could aught be wrong at court?

The wounded Turketul turned upon his shield and drew the eyes of the waiting throng.

“Hold the cross before mine eyes,” he groaned. “Nearer, nearer. My sight is dim this summer morn. Nearer, nearer still. There! Now my soul beholds him once again.”

The priest bent over the old warrior, and held the crucifix close to his dim eyes, whispering:

“When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, thou shalt receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

A CROWN OF GLORY

"Nearer! Nearer still!" answered the dying man, as darkness closed around him.

"The Chief Shepherd will soon appear," moaned the king, as he turned from the brave old warrior to the wounded runner now coming to life again.

"O king!" he gasped, looking with pity on the monarch's face.

"What news? Speak quickly!"

"Ill news. Too hard for the heart of the king."

"What thine errand then?"

"An errand would God I had never run. Wo is me that I should bear this message to the king."

"Speak then! Quick!"

"Thou makest haste to hear thy sorrow, art swift to bear thy burden, eager to grasp the thorn that's doomed to wound thy heart and brow."

"Hath aught befallen the queen?"

"Yea, indeed! Last night while she slept and dreamed, or lay and prayed for thee, armed men came and stole thy queen away. Her screams awoke the sad queen-mother, who hastened to the chamber to find the babe only sleeping on the couch, and hear the hurrying of retreating feet."

THE SINS OF A SAINT

The shout of anger that rose from the royal ranks fell on the startled rebels. Odo pricked his ears in anger, but Dunstan looked well pleased.

“Eadwine will fight it out,” cried Eadgar. “Did not I tell thee he would, O mocker?” he queried of Alfhere.

“And didst thou not pursue?” demanded the king. “Were there no brave men at Kingston ready to die, if need be, like these heroes round me, in defense of the queen? Suffered thou her to be carried away without pursuit, without a struggle?”

“Yea, O king, we made pursuit, and ran to take the queen, but failed. Every man among us ran, and women too, but we were no match for the fleet horses of the monks?”

“Monks? Benedictines again?”

“Yea! For in the chamber a cowl was found, and written in it the name of Oslac.”

“God pity the woman who falls into the hands of Oslac!” muttered Eadmund to himself, as he laid the wounded messenger on the ground.

“Oslac!” cried the king, in a frenzy of passion, almost beside himself with the outrage on the queen, this new insult offered him, the subtle craft

A CROWN OF GLORY

of the foe. "Ah! Traitors and cowards every one! By day they offer terms of peace. By night they seek to win, by deeds dark and foul, what they know they could not wrest from me in open fight. To horse! To horse! We shall pursue, and wo to the monks when we overtake them!"

The word of command was greeted by the royal army with a cheer that struck terror into the wondering rebels. The strength and daring roused by this fresh wrong might carry them to victory. The eyes of every thane leaped with fire, their lips closed firmly, their hands grasped at their swords.

"Raise me up!" cried the old warrior, already in the valley, and wandering. "Lift me up. Give me my spear that I may hurl it once again. Nearer, nearer! My sight is dim this summer morn.

"Fight it out to the bitter end! Better defeat, wounds, death, fighting for the right, for the sorrowing and oppressed, for virgin souls that weep and cry to Heaven, than base submission.

"Nearer, nearer! What can that light be? It is dazzling me this summer morn. Nearer! Oh, it is bright! And some one is coming in the glory.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Who? The Chief Shepherd appearing—nearer, nearer, smiling, and offering me—me—me a crown of glory—that fadeth not away. My Lord and my God——”

And so whispering, Turketul reached forward as if to take something in his hands, smiled, and fell back upon his shield for the last time.

The Chief Shepherd had appeared and the old warrior had received the crown of glory that fadeth not away.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MANTLE OF POWER

THE dying Turketul gave life to the royal troops. Not a man among them closed his heart to the pathos of the scene. And when the spirit winged its flight away its strength and passion fell like a mantle on the wondering throng. Death was beautiful now and no gift to be desired like the crown Turketul had won.

The old warrior had scarce entered the glory ere the fleshy Kynesige stalked forth from the abbey again to receive the king's answer. Proud and overbearing, haughty and insolent, and confident of victory, he drew near and cried:

“In the name of Holy Church, and the most noble Odo, I command you to surrender, on pain of death and eternal shame. What say ye?”

“This is our answer,” shouted the king, and lifting his spear, he hurled it full at the ample body of the fleshy Kynesige.

At the same moment ten thousand spears

THE SINS OF A SAINT

flashed in the morning light and ten thousand throats shouted with might:

“That is our answer!”

The astonished bishop turned and fled, terror-stricken.

Then, standing over the dead body of Turketul, the king drew his sword, touched the brow of the old warrior with its point, lifted it to heaven, and cried:

“By the spirit of him who now is with thee, Lord, I swear to fight to the bitter end or die.”

Ten thousand spears again flashed in the morning light, and ten thousand faces, looking heavenward, echoed the vow of the king.

“For king and country!” cried the brow-scarred Alfric.

“For the honor of the queen!” added the dark-eyed Ethelsige.

“For virgin souls that weep!” whispered the faithful Eadmund.

“Now, leave all and follow me,” cried the king, mounting his steed and rushing down the slopes to the river.

The whole army instantly arose and followed

THE MANTLE OF POWER

him, horsemen and footmen, dashing down the slopes, fearless of death, and eager for fight.

Leaping into the river and on to the rafts, they were across the Ver and dashing full tilt against the East-Anglians before the rebels could recover from surprise.

Riding with fury the king and his thanes broke through the lines of the foe, and soaked their swords in blood.

Rushing behind the horsemen, the royal footmen dashed into the broken crowd of rebels.

No foe could resist their fierce and determined onslaught. For a moment only the Anglians rallied, then fell into confusion and fled.

Eagerly pursuing, the king and the royal troops harrowed the flying rebels, and dyed the green corn red with blood. The spirit of the dead warrior had given strength to every sword.

Then, leaving Alfric and Ethelsige to complete the rout, the king took Eadmund and a company of the royal thanes and rode away to Glastonbury, vowing vengeance on the lustful Oslac, and hoping against hope he might yet save the captive queen.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PRIEST OF THE LIGHTED SKULL

OSLAC had reason to congratulate himself on the success of his move in the dark. Five hours ago he was forcing his will on the puckered primate, and now his wish was gratified. The queen lay across his flying steed, clasped in his arms at last!

Pursuit he little feared, knowing full well there were few at court able to attempt the task. Yet was he anxious to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the king.

Riding on, he crossed the Thames, passed through Staines, nor halted till he came by Egham to the fair shores of Virginia Water. Here he dismounted, bathed the face of the unconscious queen, and rested his weary horses.

It was nearly dawn. The moon was low in the west, and the green corn was waving in the summer breeze. The silver salmon were sporting in the streams, and a sagacious beaver was making

LIGHTED SKULL

merry in the moonlit waters of the lake. Fain would Oslac have lingered had not the beautiful Elgiva appealed to him still more.

Mounting their steeds again, Oslac and his Benedictines rode away over the plains of Ascot till they came to sleepy Oakingham in the shade of Windsor Forest. And here they were forced to rest their horses again.

They halted in the depths of the forest. The moon had sunk, and the deep darkness that precedes the dawn had settled on the earth. Oslac dismounted, fanned the face of the still unconscious queen, laid her softly on a grassy slope, covered her with his cloak, and went to join his Benedictines.

The first shafts of day shot through the forest. The faint crimson streaks fell on the quivering leaves and mingled with the murky gray. The great tall trunks lifted themselves like mighty giants from the earth and stretched themselves in the morning light.

The sun rose and filled the forest with its golden beams. The trunks and branches cast long and devious shadows along the ground. Light and shade, crimson and gray, intermingled in won-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

derful and intricate mosaic on the gorgeous carpet of the forest and dazzled the eyes of the Benedictines.

The morning breeze moved among the leaves of the forest and troubled them. They quivered and trembled. And the sunlight playing on them cast countless myriads of tiny shadows on the floor of the forest, a multitudinous host of bits of shimmering gold and gray, trembling and quivering unceasingly.

The spirit of dawn entered the soul of Elgiva and slowly woke her. She opened her eyes and saw the crimson spread across the sky. She gazed on it wearily, as if but half awake. Then her eyelids crept over her sight and all was dark again.

She lay like one dead, yet conscious of life. The cool morning air fanned her face and laved her temples. She opened her lips and drew it deeply into her lungs. She heard the rustling of the breeze among the dank grass, and the sound was pleasant to her ears.

She opened her eyes again and looked, and saw Oslac and his Benedictines resting by a fire. She turned and saw the forest behind her. They sate

LIGHTED SKULL

in an open space surrounded by trees and she lay in the shadow of the great forest.

She lay long and gathered her thoughts together. The events of the night came crowding back to her, and the consciousness of her present peril vividly dawned. She looked toward the forest and then toward the monks. Her breath came quickly. Would it be possible to escape? The lights and shadows trembled and quivered. She shut her eyes and pondered.

The Benedictines looked toward her now and again, waiting for her to wake, and once Oslac came and stood over her and gazed at her long. She held her breath, and seemed to him as one dead.

For long after Oslac had looked on her she lay motionless as death. Then she warily opened her eyes and scanned her captors. They were making their morning meal.

She raised herself slowly on her hands and turned toward the forest. She would creep stealthily away and hide or run and run for life and liberty. She moved on her hands beneath the cloak, and stole a few paces forward. But no sooner did she begin to move than she fell on her face with a little gasping cry. Two pairs of

THE SINS OF A SAINT

piercing eyes were watching her from the shelter of the underwood!

She lay long before she dared look again. Then she half opened her eyes, and peered fearfully into the forest. Her breath came faster than before. Two faces, as of an old man and woman, crouching low upon the ground, stared at her, and beckoned her, and made signs to her to come. She scanned them anxiously and trembled. Their looks haunted her memory.

Quickly she cast a glance behind her; quickly raised herself on her hands; and quickly crept toward the wood. Her excitement was intense and her limbs were feeble. The faces beckoned her and urged her on.

Only a few paces and she was by their sides. They rose, and hastily drew her within their shelter.

But just then a string twanged and an arrow swished through the air. And the old woman threw up her hands, uttered a loud, shrill cry, and fell backward, with an arrow in her breast. And the air rang with the shouts of Oslac.

The old man lifted the queen in his arms and darted off with the strength of a giant. Quick

LIGHTED SKULL

as a horse he dashed away and tore through the forest. And quick as a hound the fleet-footed Oslac darted after him.

Away through the forest the old man flew for life and liberty. Away in his track the Benedictines sprang. And away into the covert of the underwood the old woman crept, with the arrow in her breast.

On and on the old man sped, swift as a horse. But ere he had covered a furlong he staggered and fell, with an arrow in his back.

And as he fell he turned and faced his slayer. His nostrils were extended. His mouth defiant. His eyes afire.

Instantly Oslac halted, drew back a pace, lifted his hands in wonder, and uttered a low, sharp cry of fear. It was the priest of the lighted skull!

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MERCY OF A MONK

QUICKLY recovering from his surprise at thus meeting the priest of the lighted skull, Oslac snatched the queen from his arms and carried her away. Greatly fearing a further attempt at rescue, and greatly frightened lest even now he should lose her, he flung Elgiva across his steed and rode away.

Keeping an anxious eye on every hand, they threaded their course through the great forest, and pushed on and came ere noon across the Blackwater and along the banks of the Lodden to the picturesque town of Basing, nor halted till they entered the stoke of that name. Thence over the North Downs they hurried, past Whitechurch and Hurstbourne Priors, till they arrived at Monkston, where they rested for the night.

Rising early as dawn, they entered Salisbury Plain, rode past the mystic circle of Stonehenge, and pressed on till they came to Maiden Bradley.

THE MERCY OF A MONK

Here they plunged into the great forest of Selwood, inhabited by wolves and wild boars and infested with highway robbers and notorious outlaws, nor left it till they had encountered many perils.

Twice their path was blocked by robbers, and twice they were forced to turn and make a long and devious circuit. Thrice they crossed small bands of the same and rode through them, full tilt. Once they found themselves out-manoeuvred, surrounded and outnumbered, and obliged to pay excessive toll. The grim outlaw pointed to the queen and demanded more. And not till they had paid unto the uttermost were they permitted to pass. Then just as they left the forest they were forced to make a final dash for liberty. Even as they entered the open a shower of arrows rained upon them. Two Benedictines reeled in their saddles and fell. An arrow plunged into the crest of Oslac's steed; had it been but an inch lower it must have entered the throat of Elgiva. The horse reared and almost threw them. And for a moment all was confusion. But they settled, darted forward, and galloped through without further hurt.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Thus, after many adventures and escapes, they came at last to Glastonbury at set of sun. The walls of the abbey, radiant with the setting glory, made a welcome sight for the eager eyes of Oslac. He entered its share with joy.

