

WULSTAN OF WORCESTER



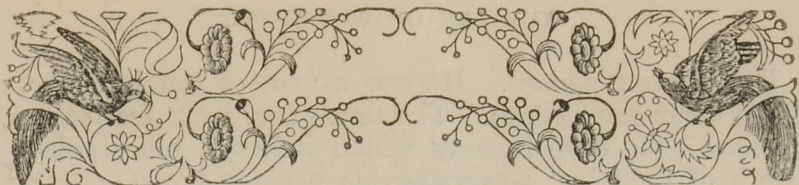
Absorbed in the day-dreams of imagination—not of the
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or

WULSTAN OF WORCESTER.



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WULSTAN OF WORCESTER:

OR, LOVE AND PRIDE.

A Legend of the City of Worcester.

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"The Bishop, he could lift his hand,  
To bless the kneeling crowd:  
The Bishop, he could grasp a brand,  
To chase the Barons proud."

OLD BALLAD.

"It is in vain—it is in vain—my dear children!" exclaimed the venerable prelate, Wulstan of Worcester, as he stood erect, with clasped hands and eyes upturned to heaven, "It is all in vain! This unhappy kingdom is now, alas! bewailing her sins in sackcloth and in ashes. Sad is her fate, but all unpitied by the ruthless Norman, who revels in her misery. Mourning and lamentation are our portion: the voice of joy and gladness has departed—but surely not for ever! 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,' saith the Sacred Scripture; and truly, my children, it hath been fearfully proven upon us. The iron heel of the pitiless Conqueror is planted upon our neck: our liberties hath he trampled under foot: our ancient laws hath he abrogated: our rights invaded—our altars desecrated—our homesteads pillaged and despoiled! So sorely have we been tried—righteously have we been punished: retribution hath overtaken us, and grievously have we been smitten. Truly, our heart is desolate, and will not be comforted. We have sown that we have reaped: the betrayal of our country has wrought our own thralldom. Harsh and exacting are our taskmasters, and our native freedom hath been shackled with the bondage of Egypt. The sins of our fathers have been visited upon us: our pride has been abased—even to the dust. Woe worth the day that England bowed her head beneath the Norman yoke: better—far better—had she utterly perished! Her people are driven from their pleasant land—her nobles are slaughtered—her priesthood degraded. Aye, the most reverend father—the Primate Stigand, is deposed. The Bishop of Selesey and the Bishop of Elmham have been immured in the Tower. The Bishop of Durham hath fled the realm. And I—even I—"

The speaker paused. He was a man of stately figure, and of herculean proportions. The thin white locks scattered upon his head—the deep furrows which indented his cheeks—the “lines of thought” traversing his massive brow—proclaimed that he had long entered into “the sere and yellow tint” of his existence: yet his appearance indicated neither mental decay, nor bodily infirmity. His large bright blue eyes, as he gazed abstractedly upwards, gleamed with all the fire and vivacity of youth: his countenance was fair and ruddy—his features bold and commanding, yet softened by an expression of benevolence which betokened his goodness of heart, although agitated by the conflicting emotions which had clouded the sunshine of his soul. Suddenly starting from his reverie, he paced along the noble apartment with a hurried irregular step—his lips moving inaudibly, as though in silent communion with himself, or in prayer. At length he halted abruptly, and leaning upon his pastoral staff, which trembled within his vigorous grasp, as it graced a hand that seemed far more fitting for broadsword and battle-axe, than for silver crozier, he exclaimed—

“It is all in vain, my children: ye cannot beguile me of my presentiment—of my sad conviction. The shadows of coming events have enveloped me in their gloom. I—even I, alas!—am marked as the next victim of royal malevolence—and why? Good reason, forsooth, and all sufficient, in the eyes of a despot. My episcopal benefice hath long been coveted by that rapacious spoiler of our church—Robert of Orleans, who would fain tread in the footsteps of his graceless master, as invader and usurper. But a voice is whispering in mine ear, that the sacred mitre which I wear—placed on my head by the sainted hands of the good King Edward, of blessed memory—shall never encircle the alien brow of an ingrate Norman.”

“Nay—nay, my good Lord Wulstan!” replied one of the twain, who had been earnest but affectionate listeners to the soliloquy of the brave-hearted Bishop, as he tenderly supported the graceful form of his lovely companion—a maiden of some eighteen summers—“Nay, my good Lord, do not imagine so lamentable a termination of your honourable career. Surely, the Conqueror—I crave pardon, my Lord, for giving unwitting utterance to an appellation so discordant to Saxon ears. But surely the King—haughty and tyrannical as he undoubtedly is—will never be so ungracious to so distinguished a personage of his royal realm, and so eminent a patriarch of holy church, as your worthy self! Surely, the politic monarch will not thus venture to outrage the feelings of his subjects and liegemen, already ripe for rebellion: nor dare to provoke the antagonism of that all-powerful episcopacy, whose banded might could well nigh wrench the sceptre from his grasp! Besides, not last nor least in the estimation of the King, my father—scarce need I vouch for his loyalty—will never fail his friend in the hour of need, were it only for the sake of his amiable daughter.”

The maiden blushed and smiled—less at the delicacy of the compliment than at the passionate tenderness of her lover's caress, as he drew her closer to his heart, and imprinted a kiss on her glowing cheek which did not pale its roses.