Now was Elgiva his at last! His, after scheming and struggling long to win her; his, after enduring the life of a monk for two weary years in hope of winning her, as Dunstan had hinted; his, in the very place where instead of praying he had dreamed of her, instead of mortifying the flesh he had pampered it, and instead of obeying King Eadred's dying will, had striven to stir up anarchy in the realm. That very night he would woo and win her by love—or by force.

At midnight, therefore, he came to the cell of the queen and stole quietly in. Elgiva, dressed in a garb of a nun, was kneeling before a private altar, in front of which were burning three tiny Oriental lamps, revealing a crucifix above, wrought in silver, with the figure of the Saviour beautifully beaten by the skilful hand of Dunstan. The unfinished Virgin beside it we have seen before.

The monk stood watching her a moment, unmoved by the tears that long had streamed down

THE MERCY OF A MONK

her face, and unseen by the straining eyes that looked to the cross for help.

“Elgiva!” he hoarsely whispered, moving toward her.

The queen started, shuddered, shrank from him, and cast herself prostrate before the Virgin.

“Holy Mother, save thy helpless child!”

“Elgiva! Dost thou hear? I have come. Rise, fair cousin. Prayers do not move the heart of Oslac.”

The queen answered not but prayed the more.

“Holy Mother, save thy child! Son of Mary, hear my cry, hear my cry, and keep my garments white!”

“Rise, Elgiva, and let us speak together. Thou hast harshly judged thy cousin. He loves thee well and comes to succor thee.”

“Nay, Oslac, nay! Get thee from me! Leave me with the Holy Virgin, and touch me not!”

“I do not wish to harm thee, sweet Elgiva, but would reason with thee. Come! Give me thy hand.”

“Oh, spare me from shame, Oslac! Save thy soul from further guilt and from God’s wrath that will surely come!”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Speak not to me of God or heaven’s wrath. I fear them not. Rise, Elgiva, rise. I have come to woo thee by love—or by force. Choose, and remember I mean to have my will, at last!”

“Thy will! Holy Mother, save thy child! Son of Mary, hear me! Oh, keep my garments white!”

“Listen, Elgiva. Thou art Edwy’s no more. Holy Church hath declared thou art neither wife nor queen. To-night thou art an outcast of society, a harlot-queen banished to Ireland, branded with the mark of shame. But I love thee, have loved thee from childhood with a great and passionate love, have endured hardship and insult all for thee, and for thy sake have sinned and schemed. Now, in thy shame, I ask thee to be mine, Elgiva. Then, come what may, Oslac will save thee from thyself, redeem thee from the Church’s doom, bring thee back to life and all the joys of wedlock. If not, banishment, misery, shame, death, all lie before thee. Choose, Elgiva, and say thou wilt be mine!”

“Nay, Oslac, that can never be. Edwy’s I am and Edwy’s ever shall be. Well dost thou know our union is holy and I am still his queen.”

THE MERCY OF A MONK

“By Church decree thou art queen no longer, denied the name of wife. Edwy can not save thee from that ban. Oslac can. Dunstan hath promised that. Renounce the king at once, Elgiva, and let us kneel together before the holy cross. Then wilt thou be mine.”

“Never, Oslac, never!”

“Thou art in my power, Elgiva, and must needs obey me now. My passion is great. My love is uncontrolled. I plead with thee to save thee from a further shame!”

“Never! Away with thee! Away! Stain not thy life with that great sin! Away, Oslac, away!”

“Come, Elgiva. Be persuaded, else naught on earth will save thee.”

He laid his hands upon her and came to her side.

“Heaven shall, or some day recompense thee! Stay, Oslac, stay!”

“Nay, Elgiva!” he answered, kneeling down beside her.

“Oh, have mercy on me, Oslac, have mercy!” Elgiva cried.

“‘Mercy’?” wildly laughed he in reply.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Mercy from a monk? Nay, not of Oslac’s stamp, Benedictine though he be! Come!”

“Save me, save me, Holy Mother! Hear me, Son of Mary! Ah, look at the cross, Oslac! Oslac! It speaks to thee!”

At this moment a flaw in the lamp in front of the crucifix gave way, and the oil igniting on the altar seemed to set the Christ on fire.

“The cross? What care I for the Fellow?” Oslac answered, pale and angry.

Then leaping to his feet, in fury and sacrilege he hurled the crucifix from the wall and swept the lamps aside with a curse.

“Now,” he cried, bounding back to the queen, “now thou shalt be mine! Come! Come!”

“Never! Oh, have mercy on me! Ah, look, Oslac! Look! Thy gown is on fire! Look! Away! Away!”

It was truly so. When he swept the lamps from the altar the oil had fallen on his Benedictine gown and taken fire. In a moment he was all aflame.

“O God!” he shrieked, as if he felt the hand of heaven upon him.

Then howling, cursing, blaspheming, he rushed from the cell, glowing like a burning fiend.

THE MERCY OF A MONK

The queen lay prostrate before the fallen Christ, full of praise and adoration.

“Thou hast heard me, Son of Mary! Thou hast answered my prayer! Thou art the Merciful One! Thou hast saved me! Thou hast kept my garments white!”

CHAPTER XXX

THE PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY

SIGWULF, remembering the commands of Odo, proceeded to put them into execution the morning following. The wild barbarian that lurked under the Benedictine gown would brook no delay. Forswear the king, or be branded with red-hot irons and banished to Ireland, would the beautiful queen that day.

To do him honor, Oslac revolted from the deed. Enough for him that Elgiva was stolen from the king and in reach of his embraces. The judgment of last night lingered with him and made him tremble somewhat, but had not yet fought its way to the gates of conscience. Despite the failure of that experience, he was not without hope that imprisonment and monastic hardship would bring her round to his will.

The behests of virtue Oslac could not understand, or the woman that would endure, and gladly endure, would suffer and die, to keep her gar-

PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY

ments white. He had walked so long in the mire he could not now appraise the snow. He had looked so long on the brute he could not believe in the angel. He had loved the sensual so much he had no heart for the spiritual. As with a red-hot iron his conscience had been seared, and now was so hard that the angels of truth knocked in vain. He saw no beauty in a white rose and felt no fragrance in its breath. He heard no music in the gospel of Christ and caught not the wail of the spirit.

So he could not understand, except in vague, far-off sense, the lofty soul of her he fain would woo. Fidelity and love so strong that naught but death could sever, he smiled and winked at, as he smiled at the life and faith of monks. There were ways of plucking every flower that blooms, he thought, and no shame to the flower or the wearer.

Elgiva he loved in a great, deep, passionate sense, as he had loved no other, and for her sake he would endure much. Her lovely face he loved, and her form of sumptuous grace that fascinated his sight and fostered thoughts of passionate joy.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Thus when Sigwulf proposed to brand the Beauty Oslac protested and rebelled.

“There is no cause for haste. She is in the power of Holy Church and can not escape her sentence. Give her time to repent of her sin, to renounce the king and walk in the paths of penance. Then will Holy Church have won a soul!”

“Nay!” answered Sigwulf the barbarian. “We must not delay. ’Twas Odo’s last command to me, and must be obeyed. To-morrow may be too late. A branded woman, robbed of her beauty, no man will take to his bosom—no, not even Edwy the Fair. Our work we must make sure. Who knows that the king may not soon be here?”

“The king knows not where to look for her, and is too weak to search the land. Did not we leave him surrounded on the banks of the Ver? There is no cause for fear. Thy kinsman will see to it that Eadwine does not trouble us. Let us rest after our ride and see if the Beauty will not repent.”

“Better the primate’s will performed and the queen’s beauty spoiled for ay, than risk her capture by the king. That may be small, but it must not be forgotten. ’Tis her beauty captivates the

PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY

Fair, or long since he would have hearkened unto Odo. And no wonder, for even a monk, who has forsworn all women, can feel the charm of her loveliness. Eh, Oslac?"

"There is no fear of capture, none at all. So why make haste to take the beauty from a face that hath power to charm 'even a monk' with its loveliness? Eh, Sigwulf?"

"Once already thou hast heard royal troops thunder at the gates of Glastonbury. We will not wait for them a second time, Oslac."

"Yea, but there was no fear of capture then, and sure there is less now. At the sound of pursuers we could easily away, and smile at them as we sailed across the rolling sea."

"Even now the boat tarries for us," answered Sigwulf. "We must away to-day. The irons are hot. Let the deed be done at once, and then, come what may, Holy Church shall have conquered!"

"Nay! It must not be!"

"'Must not'? Oslac! Hath the Beauty charmed thee also? Dost thou love the harlot too? Is there joy in her embraces?"

"What though?"

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“This, Oslac, this: ‘Brand her with red-hot irons,’ said Odo, ‘and let the scars be deep. Then banish her to Ireland, and make sure no one interferes.’ So Odo commanded Sigwulf, and so Sigwulf will perform without delay!”

“Brand her with red-hot irons thou shalt not while Oslac lives,” answered Oslac with great passion.

“‘Shalt not’? . Have a care, Oslac, have a care! It was not for naught Odo sent these trusty men.”

“I care not. Thou shalt not. Dare, and this stout seax will bite thy heart!”

“Oho, Oslac, oho! Lovest thou the charmer so dearly? So Odo feared. Wait, and thou shalt see thy darling smile and her pale cheeks grow rosy!”

He stepped to the fire, and lifted the irons out with fiendish glee. They were white with heat.

“Look, Oslac, and say dost thou think them hot enough to burn the roses?”

Fuming with anger, Oslac darted toward him, short seax in hand, crying:

“Thou shalt not! Fling them away, or soon thy blood will stain the chamber!”

PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY

“Seize him!” shouted Sigwulf to the primate’s men.

With a rush they fell on Oslac and overpowered him, but not before the seax entered the neck of Sigwulf.

In vain he struggled in their grasp and threatened with the curse of Dunstan. Sigwulf only smiled and mocked his prowess.

“Bring her in!” he shouted. “Bring the darling to his side. And with his own eyes Oslac will see his charmer branded with the mark of shame and watch the roses bloom on her damask cheek. Away! Bring the Beauty in.”

Pale with dread, they brought the queen from her cell to the abbot’s chamber, and stood her in the midst. Dressed in the garb of a nun, her beautiful face was laden with sorrow and her eyes filled with wo. Even Sigwulf marked her queenly bearing and was impressed.

“Art thou the queen?”

“Thou sayest it,” she answered in a low voice, soft and sad.

“In the name of Holy Church thou art commanded to repent and forswear the king, on pain of branding with the mark of shame

THE SINS OF A SAINT

and banishment from the realm. What sayest thou ? ”

The queen was silent.

Then Sigwulf questioned her in many words, but she answered him nothing. She stood before him pleading her cause with the noiseless power of innocence. To persevere in one's duty and be silent she deemed the best answer to calumny.

But her silence infuriated the barbarian under the Benedictine gown of Sigwulf.

With the primate's men he set her at naught, and mocked her, and arrayed her in a gorgeous robe and brought her to Oslac, crying:

“ Behold thy queen ! ”

“ Is not thy charmer fair ? ”

“ Wouldst thou embrace her, Oslac ? ”

Oslac groaned and fumed at his helplessness. His soul burned with rage and indignation, and vainly he struggled to be free. Falling on his knees he lifted his voice above the din in loud and earnest imprecation.

“ Let be ! ” shouted Sigwulf. “ Let us see him make love to his queen ! ”

There were tears on Oslac's face when he turned his eyes from Sigwulf to the trembling

PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY

queen. Love was in his voice, and gave his words passion and plaintive pathos.

“Think, Elgiva, oh think, and do as thou art bid. It is Holy Church’s order, and surely it can not err? At least there is no escape. It is life or death thou art choosing now. Pain, and misery, and banishment, and shame, all lie before thee, if thou wilt not renounce the king. Think, Elgiva, and forswear him now.”

“Never, Oslac!”

“Is not life better than death, at any cost? Is not joy preferable to pain? Is not the summer’s brightness lovelier than winter’s gloom? Think, Elgiva, think! I love thee, and plead with thee. Do as I entreat, and thy beauty will shine through many summers yet to come, and pleasure still be thine. Forswear him now.”

“Never! ’Tis our duty to be true, to do the right, at any cost. ’Twas so the Saviour bore the painful cross. I thank thee for thy love, Oslac, but that can never be. Go thou and repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. For godly sorrow, such as thou hast now, worketh repentance to salvation. Wo is me that worldly sorrow worketh death!”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Think, Elgiva, think! Do not cast thy life away. Fearful is the stream, and black the ship on which thou’lt sail to the shining sea and the golden strand. Stay awhile, and let thy heart be merry.”

The queen was silent and rested in prayer.

“Good, Oslac, good!” broke in the monstrous Sigwulf. “’Twas very entertaining. Love gave thee supple speech. And now for the roses!”

Then, turning to the queen:

“Wilt thou forswear him?”

But she answered him not a word.

“Bind her!” he cried with an oath. “Bind her! Cover her eyes that she see not! Now, Oslac, now look and see the roses bloom!”

With his own hand the Dane took the red-hot iron from the fire.

The blood of Oslac bounded through his heart at the sight. All his scheming to end in this! All his dreams to vanish thus! The beauty on which he had set his life to be so destroyed! His heart’s desire to perish in this way! He shook with a frenzy of passion but could not struggle free.

PERSECUTION OF BEAUTY

“Look, Oslac, look!” shouted Sigwulf, mocking his fury. “Look! The roses bloom!”

At the first shriek of the queen the strength of love came on Oslac and tore him from his captors' grasp.

With an angry shout he sprang on the wild barbarian and dashed him to the ground.

But in a twinkling Odo's men were down on him. One blow, and Oslac lay unconscious at their feet. Thus, in the mercy of God, he did not see the roses bloom.

Next moment the queen was carried away, unconscious too. On either cheek was a great, deep scar, black and bloody, scorched and raw.

CHAPTER XXXI

LIFTING THE FALLEN CHRIST

AN hour later Oslac slowly returned to consciousness in the queen's cell, whither the irony of Sigwulf had borne him. Dazed and stupid, he knew not where he was. His thoughts fluttered confusedly through his brain, and a fearful dread lay on his heart. Slowly the memory of the last great scene returned to him. His first care was for Elgiva.

“The queen? Where is she? Lying by my side forsooth.”

He groped around him with his hands, afraid to open his eyes.

“No! Not by my side! Lying dead?”

For a moment the daring Oslac scarcely dared to draw his breath. He passed his hands over his temples as much to keep his eyes closed as soothe the pain in his head.

“Dead? Brought to her doom by Oslac!”

He groaned. Then, slowly and fearfully, opened his eyes and peered around.

LIFTING THE FALLEN CHRIST

“No, not here,” he sighed with relief, “therefore not dead. Thank God! Away to her banishment!”

He lifted himself on his elbow and looked around. Astonishment leaped in his eyes.

“The queen’s cell! There was her girdle, and there the fallen Christ!”

He shuddered and turned away his eyes.

“The door. Was it locked?”

He leaped to his feet, fell back again, held his head in his hands and moaned. Recovering anon, he slowly crept to the door of the cell.

“Locked! Trapped like a fox! The prisoner of Holy Church!”

He clenched his teeth and scowled.

“Left, I suppose, by the gentle Sigwulf! My thanks to him! Thanks, too, that on my cheeks he did not make the roses bloom! The devil! How he enjoyed his pretty play!”

Beaten, thwarted, fooled, the prisoner groaned. The fiends of guilt and despair gathered round his soul.

“What now—life or death?”

A few hours ago he stood in the same cell, with the crown within his reach almost and the

THE SINS OF A SAINT

beautiful Elgiva within his arms—had not he wooed so fiercely! So Oslac had fancied.

His eyes wandered and caught sight of the fallen Christ again. He started and his brow grew darker. He scarce dared look his way.

He rose to his feet in agony, and paced the cell with trembling steps, as he realized the wreck of his life, the loss of his hopes, the ruin of his ambition.

“Sigwulf will never forget! Nor Odo! Nor Dunstan! Fool that I was, and more than fool! What now? A prisoner of Holy Church! Mercy? Mercy from a monk? Mercy from Odo? Death rather! Nay, my course is run! I hear the hounds that will devour me!”

He came to a standstill and gazed on death. The fiends of guilt and despair drew nearer.

“No! I can not evade them! They have me at every turn! No use running farther! No hope striving more! The crown? What worth without the queen? Life? Dark without the bright Elgiva! Robbed of her marvelous beauty! Branded with red-hot irons! Banished! Worse than dead! And all because of me!”

Oslac flung himself on the floor and covered

LIFTING THE FALLEN CHRIST

his face with shame. The blood rushed to his head and he swooned away once more.

Slowly consciousness returned, and slowly the queen's words came to him as he opened his fearful eyes.

“ ‘Never, Oslac ! ’Tis our duty to be true, to do the right, at any cost. ’Twas so the Saviour bore the painful cross. I thank thee, Oslac, for thy love, but that can never be. Go thou and repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. For godly sorrow, such as thou hast now, worketh repentance unto salvation. Wo is me that worldly sorrow worketh death ! ’ ”

His heart grew tender as he spoke the words, and beheld in a vision the beautiful virtuous queen. He followed her back through the years and came to his childhood again. He played with her in the royal grounds, and kissed her, dancing round the May-pole tree. He romped with her through the fields of innocent childhood. How beautiful she was even then ! How his boyish heart had longed to win her ! And once she had given him a golden gift, ere yet her pure soul shrank from him with dread.

He opened his breast, and took from over his

THE SINS OF A SAINT

heart a tiny golden cross and kissed it many times.

“Elgiva! Elgiva! Thou beautiful maid!”

As the charm of the fair child fell upon him his brow lightened and his eyes filled. Those were bright and happy days.

Suddenly the vision of the present rushed back again, and swept like a torrent through his brain. The scenes of childhood mocked him as they passed from his gaze. Their specters lingered and cursed him. How far he had wandered! How deathly was the sea on which he now was tossed!

The fiends of guilt and despair closed round him now. The hounds bore down on him from every side.

“Any hope?”

“None! None!” the fiends replied.

He leaped to his feet, feebly paced the cell, and kept the hounds at bay a time.

“No hope! No hope!” he panted in despair.

Then his eyes fell on the fallen Christ once more. He shuddered and shrank from him.

“In her need she cried to him and he answered her prayer.”

LIFTING THE FALLEN CHRIST

But Oslac drew back, remembering the fiery judgment and maddened with remorse.

“‘Have mercy on me, Oslac, have mercy on me.’ I gave her none! I can expect none!”

The eyes of the fallen Christ followed him as he shrank from them, and pierced his life.

The hounds barked loudly. The fiends leaped on his soul. And he lifted his arm as if to stave the blow of the avenging God.

“Death! Death! Eternal death for me!” he shrieked, and sank in agony of wo.

Then, above the barking of the hounds and the taunting of the fiends and the maddening shrieks of remorse, rose the voice of his queen, and drew him forth to his salvation.

“Go thou and repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. For godly sorrow, such as thou hast now, worketh repentance to salvation.”

But in his despair he hearkened not.

“Go thou!” the voice kept calling.

But in dread he turned away.

“Go thou! Go thou!” the queen kept crying.

He looked toward Him with fear and trembling.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Go thou! Go thou! Go thou!” the voice commanded.

Then he arose and came to the fallen Christ, and stooped to lift him.

The hounds barked more loudly. The fiends leaped more wildly. The queen called more commandingly. He wavered and trembled. The angels hushed their whispers and breathlessly waited.

And he lifted the fallen Christ, and came and set him in his own place above the altar, and wept.

The eyes of the Saviour looked deep into his soul.

All his sin cried against him.

And Oslac stood speechless before the Christ. Remorse and shame kept him dumb. Fear and trembling took possession of his life, and overwhelmed him.

“In her need she cried to him, and he answered her prayer. But he would not answer mine!”

The perspiration broke over his fearful frame. Great drops of agony stood on his throbbing brow.

“O God!” he cried, with hopeless voice.

And so crying he flung himself prostrate before the lifted Christ.

LIFTING THE FALLEN CHRIST

The struggle was too much for his ebbing strength. He fell into a dark swoon again. The lifted Christ faded from his sight. Long he lay thus and rambled.

But over and over again, like an angel's voice breaking with yearning, came the suffering queen's command:

“Go thou—and repent—and turn to God—and do—works—meet—for—repentance.”

Slowly consciousness returned again. Slowly he lifted his eyes to the Christ. Slowly he made the sign of the holy cross. And slowly prayed:

“Save me, Son of Mary. Hear my prayer!”

But the specters of the past still crowded round him. The sin of his life still cried for expiation. The hounds and fiends would not be quieted.

“Is it enough to pray? Must not I make some expiation? Must not I do some deed meet for repentance?”

His frenzied eye fell on a beam that stretched across the cell.

“It is all that is left me. Shall I offer it? Forsooth, He will hear me then!”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

As he pondered, the king came to the abbey gates and knocked.

“He comes! He comes! 'Tis only right he should behold my expiation!”

Hastily he wrote on a roll of parchment, and laid it on the altar and mounted it himself.

“Go thou—and repent—and turn to God—and do works meet for repentance.”

He turned to the lifted Christ and crossed himself.

“He comes! He comes! And must behold my expiation!”

He made a noose of the queen's girdle and flung it across the beam.

“The gates have opened wide!” he shrieked.

He placed his head in the noose.

“He comes! He comes! And, Son of Mary, I come to thee! I come to thee! Accept my expiation, Lord, and make it, oh make it, meet for repentance!”

And so crying, he leaped into the arms of the lifted Christ.

BOOK THE THIRD

CHAPTER XXXII

A TALE OF A SICK NUN

GUIDED by his knowledge of the foe, the king had come to Glastonbury as the one place in the realm where he might hope to meet the owner of the cowl marked "Oslac."

Here, too, he might expect to find the queen.

At Kingston no one knew whither Oslac had carried her, while at Glastonbury the monks proclaimed themselves wofully ignorant of the object of the king's coming. Oslac was not there, they answered, or the queen.

By the king's command, however, the abbey and monastery were searched. Every cell and corner was entered, and every hiding-place surveyed.

Passing through the abbot's chamber, Eadmund kicked his foot against an iron. It showed signs of recent use, and bore on it a piece of scorched flesh. He started. Could it have been

THE SINS OF A SAINT

red-hot that morning? At the thought he shuddered and turned away, forbearing to tell his fears to the king, or point to the pale destroyer of beauty.

Entering the cell where the queen had lain, the king fell back on beholding the body of Oslac. It was a ghastly sight. Round his neck was the girdle of the queen, by which he hung, limp and lifeless, from the beam. His mouth was open, and his eyes were fixed pleadingly on the lifted Christ.

With one sweep of his sword Eadwine cut him down.

The body was yet warm, but the penitent spirit had gone in search of the pardoning Christ.

A devilish hate possessed the king. Why was Oslac dead before he came? How satisfied his heart would have been if only his hand had smitten him with wounds and death!

Balked of his wish, and angry, Eadwine turned from the corpse of Oslac. On the altar was a tiny roll of parchment. He opened it.

“TO THE KING: Forgive me, Edwy, as thou hopest to be forgiven. I loved her, but have now

A TALE OF A SICK NUN

repented with sorrow. Her fidelity broke my life and turned me to God. Can man, by dying, expiate his sin? I know not, but shall try. Haply, the Christ, who offered his life an expiation, will plead on my behalf. Wo is me that I have betrayed innocent blood! Forgive me, Edwy, for the sake of long ago. OSLAC."

The eye of the king softened, and still more so when he turned from the altar and caught sight of the golden cross firmly clasped in Oslac's hand. One like it lay next his own heart even now. They had been given them both by the beautiful Elgiva when the dead man and the king were boys together. The sight of Oslac's brought back the happy innocent days of long ago.

"Poor Oslac!" cried the king, bending to touch the gold. "Poor Oslac! Thou were not ever so, but noble and generous as any boy! Alas, that the waters of passion have overwhelmed thee, and that thou didst embark on Dunstan's treacherous seas! What shipwreck thou hast made! Yet, may thy spirit reach the shining sea, and walk with gladness on the golden strand!"

THE SINS OF A SAINT

So the king lingered with the past and moistened the hand of the penitent Oslac.

“Take him, and give him decent burial,” he cried to the monks. “Light some candles round his shrine and pray for the peace of his soul!”

The Benedictines lifted the body of Oslac, and hastily carried it away.

“Whither now, Eadmund?” asked the king sadly.

The darkness of winter’s gloom had fallen upon him. Feebly the lights of hope were glimmering now.

“To the port of Brystyngestowe with all speed,” answered the faithful knight. “Pray God we may yet be in time to take her.”

Feeling sure that with such a start and such uncertainty the chase were vain, the king, nevertheless, mounted. With that sense of desperation men feel most when they know not what they do, or pursue a foe flying they know not whither, Eadwine put spurs to his steed and rode furiously.

Away from the beautiful Isle of Apples he galloped, over the Mendip hills, and after the red deer, till at sundown he came to the busy port of Bristol.

A TALE OF A SICK NUN

Here he learned that early that afternoon a party of monks with a "sick nun" had taken ship to Ireland. That the "sick nun" was his poor queen, tormented, pained, desperate, the king had little doubt. And he sank on his saddle and wept.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MUSIC AND MORALS

FOR the king to follow to Ireland were vain. But Eadmund pleaded hard that he might be permitted to attempt the task. And Eadwine despairingly consented.

“Let me pursue,” cried the faithful thane. “I shall disguise me, and sail forthwith! Mayhap the Fates will lead me to her hiding and give me power to rescue her! Let me go!”

“Go, then,” answered the king, “and may the Fates grant thee more prosperity than God has granted me!”

And so the king and his faithful thane parted. What sorrow and hardship they must endure ere next they meet! What trial of faith to David and Jonathan! But meantime, Godspeed, Eadmund, Godspeed!

For rest and refreshment the king retired to a tavern near at hand. Bitterness and disappointment lay on his soul. The floods opened up their

MUSIC AND MORALS

gates and filled his mind with desperate thoughts. And by a cruel irony of fate he looked in his wo from the very window where the gloating eyes of Oslac once were made merry at the sight of Eadmund and his royal troop!

Passing to and fro or huddled on the quay were batches of British slaves for export to foreign lands. At this time England could hardly claim to be a trading country at all. Its one export was that of slaves, and Bristol was the stronghold of the trade.¹ Fair men and women, young and old, were huddled together in chains, trembling in their misery beneath the sorrow-laden eyes of the king. Above their groans anon would rise the curse of the breeder or the lash of his whip. The fair king shuddered and turned away from the sad sight.

In front of the tavern, beneath the king's window, were companies of chapmen watching over their costly wares and making merry with wine.

¹ A hundred years later the wealth of English nobles was said to spring, sometimes, from breeding slaves for the market. It was not till the reign of the first Norman king that the preaching of Wulfstan and the influence of Laufranc suppressed the trade in its last stronghold, the port of Bristol.—See Green's Short History of the English People, pp. 58, 59.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

In the midst of one group sat an old gleeman,
gray-bearded, withered, and worn. The sunset
had come to his life as well as to the day. Called
upon for a song, he took his harp and struck up
this dirge of life:

There was song and social glee
In the hall of heroes,
In the banquet chamber
Loud with tales of gladness :
Warriors boasting of their bouts
On the field of battle ;
Singers harping happy lays
Of the fairest women ;
When uprose the gray, old king,
Full of years and numbers,
And sang this song of life.

He in battles oft had fought,
Vanquished many heroes,
Traveled many lands,
Ere the snow had fallen
On his head and face,
And his eyes would glisten,
Or his worn hand wander
To his jeweled hilt,
When the song of battle
Woke the warrior sleeping
Underneath the snow,
Though the sun was setting fast
And the death-winds moaning

MUSIC AND MORALS

Round his wintry life,
When this song he sung :

“ A phantom of mirk and mist is Life,
A specter of gloom and gladness,
Father of shadowy children,
Spirits of day and of dark :
Out of their misty homes they troop,
Clad in garments of cloud and light,
Dancing with merry, dainty feet,
Tossing their locks in the wind,
Laden with song, and prattle,
And promises thin as the air :
' Seek, if you dare,' they cry to men,
' And treasures untold will we give you
Of gold-rings, and jewels, and gems.'

“ Soon as a child leaves the womb-home
The queen of the spirits appears
And places a circlet of gold-stuff
Around the neck of the bairn ;
And on it a jewel unseen
With marvelous power in its core,
Breeder of greedy desire,
Of wild, insatiable want,
Wrecker of peace and joy
And maker of longing eyes,
That never from round him is torn
Till Loki doth steer his life-bark
Over the dark sea of death.

“ Over the land comes the Earth-Spirit,
Dressed in the pale green of Spring

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Decked with the flowers of Summer
Robed with Autumn's gold
Or draped with Winter's snow,
Over the dells peopled with fairies,
Over the rivers laden with lilies,
Over the mountains' purpled slopes,
And tells of the joys of the field,
Of the wealth that is buried in land,
Of the food that is under the soil,
And the fruit that is growing above :
'Seek, if you dare,' she cries to men,
'And treasures untold will I give you
Of gold-rings, and jewels, and gems.'

“Down from the hill rides the War-Spirit
On charger snow-white, and snorting,
And eager as he for the fight,
He with the helm of gold,
Naked sword aflashing,
Spear and shield on fire,
And tells of the glories of battle
Of conquest and spoil of the foe :
'Seek, if you dare,' he cries to men,
'And treasures untold will I give you
Of gold-rings, and jewels, and gems.’

“Out of the Ocean the Sea-Spirit swims,
Draped with the spray of the breakers
Gorgeous with light of the sun,
Over the foam-crested waters
Singing their endless song ;
With child-spirits sporting around her

MUSIC AND MORALS

And peeping above the brine ;
And tells of the wealth of the ocean,
Of wonders in far-away lands,
And hoards deep down in the sea :
'Seek, if you dare,' she cries to men,
'And treasures untold will I give you,
Of gold-rings, and jewels, and gems.'

"Yet not in the bosom of Earth,
Not on the field of War,
Not in the depth of the Sea
Are the treasures of men to be found.
But, deep in the bosom of home,
Deep in the love of a maid,
Deep in the joy of a wife,
Of children, loving and fair,
And high in the service of Heaven,
Of deeds both noble and brave,
Of God and His Holy Son.
For these are the treasures untold
Of gold-rings, and jewels, and gems."

Scarce had the song of the old minstrel died away ere the company loudly called for another, brighter and merrier. Whereupon a rollicking youth, in the strength and passion of life, seized the old gleeman's harp, and to the great merriment of the throng struck up, in a boisterous, suggestive voice, one of the merry songs of the time:

Once in Sunny Strange-land,
Where the slopes wolf-haunted

THE SINS OF A SAINT

And the breezy headlands
Break into the water,
Dwelt a queen and maidens
(Names I will not give you)
Fairer than the sunlight.

Mickle were the maidens,
Each with gold adornments ;
Round their throats snow-whited
Collars many-jeweled ;
And on all bright armlets,
Rings and gems bedazzling,
Fairer than the sunlight.

Through the flowery meadows,
Toward the place of bathing,
Came the mickle maidens ;
Where our Stallions of the wave,
Fast a-riding by their anchors,
Lay waiting for the troop
Fairer than the sunlight.

“ Ho, whither have ye come,
Ye solitary floaters ? ”
“ Over the whale’s domain,
Through the ocean-mists
In our snell sea-horses,
Woven round with speed,
Maidens of the sunlight.”

Then upon the shingle,
Where the slopes wolf-haunted

MUSIC AND MORALS

And the breezy headlands
Break into the water,
Ran our snell sea-horses,
Bearing us among them
Fairer than the sunlight.

Gray above an ash-grove
Formed a bridal-bower :
There was cheer of heroes,
Mirth and merry laughter,
With the merry maidens
Decked with many jewels
Fairer than the sunlight.

So until the darkening
Lingered we within,
Telling tales of wedlock,
Showing deeds of prowess,
Wooing all the maidens
Decked with many jewels
Fairer than the sunlight.

But now weeps the welkin
O'er the slopes wolf-haunted,
Where the breezy headlands
Break into the water.
There, too, weep the maidens
(Names I will not give you)
Fairer than the sunlight.

The company cheered the singer lustily and made merry over the weeping maidens. The rol-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

licking youth threw the harp back to the old gleeman and laughed boisterously.¹

The last rays of the setting sun had wandered from the earth, and darkness, laden with sighing winds and lowering clouds, had covered the scene. Through the gloom came the mingled groans of the slaves and laughter of the chapmen.

The king turned away from it all, sick and weary of life, to dream of the wrongs of his captive queen and ponder what could be done.

¹ "It is hard not to look kindly at the gleeman, for he, no doubt, did much to preserve the olden poetry, which, even now, was ebbing away . . . We see them, indeed, lingering in men's memories till the time of Dunstan. But the heathen character of the bulk of them must have hindered their preservation by transfer to writing, and custom hindered it yet more, for men could not believe that songs and annals handed down for ages by memory could be lost for want of memory. And, no doubt, the memory of the gleeman handed on this precious store of early verse long after the statelier poems of Cædmon and Cynewulf had been set down in writing."—Green's *Conquest of England*, p. 338.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A SOUL'S BOG-LAND

RETURNING to Kingston, Eadwine sought to negotiate with the Church for the queen's release. Odo, well satisfied with the results of the war and conscious of his advantage, declined to listen to the king's demand.

"The will of Holy Church had been done, and in her hands Elgiva would remain until the king renounced her and paid the penalties of his sin."

Dunstan was even more insolent and overbearing.

"Had not Holy Church the right to tear the harlot from his arms and visit judgment on his sin?"

Unable to answer as his heart desired, Eadwine was forced to live in ignorance of the fate of Elgiva, tormented with thoughts of uncertainty, visions of dread, dreams of sorrow, days and nights of pain. Over his soul, as over a bog-land, swept the winter winds, moaning, mocking, sigh-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

ing, and shrieking, as they sported with his desolate life.

For to what purpose battle now? Would the kidnapped queen be forthcoming, even if victory rested with his arms? Would the ship that sailed for Ireland return, bringing back the "sick nun" at the sound of war? Would the Church go back on her deed?

Only too well he knew there was little hope of that. Battle would only enrage the monks and bring down revenge and slaughter on the helpless queen—if still alive! The present of her head of gold on a reeking charger was not to the king's mind. To save that, and eke out the slender thread of hope, he was willing to bear humiliation and shame. There was nothing for it at present but to make ready for further conflict and await further events.

How lonely were the halls without his queen! How haunted the grounds and riverside! How empty his life! The queen, where was she? Did she exist? Had she been slain, as the sad queen-mother feared? Had she forsworn him, as the monks declared? Had she donned the veil, as White Heart pityingly suggested?

A SOUL'S BOG-LAND

All inquiries were in vain. No relief was given to his soul's uncertainty. No light broke through those dark days with a gleam of hope. Day after day he groped through the darkened palace, searching for something he could not find. Night after night he dreamed of a sick nun, and heard her cry above the roar of the waters, but could never see her face or come near to her help.

How painful is love when its darling is gone, her on whom life's affection has been poured, who has wound herself around a passionate heart! How desolate is the soul when severed from its kindred spirit and left to walk the weary days through lonesome bog-land heaths! How troubled the heart when a ghost starts up crying:

“I am dead! I am dead! Avenge me!”

And gives place to a mist, anon, whence the voice of the queen comes, far off but clear:

“I am coming! I am coming! Wait for me!”

The king waited, nursing his strength and fury.

Throughout those weary days White Heart carried the gospel of consolation to the king. She would not return to Croyland, but lingered at the palace waiting the coming of the queen.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“I have prayed,” she often said, “I have prayed and God has heard me. My heart is sure of victory. Did not I hurl the Christ after her, and cry to God for vengeance? She is coming! She is coming! In my dreams I hear her. In my prayers the Holy Mother comforts me. In my visions the Christ returns with Elgiva in his arms. Fear not, Edwy; fear not. She is coming! She is coming!”

The heart of the king was comforted through her faith, and opened itself at times to the music of her gospel. In the darkest day he heard her sing “She is coming! She is coming! Fear not, Edwy!” and though his own faith was small and his fear great, the persistency of her hope and the certainty of her trust broke the gloom for him. Then for a moment he walked in her light.

But only for a moment.

The child was all that was left the king of Elgiva, and, first for her sake, he nursed and mothered it. But as it grew it crept into his heart with new life and new hope, and then he mothered it for its own sake too. When it began to toddle he would take it from White Heart and lead it by the hand to the places Elgiva’s love had conse-

A SOUL'S BOG-LAND

crated for him. Then he would sport with it among the flowers, and weave coronets of roses for its brow as he had done for mother long ago. Or he would carry it to the river, shoulder-high, through the field of gold Elgiva had come when the sun was setting on May-eve only three years ago. Or, when the iron entered into his soul and anger raged within, he would hand it a tiny sword and teach it to fight.

Then a new dread would fall on him, and he would seize the child in his arms and carry it in his bosom to shield it from harm.

“They will not surely seek to take the child away! They must be watched! Elgiva’s darling must be saved!”

At night the child slept in the king’s sitting chamber. In vain White Heart tried to send him to sleep. The boy had drank too deeply of the cup of fear while he lay in his mother’s womb. The dread of the queen had been born in her son. Visions swept before him as he entered slumberland, and drew him from its drowsy shore, trembling and wailing.

Then would the king lift the cradle to his side and rock it with his own hand. And it always

THE SINS OF A SAINT

happened that the child, like Elgiva, would cease from fear, and fall off into peaceful slumber, while the king, bending low, sang this cradle-song:

Sleep, little baby,
Hush in thy cot,
Angels are singing sweet,
Stroking thine eyelids,
Anointing with slumber,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Sleep, little baby,
Hush in thy cot,
Mother is bending low,
Kissing thy forehead,
Smoothing thy gold hair,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Sleep, little baby,
Hush in thy cot,
Father is guarding thee,
Standing to shield thee,
Strong to defend thee,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

While the child slept and White Heart proceeded with an embroidery of the Virgin, the king sought the comfort of books.

He pondered the Consolations of Boëthius till he must have known them like Alfred the Great. Sometimes, forgetting the pale nun's presence,

A SOUL'S BOG-LAND

he would read aloud, as if his heart were finding words to its taste. Thus—

Felix qui potuit boni
Fontem visere lucidum.

Or more mysteriously—

Felix qui potuit gravis
Terrae solvere vincula.

But ere the night was far spent Boëthius was cast aside and Eadwine was seen to be pondering the Psalms of David and finding their prayers and imprecations even more to his taste.

Those were sad days at court. The thanes found no place for mirth. The brow-scarred Alfric and dark-eyed Ethelsige wished they had died with Turketul. The king would rise and pass from the guest-chamber ere yet the merriment had begun, leaving them all sick of life and sad. Piti-ful eyes would look on him walking slowly with bowed head. Warriors' hands would wander to their scabbards while mouths were firmly clenched. And when the king had passed from the hall the old court minstrel would lift his harp and wail this shrill lament:

Sorrow-laden is the king
In the bower of heroes,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

On the wasted wine-hall,
Now bereft of joyous noises :
Clang of harp is here no more,
In the chambers no delight,
As in days of old.

All too empty are the meadows,
All too empty are the dwellings,
Empty too the bridal-bed
Now bereft of beauteous queen :
Song of love is here no more,
Merry-hearted laughter,
As in days of old.

All alone, and lonely,
With the iron wounded,
Of no comfort, surely,
Now bereft of friendship :
Sigh of soul is here among us,
Wailing in the chambers,
Unlike the days of old.

All unhappy do we weep
In the day and darkness
As the surge of sorrow
Swells around our life :
Never now the goodly hawk
Hovers through the guest-hall
As in days of old.

Pray with me that God's Son,
Child of Holy Virgin,
Come adown the sunbeams
Now bereft of healing,

A SOUL'S BOG-LAND

Speak the word of soothing,
Make the house-lord gladsome,
As in days of old.

Pray that sorrow leave us,
Leave the bower of heroes,
Leave the wasted wine-hall,
Now bereft of joyous noises.
Pray that harps will sound again,
All the chambers filling,
As in days of old.

Sorrow-laden is the king
In the bower of heroes,
On the wasted wine-hall,
Now bereft of joyous noises :
Clang of harp is here no more,
In the chambers no delight,
As in days of old.

CHAPTER XXXV

NUN'S VEILING

So a year passed, and more—a terrible year for the king.

In the early summer, while the corn was yet green and tender, the gnarled tree of Odo's life fell and was cast into the burning.

In the early winter, while the first snow still lay on the land, the weary soul of the sad queen-mother began to sing the song of eternal joy.

In the north, Eadgar sate upon the throne of the Mercians and Northumbrians, dressed in robes of pampered glory, a puppet-king, flattered and swayed at the pleasure of Holy Church.

Dunstan, now Bishop of London and Bishop of Worcester in one—what matter to him that dual appointments were given against the Church decrees—waxed great in the land and schemed for the primacy.

Eadmund had never returned from Ireland, had never, indeed, been heard of more. Had he

NUN'S VEILING

also fallen into the hands of the monks and entered the unknown land?

With the dying of his hopes the bitterness of the king's soul settled down into preparation for battle. To fight and die fighting now became his heart's desire, in the hope of hurling vengeance on the monks and the good Saint Dunstan. His desperation wrought in him a frenzy bordering on madness and made him prepare for battle with the subtle cunning of the maniac determined to outdo the craft of his watchers.

"She is coming! She is coming!" sang the pale-faced nun, but the king had lost hope in her gospel.

Boëthius had long since proved vain, and all that was left of the Hebrew king were imprecations loud and fearful.

Thus till the dying of the year 958.

While the passing bells were tolling out the old year, two persons, a monk and a nun, came stealing through the palace gates.

Within the king's chamber the child lay sleeping in his cot by the king's side. It was lighted only by two horn lanterns that lay one on each side of the table, where sat the king, head in hand,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

surveying the passing year. He was alone, White Heart having gone to pray. His meditations scarce could be heard for the bells. Suddenly they stopped as the old year crept slowly away and made room for the new mystery.

In the hush, a nun, thickly veiled and draped, stole into the room unseen.

“Dark hath been the year for me. Darker still for Elgiva—unless she hath entered heaven’s light.

“ ‘Felix qui potuit boni
Fontem visere lucidum.’

‘Aye, Boëthius, but thou hast little comfort there for me. Mine eyes have not seen the fount of light: ‘I stick fast in the mire of the deep where there is no sure standing. I am come into the depth of the sea: and a tempest hath overwhelmed me. I am weary with my crying, my jaws are become hoarse: mine eyes have failed while I waited for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.’ ”

The veiled nun sobbed aloud, but the king heard not.

“What will the new year bring for us? ‘Us!’

NUN'S VEILING

So White Heart still would have me say, pale believing soul. Where can Elgiva be? Will she ever come back again? 'Draw me out of the mire that I may not stick fast: deliver me from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the tempest of water drown me, nor the deep swallow me up: and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.'"

"Amen!" sobbed the nun.

But still the king heard and saw not.

"'Thou knowest my reproach and my confusion and my shame. Mine adversaries are all before thee. Pour out thine indignation upon them: and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be made desolate, and let there be none to dwell in their chambers. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; and with the just let them not be written.'"

Lifting up his eyes as he hurled his imprecations heavenward, he noticed the nun at last, and strode toward her.

"Who art thou? And what thine errand at this hour?"

The woman fell at his feet and wept bitterly.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Thou hast a sore heart, sister, whoever thou art. Yet it is well its bitterness can flow in tears.”

The fountain of the king's heart had never broken yet. So hard was his grief the smitten rock refused to well forth waters.

“Come, sister, and let the king hear thy plaint. Mayhap he can comfort thee, though comfortless himself. Who art thou, and what thine errand?”

“See for thyself, O king,” she weeped.

The voice thrilled him. He started. Could it be? Eagerly, with fear and trembling, he stooped and raised the nun's veiling.

“Elgiva! Elgiva! My queen! My queen! At last! At last!” shouted the king, breaking with joy, snatching her up in his arms.

“Yea, thy queen, Edwy. Thy queen, home at last,” sobbed Elgiva, burying her face in his breast.

So for a minute she lay, clasped in his strong arms, their two souls speechless with thanksgiving and joy. The warm fountains of love played on their lives and bore abounding blessedness to their hearts. Their guardian angels kissed each other, and turned their eyes away.

NUN'S VEILING

To few it is given to feel the thrill of such a moment, for few are called, in the mercy of Heaven, to pass through such a vale. Turn thy head with the angels, and wait patiently till speech returns. Having suffered much they have earned this moment of joy.

“Come to the light, Elgiva, that I may see thy face again. Hath it changed?”

“Much! So much, Edwy, I fain would keep it from thy sight.”

“Thy beauty must still remain, save only where sorrow hath softened it and made it more beautiful. Come. My God! What is this? How? Whence these scars? Who hath wronged thee so?”

“They scarred my face with red-hot irons to make the roses bloom!”

“Who?” cried the king, the fountain of his heart breaking at last.

“Sigwulf the Fierce, and the primate’s men.”

“Oh, Heaven, why didst thou stand by and spare thy thunderbolts? Was it nothing to thee?”

Heaven vouchsafed no answer then.

“Hush! It is well,” Elgiva answered. “He

THE SINS OF A SAINT

heard my prayer. He saved me from shame. He kept my garments white!"

"And how hast thou escaped?"

"By aid of Eadmund, thy faithful knight and mine. Waiting long, and failing oft to make escape, he freed me from their power at last, and now hath brought me safe to thine arms."

"Oh, my queen! My queen!" faltered the king, as the hard rock welled forth waters at last and fountains of tears broke from depths no pen can fathom.

Chased like a beast, for days Elgiva lay in the covert of his love as a hunted child in its mother's arms. A peace passing all understanding stole over her heart and mind, like soothing slumber mingled with pleasing dreams and laden with melodies softly sung. His warm breath and moist cheek and throbbing heart and clasping arms made heaven for her soul.

The child that had been quietly sleeping in its cot suddenly woke with a cry. At the first sound of its waking, the mother that lay in Elgiva's heart bounded to her offspring's side.

"My son! My son!" she cried, lifting the boy, and covering his face with kisses as she

NUN'S VEILING

pressed him to her breast and rocked him in her arms.

“Who art thou?” asked the child, when she had soothed his fears and won his speech.

“Thy mother. Kiss me, my son.”

The child put his arms round her neck and kissed her many times. “My mother. Oh, I am glad. Father hath wearied so much without thee. Hast thou not, father?”

“Yea, my son,” he answered. “Wearied much!”

“Let me see thy face, mother. Let me touch it with my hand. How strange! How deep the wrinkles on thy cheeks! See, I can put my fingers in them! Where are thy roses? Father told me roses, beautiful and red, grew on thy cheeks. Is it winter, father? Hath the frost bit them, like mine? Why dost thou cry? Mother, look at father’s tears!”

For a moment naught was heard save the sobbing of the three and the falling of their tears.

“Yea, my son, it is winter now. The frost hath nipped the bloom. The roses have gone. But play on, my child, play with thy mother’s shame! Mark her wrinkles well, that when thou

THE SINS OF A SAINT

art big enough thou mayest avenge them should thy father fail.”

Speech forsook them once again.

And in the hush the child fell asleep in his mother's arms, his rosy face against her roseless cheeks. Gently she lifted him and carried him to his cot.

And as she happed him round she softly sang:

Sleep, little baby,
Hush in thy cot,
Mother is bending low
Kissing thy forehead,
Smoothing thy gold hair,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

The king crept to the other side of the cot, and, putting his arm round the queen's neck and his cheek next hers, bent over the child, and sang:

Sleep, little baby,
Hush in thy cot,
Father is guarding thee,
Standing to shield thee,
Strong to defend thee,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

While he sang, White Heart, hand in hand with Eadmund, stole into the room, radiant with smiles at the coming of sister and friend. And

NUN'S VEILING

when the king had ended, she stood at the cot-head
and sang with a voice soft and sweet, like a spirit
making melody divine:

Sleep, little baby,
Hush in thy cot,
Angels are singing sweet,
Stroking thine eyelids,
Anointing with slumber,
Sleep, little baby, sleep.

Then the church bells clanged on the frosty
air and rang in the bright New Year.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HOUNDS AT BAY

THE hounds were close at the heels of the hunted queen. With gnarling teeth they came to the palace and cried for their victim. Their fury at her escape knew no bounds and drove them headlong to the queen's covert. With boldness and insolence long practised they came to the king and loudly demanded the runaway.

Repeated successes had made them unsuspecting of refusal.

His regal spirit had been crushed, they thought, and would readily yield to their demands. But when they came fire was flashing from his eyes and a fierce look before which the bravest of them quailed and drew back.

"Back with you, hounds and insolent!" he cried. "Back, in the name of the king!"

Staggered and speechless, the monks halted and panted as they gnarled at their victim. Their

THE HOUNDS AT BAY

teeth showed white and their eyes gleamed hate. For a moment only they stood. Then, more infuriated by this unexpected check, Sigwulf advanced toward the king, crying scornfully and defiantly:

“The king? Ha, ha, ha! Nay, not the king, but the Church’s proud offender. We have no king but Christ, and Dunstan, maker of kings and ruler of the Saxon realm. And we come in his name to claim the harlot-queen. Give her back. Holy Church demands her!”

The king advanced to meet him, full of wrath. Power gathered round him as he spoke. Even Sigwulf felt it, and withdrew a step.

“Once and for all let Holy Church learn the king will never give her back. Never, while life is left him or God Almighty gives him strength to fight. Never, while his eyes behold the outrage and wrong committed on his queen. Never, while his heart’s blood boils at the cruelty and shame of men who call themselves servants of a holy and merciful God. Never, while his heart proclaims him right and his queen pure and holy as Mary the Mother of God!”

The monks fell back as Eadwine advanced in

THE SINS OF A SAINT

his wrath, his face marked with righteousness and strength.

“And as for thou, Sigwulf, kinsman of Odo the shameless, no more shalt thou make the roses bloom or hunt an English queen. The days of thy cruelty are ended. With mine own hand I send thee to thy doom!”

So crying, the king swung his jeweled sword and smote the barbarian to the ground.

The long pent-up energy of the years had broken loose at last. As he drew his weapon, reeking with the blood of the Dane, the strength of battle fell on him. Now that he knew where to strike, strike he would with all his might.

“There!” he shouted, drawn to his full height again, his eyes piercing, his sword uplifted, the monks withdrawing terror-stricken, surprised, aghast at the deed. “There is my answer to a Church that persecutes the innocent for selfish ends and stains her robes with the guilt of heinous crimes! There is my answer to men who, for lust of place and power, fear not to hurl the word of shame at England’s fairest queen! Take up the corpse and carry it to Dunstan and say: ‘Eadwine,

THE HOUNDS AT BAY

king of all England, defies thee, and holds Elgiva for his queen! ' ”

Terrified by the visage of the king, and fearing lest the dripping sword would reek with the blood of more, the cowering monks lifted the body of Sigwulf and hurried from the scene.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RING OF BATTLE

SOON the sound of war was heard throughout the land. Dunstan was not the man to be foiled by a woman. However infamous the plot, only let the fiat leave his brain and he would see it carried out, though England reel with the weight of his craft and hear the flapping of death's black wings. The banished queen's return was for him pretext enough for staining the fields with blood.

“War!” he cried, and the cry reechoed from the walls of Canterbury, Glastonbury, Worcester, York, and many a church between. From tower to tower it ran, and fell on the startled ears of monks seeking for rest in cloistered shades. From glade to glade, and pained the tender hearts of whitely nuns walking to heaven through virgin lands. From shire to shire, and drew the swords of Danes and Anglo-Danes, ever ready and eager for war. Benedictine and Jarl, Mercian and An-

THE RING OF BATTLE

glian, heard it gladly and issued forth to battle, blessed by the hands of the priests.

The king left his palace and went to make his answer at Oxford. The queen, fearing to be left alone again, prayed her lord that she might also come, desiring above all things to join in the battle, and die by the side of the king, if the worst came to the worst. She rode on a white palfrey at the head of the thanes, and roused their hearts by the sight of her scars and martial bearing.

With pride, the king, tall and upright once more, looked down on her from his charger, gaily caparisoned, decked with gold. She drew her veil to hide her scars from him, but when he rode away to lead the march, she lifted it with tears, pointed to the wounds, and cried:

“Look, ye royal thanes, look on your master’s shame, mark his queen’s deep scars, and swear ye will avenge them!”

The thanes swore, with flashing eyes.

“With blood?” she queried.

“With blood!” they answered.

“Fearing not death?”

“Laughing at death!”

Oxford at this time was a place of some mili-

THE SINS OF A SAINT

tary and monastic importance. Its fame lay in the strength of its castle rather than in the greatness of its learning. The University had not yet been established, though it is said to have been a place of study from the time of Alfred the Great. Its schools were mostly claustral and were influenced entirely by the Church. But the spirit of its after glory was already hovering over the town.¹

The fields were green with tender grass and aflame with buttercups of gold when Elgiva came

¹ Says the late Prof. E. A. Freeman: "The history of Oxford begins in the tenth century; in the eleventh it was a place of the first importance as a military post, and as the scene of great national gatherings. But it is not till the twelfth that we get the first hints of the coming University, the first glimpses of schools, scholars, and lecturers; and it is not till the thirteenth that we get anything like colleges in the modern sense. In that age too comes, not indeed University College, but the benefactions out of which University College grew." We may take it that a place which held out for long against the forces of William the Conqueror, a century later, was, even now, a place of some military strength. The castle was probably founded about 900 A. D. by the West Mercians. . . . The foundation of the University by Alfred is now regarded as fabulous and due to the continuous stream of flattery poured upon his name by the monks. They knew how to praise and how to damn, but truth, like love, "suffereth long," "never faileth," "rejoiceth not in iniquity," and comes to see things "face to face" by and by.

THE RING OF BATTLE

on her white palfrey to the south gate of Oxford, where Magdalen Bridge now spans the sluggish waters of the Cherwell.

Here the march of the royal troops was blocked by the rebels in battle array. At the king's command they halted ere they rushed to the fight. Lifting the veil from the queen's face he led her along the ranks in painful silence, pointing to his shame, and with avenging looks rousing the army to frenzy for battle and passion for right.

“Forward!” he cried, when his work was done and the troops were panting to strike. “Forward to battle, to do or to die!”

“Oh, that thou wouldst give me a sword, Edwy, that I might battle too, and die with thee,” entreated the queen, now casting her veil away and facing the foe.

He gave her his own Saxon seax, inlaid with gold, in a scabbard of gems, on a belt embroidered with jeweled scenes of war.

Drawing it, she lifted it high, looked toward the sun, then pointed to the foe, and cried:

“Forward! And fear not death! Heaven will fight for us! The sun will sink in victory!”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

A loud cry of passion broke from every man and strengthened every warrior's limbs. Forward they rushed and leaped, wildly singing this battle-song:

Lamp of the Lord God,
Lord everlasting,
Lord of the morning,
Light of the day,
Sail through the night-mists,
Shine on the war-beams flashing before thee,
And lead us to victory we pray.

Beat on the brows of the Sons of the Sunlight,
Break on the shields of the faithful and brave,
Break, like the waves on the shingle of morning,
Bearing the sail of the day from the night,
Smile on our war-deeds,
Set in a glory of salmon and gold-light,
And lead us to victory we pray.

Fly on the track of the faint-hearted fighters,
Fling forth thine arrows that fail nevermore,
Spread, like the beams of thine own shooting warriors,
Carnage and death in the camp of the foe,
Rout all their specters,
Set on pale faces with death-grip adorned,
And lead us to victory we pray.

Lamp of the Lord God,
Lord everlasting,
Lord of the morning,
Light of the day,

THE RING OF BATTLE

Glide o'er the war-field,
Till, gorged like an eagle, thou sink to thy setting,
And lead us to victory we pray.

The royal troops dashed among the rebels, while prayers for their confusion were chanted by the monks. Fighting with irresistible might, the king led his men to the south gate, and amid a storm of arrows began, with the gallant Eadmund, to thunder at its iron sides. The brow-scarred Alfric and dark-eyed Ethelsige, now of all most eager to die, were sent to storm the bristling walls, while the queen was left to guard the rear.

For long the gates refused to yield to the king's fierce onslaughts, and many times were the ladders thrown from the walls on Alfric and Ethelsige. The monks cheered the rebels and hurled anathemas on the king. The jarls shouted defiance from the walls and mocked the efforts of the royal force. Grim Gunnar and dusky Dragmel exulted as though defeat for Eadwine were certain. But in vain.

Returning to the attack with undaunted courage, the royal troops rammed the iron gates and were sweeping into the town just as Alfric leaped on the bristling walls and made a way for his

THE SINS OF A SAINT

company by receiving into his own body full a dozen spears.

“On!” he cried, as his followers leaped on the foe. “On! Fear not death! Avenge the queen!”

And as he sank he turned his face toward Elgiva, waved his hand, smiled triumphantly, then marched away to God. Soon his feet leaped on the walls of the golden city.

With a loud cheer the royal troops now rushed upon the rebels, scaling the ladders and sweeping through the gates. The grim Gunnar was the first to encounter Eadwine as he entered. The young king leaped forward to meet him. For a moment the armies waited to see the issue.

The combat was brief though fierce. The wild barbarian bore down upon the lissom king with brutal strength as on an easy foe. With matchless skill the king received, parried his thrusts and blocked his rushes, then ran his good sword home and laid proud Gunnar low.

Scarce had the single combat ended ere Eadmund leaped to meet the dusky Dragmael. But ere the dark-faced warrior fell the bloody conflict had begun on every side.

THE RING OF BATTLE

It was a desperate struggle. Fighting hand to hand, the royal forces slowly drove the foe before them step by step. Throughout the day they fought, surely and bravely cutting their way to the frowning castle where lay the wily Dunstan and pampered princeling. With great valor and desperation the rebels resisted and had to be driven from every point of vantage on the way.

Verily avenging blood flowed freely.

Meanwhile the queen herself was dipping her gift in the crimson of the foe. Thinking to surprise the king, Dunstan sent a force round to the south gate with orders to enter and attack the royal troops in the rear. But the watchful queen lay in readiness.

Slowly and cautiously two of the foe stole up to the gate to see if the way were clear, while their fellows crouched in a copse near by. Behind the gate the queen and her troop lay waiting, excited, observant. As they crept within the gates the queen started. They belonged to Sigwulf's party of tormentors, had mocked her in the abbot's chamber, had seen the roses bloom!

Gripping her seax, she sprang upon them and plunged the gilded weapon in the heart of one.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

When she saw the blood spurt from the open wound her hand had made she gloated and shuddered in turn.

“The blood of vengeance!” she cried exultingly, but could not voice the dread feeling that rose next moment in her heart. She had slain a man!

The second monk turned and fled as the queen leaped upon his fellow, but ere he crossed the bridge he threw up his arms and fell with an arrow through his life.

The crouching foe then hasted back to Dunstan, foiled and fearful, and tried no more that day.

The great man received them in anger, lashed them with scathing glances, raged a while, then smiled as another plan rose in his fertile brain. Eadgar saw it and played with his jeweled hilt. The pomp of victory rose from the strife of battle. He had never seen Dunstan smile so in vain.

Ere sunset the king, with much bloodshed, had fought his way to near the castle. In front of it, where Queen Street now lies, the last struggle of the day took place.

THE RING OF BATTLE

The grim Danes resisted stubbornly and stood for long against the fierce onslaughts of the royal troops.

But as the sun went down they wavered, broke, and fled, running for life past the old Saxon Church of St. Michael, through the north gate, called Bocardo,¹ hotly pursued by the conquering king.

When darkness crept along the sky Eadwine returned from the slaughter proud of the honors of the day. The castle alone remained to be

¹ "The rooms above the gate were used as a prison, and the poor inmates used to let down a greasy old hat from the window in front of the passers by, and cry 'Pity the Bocardo birds!' . . . Of Bocardo no trace remains, but St. Michael's is likely to last as long as any edifice in Oxford. . . . It is worth while to climb the tower, and remember the time when arrows were sent like hail from the narrow windows on the foes who approached Oxford from the North, while prayers for their confusion were read in the Church below."—Andrew Lang's *Oxford*, pp. 33, 34.

In the Bocardo prison Cranmer is said to have witnessed the martyrdom of Ridley and Latimer, which took place without the north wall. Issuing from it to the flames he made his famous declaration: "As for the Pope, I utterly refuse his false doctrines; and as for the Sacrament, I believe as I have taught in my book against the Bishop of Winchester, which my book teacheth so true a doctrine of the Sacrament, that it shall stand at the last day before the Judgment seat of God, when the Papistical doctrine contrary thereto shall be ashamed to show her face!"

THE SINS OF A SAINT

taken—an easy thing it seemed to him now glowing with triumph.

So he laid him down to rest under the shade of St. Michael's Church, with grateful glances toward the cross, confident of victory on the coming day.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE BARGE OF DEATH

TOWARD dawn the king and queen rose from restless slumbers to begin anew the battle of the day. There was hope in both their hearts that now, at last, wrong would be righted. Like lovers within sound of wedding-bells they hastened to meet the morn, impatient for the crowning of fond desires. A new life would be theirs, they fancied, ere eventide had come.

“The dawn of victory is nigh, Elgiva, and the day of Dunstan’s downfall come. One short struggle more, then the castle will be stormed and our enemies scattered. Pray God the abbot may fall under Eadwine’s sword. So wilt thou return avenged, and, smiling, reign in peace, my queen.”

“The day hath not yet blushed, Edwy, and knoweth little yet, but may thy prayer be granted and evening smile on thee. And oh, that Mary’s Son would water my cheeks to-day and make the roses bloom anew for thee. But if so be that

THE SINS OF A SAINT

he will not, then let the day begone, and thorns remain to mind thee of wrong avenged and victory won, and me—of garments He kept white.”

“Farewell, fair guardian of the gate,” said Edwy, smiling on the queen. “Hie thee to thy post, and see thou wield thy weapon well as yesterday. And I shall speak me to the king on thy behalf, that he may honor thee!”

“Farewell, my king!” answered Elgiva, and came to take his parting embrace.

She lay in his arms a moment and lingered, as if some kindly spirit were bidding her remain, kissed him passionately seven times, then walked away to her doom.

An hour before, Dunstan, with the pick of the rebels, stole from the castle, made a semi-circuit northward, and came to the Cherwell. Here was a gay barge in waiting, with silken hangings and monstrous figure-head. Another and larger company, under Eadgar, completed the circle southward, and crept toward the copse without the queen’s gate.

Leaping on board, the abbot himself took the helm, and steered down the stream with muffled oars. The night was dark with dense banks of angry

THE BARGE OF DEATH

clouds that held the moon in check and favored the chancellor's crafty plan.

When the queen came to the south gate the guard informed her all was well, had been, at least, till an hour ago. Then threatening clouds had gathered in the sky and hid the struggling moon. Since faint sounds had been heard, as of muffled oars, and the splash of a prow as it breaks through the water. And only a minute before there had risen from the river a low wail as of some one in pain—sure sign of evil portending.

The queen wondered. What could it be? Would it do to go and see? There could be no danger! The guard was all alert! If only the moon would pierce the clouds!

Even as she wondered the sound came again and quivering with pain.

“’Tis a wounded man in sore need of aidance,” cried the queen, and sprang to light a lantern that she might succor him.

“Nay!” cried the veterans of the guard. “Nay! Thou must not leave thy post! There may be danger in the dark!”

They listened all.

A painful silence, broken by no light; and

THE SINS OF A SAINT

again, but louder than before, a cry of pain. It seemed changed, too, and sounded now like a child in utter agony.

The mother in the queen could not resist the cry. Lifting a lantern, she leaped into the darkness and hurried toward the river. The veterans followed, vainly entreating her to return.

A moment later there was a shrill cry of "Help! Help!" a groan as the veterans fell pierced with many wounds, and a loud splashing noise as the barge was pushed from the bank.

Hastening toward the river, the startled guardians of the gate arrived to find the barge in mid-stream and being quickly rowed away. Through the darkness they could dimly see the queen being gagged and bound, and the abbot at the helm directing all.

Some leaping into the water vainly strove to reach her. As they neared the side an arrow or a spear brought them, one by one, into funeral procession.

Soon their comrades on the bank were engaged in closest combat with Eadgar and his men. The clang of battle woke the tardy morn. But the strife was short and deathly. Sweeping toward

THE BARGE OF DEATH

the river in overwhelming numbers, the rebels hemmed the royal guardians in, hewed them down resisting stoutly, and hurled them headlong into the stream.

No mercy was offered, none indeed was asked. One warrior only, wounded, floated down the river as if dead, and escaped to tell the tale.

Dunstan's triumph was complete.

When the work was done blushing dawn crept up the sky and cast its crimson on the scene. The moon broke from the darkness with the day and tipped the morning gold with silver light. The barge, like a burnished throne, burned on the water, aflame with silk, adorned with grinning prow. At the helm stood the crafty abbot smiling as he never smiled before. And down the stream many a pale face floated right in the wake of the barge of death.

CHAPTER XXXIX

BUTTERCUPS AND BLOOD

WHEN day dawned the assault on the castle began. Eadwine, unconscious of disaster at the south gate, led the attack and gloried in the prospects of victory.

The rebels kept up the defense with spirit, but did not seem so numerous and did not shout their gibes so loudly at the king. The timid Ethelwold and treacherous Alfhere were seen upon the walls, but Dunstan and Eadgar were nowhere visible. The royal troops exulted and declared there must have been flight during the night. The rebels replied by showing that, though few in number, they were strong enough to hold the castle as long as Dunstan had directed.

Though he attacked with heart and hand, the sun was mounting high ere Eadwine stormed the gates and swept into the fort. The royal troops cheered and fell on the rebels with joy. The few

BUTTERCUPS AND BLOOD

that escaped fled along the road that led to Gloucester.

In the hour of triumph the wounded warrior wended his painful way from the river, and told the king the tidings of his queen. His arms fell by his side, his head dropped, his life, that a moment since had been breaking with light and joy, grew dark and sad once more. The thanes looked on their lord with hearts full of sorrow. The royal troops hushed their exultation and listened, feeling fate was mocking their joy with tidings of wo, and some great calamity was nigh at hand.

“Wo is me!” cried the king with breaking heart. “To think that in the time of triumph I should hear her funeral knell!”

“Pursue! Pursue!” cried Eadmund, strong man of faith and hope. “Pursue, and we may take the queen again, and wreak our vengeance on the foe. Pursue! Pursue!”

Mounting his steed, the king rode away in dire pursuit of his much-wronged queen, with fearful mind and heart breaking with wo.

When Dunstan’s barge came to where the Cherwell and Isis join the Thames he disembarked

THE SINS OF A SAINT

with haste, and set out for Gloucester with the captive queen. The face of him shone in the morning light and met the noon with smiles of mirth and triumph.

But late in the afternoon it darkened when, on nearing the Cotswold hills, he feared the avenging king's pursuit. Then was he driven to a deed that stains his memory with the guilt of a cruel and brutal crime, pitiless and inhuman as subtle brain could imagine.

“What shall we do with her?” he asked when the hoofs of the king's horses were heard in the rear.

According to the stern maxims of Saxon jurisprudence, any one returning from banishment without consent might be put to death without the formality of trial. But the fury and hatred of the monks scarce needed any such excuse.

“Hamstring her,” cried the fleshy Kynesige with a curse. “From coronation night till now she hath been as a thorn in the flesh of Holy Church. She is in our power once more, and fools shall we be if we delay her death. End her now, and then our troubles will be ended. Hamstring her, and leave her to die on the highway alone,

BUTTERCUPS AND BLOOD

to welcome the royal sinner and find his fond embraces at the last!"

"Hamstring her!" roared a dozen voices under Benedictine cowl.

Eadgar was far in front, damning his dream of silk and purple, and wondering if Dunstan's smile would ever bring the crown.

"Hamstring her," they roared, "and leave her to die on the way with the curse of Holy Church upon her soul. Thus shall we rid us of her life and kill the stubborn king."

"Even so," cried Dunstan, well pleased with the plan, smiling fiendishly once again. "And let the deed be done forthwith!"

They laid her on a bank of flowers by the wayside, and with the king's own gilded seax committed the barbarous deed, and left her to die in excruciating agony.¹

"There!" shouted the fiendish executioners.

¹ There seems little doubt of the actual occurrence of this deed. Dr. Lingard, who has undertaken the defense of Dunstan, does not deny the main facts of the conduct imputed to him. After relating the tragedy he describes hamstringing as a "cruel but not unusual mode of punishment in that age"—a remark pronounced to be conceived in the spirit of an inquisitor of the worst ages. The punishment consisted in cutting the sinews of the legs with a sword. See Milner and Kemble.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“There! Lie low, and wait the last embraces of thy king! The curse of Holy Church is now upon thee!”

Among the sweet spring flowers they left her, pure and fair as any flower, writhing in agony. The daisies, hearkening to her cry, hastened to dip their pale-pink faces in her blood and deepen the red of their ruddy hearts. The buttercups, in sympathy, renounced their love of gold and gave themselves an offering to the queen. A blackbird whistled in a wood near by, and right above her a skylark sang its song of joy high up in the heaven of God.

CHAPTER XL

THROUGH THE FIELD OF FLOWERS

Toward evening the king came upon the dying queen. She lay in a swoon of pain on the bank of flowers stained with her innocent blood. He flung himself by her side, utterly unnerved, weeping piteously:

“Elgiva! Elgiva! My queen! My queen!”

His heart was broken.

Round them gathered the royal troops and looked with open hearts on the painful sight. The thanes wept with their lord and king and were not ashamed. The common warriors, young and old, scarred and bloody, wiped not the tears that flowed down their stern faces. No man sought to hide his eyes that eventide. Even the wounded forgot their pains in pain for the queen, and the whole were wounded sore.

Yet, of all, none was smitten like the faithful Eadmund. In that sad hour his hope was baffled,

THE SINS OF A SAINT

his faith forsook him, his soul was left in a land dark, desolate, dreadful, and void of God.

Laving her face with water, the king sought to bring the queen back to life again. A passion to save her rent him with agony. Slowly at set of sun she opened her eyes once more with a loud wail of pain, flung her arms round his neck, and cried:

“Oh, Edwy! Edwy! Let me die! Let me die! My king! My king!”

And so crying she swooned away again and entered the Valley of the Shadow.

The sun departed and darkness came on. A lantern was lit and held by Eadmund standing at Elgiva's feet. At her left side knelt a priest holding a cross before her dying eyes. At her right the king, stricken with pain.

For an hour she moaned and walked the Valley with troubled spirit and trembling speech. Then sweet peace stole over her face, pain fled, and smiles ran over her opening mouth.

“Flowers, flowers, flowers!” she whispered.

The king bent low to catch her speech.

“Flowers, flowers! A spacious field of flowers!”

THE FIELD OF FLOWERS

Her hands wandered from side to side plucking and arranging the treasures. She lifted them to her face, laid them against her cheek, smelt them, smiled, and placed them by her side.

For a moment she lay still, as if dreaming, then opened her eyes, and whispered:

“I shall get me to the wood and pluck the wild roses yonder.”

In spirit she went and plucked the pale-pink blossoms for a time.

Anon she cried as if in pain:

“Oh! A thorn has pricked me sore!”

She lifted her hand and picked the thorn from it. She cast it away with a look of pain, and kissed the wound many times.

Then she wandered back to where her bouquet lay and cast herself beside it with a smile.

Anew she began to pluck the flowers around her. Suddenly her face changed. One by one, as she plucked them, she cried:

“Blood! Blood! A tiny drop in the heart of each!”

For long she kept at it:

“Blood! Blood! A tiny drop in the heart of each!”

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Then there was a long silence full of awe.

She lay as if dead, peaceful and still.

Anon she opened her eyes with a sigh.

“Lo, I have taken the angel’s place on the shield and am clothed in dazzling raiment. The king is by my side weeping. And I can not speak to him or touch him, for I am dead and in the field of flowers. Oh, how plainly I see them all!”

A brief silence, and then:

“Children, children, children! Weeping round me bitterly. Everywhere weeping for me. Ah! And every one hath the face of mine own! And is clad in his spotless robes! Edwy, Edwy, bring the child to me once more—my child, my child! Oh, he doth not hear me, doth not hear me, my king, my king!”

There was a long silence once more, and then:

“Listen! The children are singing. How dull my hearing! I can not catch the words, save the loud refrain:

“‘Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send!’

And they are weeping, weeping, weeping.”

Then she strained her ear to listen to music that seemed to come from afar.

THE FIELD OF FLOWERS

“Deep, low, sepulchral, as from a land of spirits. 'Tis the voice of the warriors. The same song! The same refrain—and throbbing with passion!

“‘Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send!’”

The scene changed once more as her spirit walked deep down the Valley. Another vision seemed to rise before her eyes. She lifted them toward a mountain and watched long a figure approaching. And as it drew near, she cried with much surprise:

“White Heart! And her feet are wet with blood! Lo, Turketul is by her side and whispering: ‘Fear not, my child, God will avenge!’”

Her spirit sank deeper in the Valley now and came to the water’s edge. The priest held the cross close to her dying eyes. The king took her hand and held it softly. The silence was broken only by the breathing of the warriors and the running of a brook near by.

So till the end. Then brokenly and slowly:

“The field of flowers again. How sweet they smell. How beautiful. He maketh me—lie down—in green pastures—he leadeth me—beside—still

THE SINS OF A SAINT

waters—I walk—through the valley—shadow—
death—and fear—no evil—thou art—with me—
art — with — me — Surely — goodness — mercy
— shall — follow — me — follow — me — me —
me — And — I — shall — dwell — house — Lord
—forever.”

Her speech was low and faint now, and it was long ere she murmured “forever.” Thrice she said it at last, and lingered over it with joy.

Then as the heavenly light fell on her face she stretched forth her hand as if to pluck one flower more, smiled, passed through the Valley, and entered the house of the Lord.

Her passing was so peaceful at the last that they scarce knew when she went away. After a long silence the king whispered in her ear:

“Elgiva! Elgiva!”

But when she answered not he loudly wailed: “Dead! Dead! Dead!” Then flung himself prostrate at her side.

In that dread hour his heart was bare for the stroke of death and bled. The blow fell on him heavily and stunned his life. He lay under the

THE FIELD OF FLOWERS

lash and endured it for long. Then, rebelling, he rose, frantic and fierce, and cried:

“There is no God! There is no God! Else he had saved my hapless queen!”

And so crying, Eadmund led him away weeping.

CHAPTER XLI

AN ANGRY HEAVEN

AT dawn the royal troops rose from their camp of sorrow, and waited the bidding of the mourning king. The queen lay on a fresh piece of the bank of flowers amid a wealth of buttercups and daisies, clad in whitest raiment.

Ere they went in pursuit the old court minstrel took up the burden of their hearts in a loud lament. And the royal warriors, kneeling around their queen, joined with passion in the oft-recurring refrain:

Lord, our backs are bent with wo,
Beaten, broken, all our hopes,
Blasted with the biting winds,
Frozen with the cold hoar-frost,
So we lift our prayers to Thee.

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send!

Now our souls are darkened drear,
Darkened with the clouds of Death,
Darkened with the ravens wan,

AN ANGRY HEAVEN

Dinned with howls of wild were-wolf,
So we lift our prayers to Thee.

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send !

Rooted from our Mother Earth
Is the lily of the land,
Plucked and bruised with brutal arm
The whitest rose of all the realm,
So we lift our prayer to Thee.

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send !

Torn the purple of the throne,
Torn the jewel from the crown,
Torn the heart of England's king,
Torn the queen of Beauty now,
So we lift our prayer to Thee.

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send !

Smitten fiercely hath the foe,
Plunged the war-beam to the hilt,
Rent the vitals from our life,
Swept our souls with swords of Grief,
So we lift our prayer to Thee.

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send !

Now with wounds enwreathèd all,
Girt about with woful trappings,
Laden deep with sorrows sore,
Fare we fainting forth to fight,
So we lift our prayer to Thee.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send!

Make our war-beams mighty, Lord,
Doughty of the edges, keen,
Slaughter-greedy weapons all,
Fiercely thirsting for the fray,
So we lift our prayer to Thee.

Son of Mary, in Thy Heaven,
Hear, and vengeance send!

When the prayer had ended the royal warriors rose and went in pursuit of the fray. Four of the thanes, making a bier for the queen with their linden shields, lifted her on their shoulders and carried her thus at the head of the army.

It was not till late in the afternoon they came upon the rebels near Gloucester,¹ on a fortified position on the Cotswold hills.

The thanes laid the queen on the ground, and as they went to the fight the warriors touched her with their spears, singing this battle-song:

¹ Gloucester, originally founded by the Britons, was a city of some military importance. At the commencement of the eighth century it was, according to the venerable Bede, one of the noblest cities in the land. In the seventh century Wulphur, son of King Penda, founded the monastery of St. Peter there. The city repeatedly suffered from fire and the ravages of the Danes. It was almost wholly destroyed shortly after the Norman Conquest. Two of the sons of William the Conqueror sleep in its cathedral.

AN ANGRY HEAVEN

Forth and forward faring,
Fighters fierce in battle,
Through the surge of war-wights
By the strength of fingers
Victory's song abringing.
Wield with might the war-beam
For the war-strife shapen,
Bend the biting arrows
Yont the yellow-shields
Wailing slaughter-runes.
Stride along the war-host,
Shout aloud the trumpets,
Soar aloft the banners,
Girt with greedy war-words,
Decked with gems of Death,
Till in woe the war-wights
Joyless fall.

The battle began with eager haste, all recognizing it was the death-struggle of Eadwine or Dunstan. The royal troops fought with the vision of the queen before them and with their swords thirsting for vengeance.

The king, reckless of life now and courting a death-wound, rushed into the thick of the fight and seemed to wield a charmed weapon. His tall frame towered above the combatants, and marked him out for many an arrow that turned aside wailing from his magic shield.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Baptized with power, he carried the thanes with him, and struck terror into the foe. Hand to hand he fought his way up the steep hillside, and grimly smiled in the midst of death. Hero after hero he met in single combat, and trampled in their blood as he leaped to meet another. One by one they fell before him, and Death would not take him eager to go.

The royal troops beheld his might, and cried, "The Lord is round about him!" Certain of victory now, they fought with fearless strength.

So till sunset—a wild and angry sky, with clouds rushing to meet the night.

Then the king caught sight of Dunstan cheering the reeling rebels on, and near him Eadgar with golden helmet, and the treacherous Alfhere. With might and main he cut his way to where the abbot fought.

When but a few paces off, Rold, a wild Northumbrian jarl, leaped out to meet him in single strife. The forces fell back on either side to watch the fray. But not for long. With a mighty blow the king smote him to the earth, and led on the cheering thanes to where the abbot stood.

The enchantment of invincible power lay upon

AN ANGRY HEAVEN

him till within a few yards of the pale-faced monk. Then, as Alphere leaped to meet him hand to hand, he fell, smitten with many wounds and pierced with many spears.

But as he fell he hurled his sword from him, full at the life of the abbot, with all his ebbing strength, and saw it plunge deep in the neck of Dunstan.

A flash of lightning leaped from out the sky as darkness closed on Eadwine and lit his soul to heaven. A peal of thunder told his welcome there. The dying sun sank blood-red amid a sea of tempestuous clouds.

The royal troops were terror-stricken. The Lord had forsaken them! Their king was slain. Their swords were reft of power. Their hearts of hope.

But the rebels rallied with glee and fought with new enthusiasm. They swept down the hill against the hopeless warriors. The strength of victory came upon them. And the royal troops, bereft at once of king and hope, could not long withstand them, were beaten back, thrown into confusion, and put to hopeless flight.

That night a wild storm swept over the land.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

Angry angels leaped from heaven and beat the air with furious wings. Lightnings and thunderings, such as went beyond the memory of man, rent the sky and smote the hearts of the victors.

The beaten warriors as they fled heard above the storm of the angels the loud thunderings of doubt, the cries of faith-forsaken hearts, and arraigned the righteousness of God.

And Eadmund, strong man of faith and hope once, cried with a broken voice, above the shout of heaven:

“There is no God! There is no God! Else he had saved our hapless king!”

EPILOGUE

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

THIRTY years later the faithful abbot of Croyland sate in an arbor there, conversing with a young and noble monk. It was the eventide of a long June day. The news had recently arrived of the death of Dunstan, and threw the abbey, as it did the country, into a state of commotion mingled with feelings of pity and relief.

“The end, after all, Edwy, hath proved the faith to be true that prophesies final victory for truth and righteousness. ‘Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord.’ And he doth not forget his promise or fail to perform, though in our bitterness and ruin we may wonder at his seeming want of action.”

“Even so the saintly abbess declared to me yesternight, Eadmund. ‘The Holy Virgin,’ said she, ‘lifts our prayer and holds it near to God Almighty’s heart till the times are ripe for his

THE SINS OF A SAINT

working. Then comes the retribution and vindication of his holy name. It may be three, or thirty, or three hundred, or three thousand years; but, sure as the sun rises after the longest night, God's answer comes.' ”

“The saintly White Heart's faith hath never failed her,” answered the faithful knight, who loved her to the end. “She drank too deeply of the spirit of Turketul ever to waver. ‘Thy cause is just,’ he said to thy father amid his assembled thanes, ‘and Heaven will not deny thee victory in the end. The air is laden with its legions, and the wicked are wounded they know not whence or how. Be strong, O king, and generations yet unborn will honor the name of Eadwine the Fair.’ So said he to thy father, Edwy. And lo, his son is seeing the fulfilment of the old warrior's word!”

“Recount it all to me again, Eadmund, that my faith may not waver, and the son of Eadwine the Fair rest well pleased with God's avenging.”

“Becoming monarch of all England on thy father's death, Eadgar robed himself with great splendor and sought to hide the stain that lay on

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

his heart. But his feet were wet with blood and his hand often trembled. The dream of silk and purple was never realized. The crown he won brought him sorrow, and fell from his head in the pride of his life and glory. The sword of justice swung around his throne and found its home sooner than men expected.

“Vain and pompous he kept up a show for a time, appeared to flourish in the eyes of men, and sought to be accounted great and glorious. He called himself by titles most boastful—‘King of the Angles and all the nations round about’; ‘Ruler and Lord of the whole isle of Albion’; ‘Basileus and Imperator of all Britain’; and many other such. He appeared in public with great ostentation, resplendent in royal purple robes, his long flaxen tresses ever plaited with shining gold, his belt embroidered with precious gems, and his sword, with richly jeweled hilt, dangling in a burnished scabbard of gold. A legend will tell thee that after his coronation he was rowed up the Dee from Chester to the abbey of Saint John the Baptist by eight vassal kings, himself holding the helm. But legends, however pretty or romantic, must not always be believed.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Under all this outward splendor dwelt a foul and feeble heart. The hand that ruled was Dunstan’s. The heart that sinned was Eadgar’s. The Benedictines do not hide the fact that their darling benefactor was no saint in morals. A libertine himself, he made his court dissolute, and did not hesitate to purchase the gratification of his passion by the foulest of all crimes.

“Twice married, first to Ethelflaed the White, who bore him Eadmund the Martyr, and then to Elfrida, who presented him with Ethelred the Unready, he was not blessed with joy.

“His second marriage covers both names with shame. Elfrida, vain and ambitious as himself, and beautiful beyond tell, sought, though daughter of one of his nobles and wife of another, to captivate the king. Succeeding in this, Eadgar, like David of old, murdered the noble husband, but, unlike the Hebrew king, did not repent of his sin and cry unto the Lord. Heaven marked the deed, filled up the cup of his judgment, and took him from the scenes of his sins and crimes, his pomp and glory, his silk and purple, his gold and gems, at the early age of thirty-two.

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

“Then began the troubles of Dunstan.

“Having by his craft, the favor of Eadgar, and the smile of Pope John XII, become Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England, he had been till now the master of the realm in Church and state. Eadgar, like Eadred before him, had been his tool, a willing tool, well content to be wielded by the cunning hand of Dunstan. Great as ecclesiastic and statesman, greater than any who had hitherto ruled the realm, even in the fulness of his power he was not strong enough to force his heart's desire.

“The clergy persisted in maintaining their natural rights and forced him to withdraw from active propagation of Benedictine rules. Only by counsels of discretion was revolution prevented. The ardor of the zealot was cooled by the fears of the statesman.

“Yet in secret he countenanced the Benedictine crusade. And his cunning is shown in the fact that he made Eadgar appear as the benefactor of the rule. They say that over forty Benedictine monasteries owe their foundations to that pious king!

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“A great man is not always a great saint. Dunstan—Saint Dunstan as some call him—earned his greatness at the expense of his holiness. Carried away by his ambition he became unscrupulous for power, and stained his hands with innocent blood. Kings and nobles he despised, and now, in turn, he came to be despised by them. So, often, are men paid back in their own coin.

“On Eadgar’s death Dunstan began to get his pay. The rival factions in Church and state came to strife as to who should wear the crown. The country was rent in twain, some calling for Eadward and some for Ethelred. With much right Dunstan favored Eadward, and in the end secured for him the crown.

“But the infamous Elfrida would not rest content. Her life’s ambition was to see her own son, Ethelred, clad in purple. So when the young boy-king Eadward was out hunting one day, and came to her door for a sup of mead, her servants plunged the dagger to his heart as she herself handed him the draft with a luring smile.

“Though innocent of his mother’s crime Ethelred was regarded with horror by the people. But

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

as there was no other claimant for the throne, Elfrida came to see her son robed in royal purple. Dunstan, protesting and proclaiming his forebodings of national calamity, was yet forced to place the crown on the head of Ethelred.

“Thereafter the primate retired to Canterbury, and left the government of the realm to other hands. His power in the land was broken.

“A murderess now ruled the isle of Albion.

“Then began the death-struggle of Dunstan. The long peace which his power had established came to an end. Internal strife prepared the way for the coming of foreign foes. The people, dispirited under a sovereign on whom the curse of Heaven was thought to rest, made no strong or well-timed efforts to resist their foes. Danish and Norwegian pirates swooped down upon the land like eagles greedy for the prey or birds of vengeance sent from heaven to rend the reigning king. And he, never prepared for them, and never able to beat them back with terror, well earned the nickname Dunstan gave him of Ethelred the Unready.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“In vain the primate sought to control the destinies of the realm and prevent the threatening doom. His sin had passed to the third and fourth generation. Hated by the clergy, unloved by the nobles, despised by the king, he never regained his hold on the state. Day by day his power waned, till at last his sun sank to its setting.

“It happened thus: The lands of Rochester in his see were ravaged by the young king’s order. Angered by this insult, Dunstan came from his retirement to the court of the king, loudly protested, and threatened excommunication. The laughter and contempt with which his threat was heard mortified him so much that he fled the court and went back to Canterbury, broken in spirit as well as in power, and died, it is said, of bitter grief and sheer vexation of heart.”

“And it is rumored,” broke in the royal monk, “it is rumored that at the last he bewailed himself in the ears of his priest: ‘Wo is me! Had I but loved the beautiful and good, as in my youth, and left alone ambition, I should not now be marching to the grave amid the laughter of men

AFTER THIRTY YEARS

foul with sin, but taking to myself the glory of a blameless life. Wo is me! My soul is heavy laden, and weary, waiting for the light. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!’ ”

“And ere the priest closed his eyes,” added the saintly abness, who had approached them unseen, “it is said he moaned: ‘God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this: power belongeth unto God.’ And as the shadows fell, in humble contrite whispers: ‘Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy. Thou wilt render to every man according to his works.’ So may his soul rest in peace!”

“And may we rest,” concluded the abbot, “by holding fast the faith of the Psalmist:

“‘Blessed is he who hath the God of Jacob for his helper, whose hope is in the Lord his God: who keepeth truth for ever: who executeth judgment for them that suffer wrong: who healeth the broken of heart, and bindeth up their bruises. Great is the Lord, and great is his power: and of his wisdom there is no number. He bringeth the wicked down even to the ground.’ ”

“It is now the time of even-song,” whispered the prince Edwy, after a long silence.

THE SINS OF A SAINT

“Then let us be going,” answered Eadmund, piously crossing himself.

And as they rose to go the hush of eventide lay on the land. White clouds were floating in a peaceful summer sky, and a lark was singing its song of joy high up in the heaven of God.

THE END

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