“Walter Fitzwalter,” replied the venerable old man, with a look of parental pride and fondness, as he glanced alternately at the youthful pair—the illustrious representatives of Norman chivalry and Saxon beauty, “Far be it from my heart to doubt the honour or the friendship of your noble father—foe that he hath been to my country—but well I know the blind feudal obedience which your Norman chiefs and sovereigns exact from their vassals; and many are the instances where filial, parental, aye, and even conjugal love, has been sacrificed at the shrine of that soul-debasing subservience, which is so zealously and unscrupulously inculcated by your priesthood. Nevertheless, Walter Fitzwalter, Norman as thou art, yet hast thou Saxon blood in thy veins; and I joy me to think that the chosen one of my gentle Edith is not all unworthy of her love—nor the friendly grasp of her Saxon father, for thou hast never drawn sword against the liberties of England: nor wilt thou disdain to clasp a hand, I ween, that hath battled with thy countrymen in the sacred cause of native freedom.”

“No, certes, my good Lord—my honoured father!” cried the noble youth, with kindling eye, hastily advancing towards the warm-hearted prelate, and proffering his hand, which the worthy Bishop shook most cordially, “Would to heaven that the deadly feud which hath so long ravaged this pleasant land might be as easily reconciled—and our hostile races blended as indissolubly, as I trust our own rival houses will happily be, ere another moon hath waned.”

The maiden blushed again, as her lover resumed his place at her side, and twined his arm around her, whispering in her willing ear, as he pressed her more closely to him, the soothing words of hope and love, until insensibly yielding to that innate attraction—mysterious as undefined—which joineth heart to heart in that sympathetic bond which time itself can never rend asunder, her head for a moment drooped confidingly on his shoulder, and the lustre of her bright blue eyes was dimmed by the tearful emotion of a sensitive heart.

As the venerable pastor gazed approvingly on the youthful pair, though it was but for a moment's space, yet the magic wand of memory recalled the bygone scenes of other years; and as he turned away in silence and in sadness to muse and to moralise on that wondrous theme of human life, which far surpasseth all understanding, he gazed on the calm cerulean heavens above, with the pure faith which never doubteth: for it is there, and there alone—in those boundless realms of light—that hope shall be realised, love shall be purified, and life shall be made eternal. Such is the aspiration of the soul, the belief of the heart, and the conviction of the mind.

Unwilling to interrupt the well-known reverie of the worthy Bishop, and smiling at his apparently visionary forebodings, the lovers had retired to the shady recess of a spacious window commanding an extensive view of forest scenery; and there, "sunning themselves in their own sweet thoughts," they also became absorbed in the day-dreams of imagination—not of the past, nor of the present, but of the future.

Young Walter Fitzwalter and his betrothed were indeed a handsome couple. He, tall and stately: of a noble presence, and martial aspect. She, peerless in beauty and in grace.

During the reign of Edward the Confessor, who had himself been brought up at the court of Normandy, and was for many years the companion of Duke William, England became the chosen retreat of those wandering adventurers, the younger branches of the Norman nobility, who knew full well the fond predilection of the imbecile Saxon monarch for the refinements of that romantic feudalism which had so charmed him in his youth. Gradually usurping the principal offices in the royal household, these haughty foreigners obtained the most complete ascendancy over the mind of the King, arrogated to themselves the honours and emoluments of the state—slowly but surely undermined the broad base of national patriotism—and paved the way for the subsequent invasion which desolated for ages the hearths and the homes of merry old England.

Amongst the goodly company of "gentle knights" who had permanently settled in the valley of the Severn, was the Baron Fitzwalter, an illustrious scion of a noble Norman house, with nothing but his sword and his personal accomplishments to win his way to fame. Eventually fortune smiled upon him, and, aided by the King's influence, he married a Saxon heiress of large possessions, whose lamented decease took place within a few short months after the birth of her only child, Walter.

For many years the Baron Fitzwalter had lived upon terms of intimacy and friendship with Bishop Wulstan, and in consequence an attachment had sprung up between the youthful representatives of both houses. The addresses of Walter were favourably received by Edith, and their intended union was sanctioned by their respective parents, and "all went merry as a marriage bell," until in evil hour William Duke of Normandy resolved to assert his right to the crown of England, on the death of King Edward, by an appeal to arms. This sad event severed the amicable relations of the many Norman and Saxon families throughout the kingdom; and Walter, to the great grief of his betrothed, was forcibly hurried on board ship, by his ambitious father, who joined the armament then lying at anchor off the coast of France, at St. Valery.

The battle of Hastings was fought, and the matchless skill of the Norman triumphed over the indomitable valour of the Saxon and the Dane. But on that disastrous day, so fatal to the freedom of England, the true-hearted Bishop, doffed rochet

and mitre for helmet and hauberk of mail, and wielding battle-axe and sword with the dauntless courage of a veteran warrior, he fearlessly confronted the rush of charging squadrons at the head of his flock, who, animated by the heroic example of their beloved pastor, proved the possibility of "lambs in the house" becoming "lions in the field," and fought against overwhelming odds like "mighty men of valour."

The death of Harold, and the flower of his nobility, on that memorable field of carnage—glorious though indeed it was—combined with the rapid successes of the Conqueror, paralysed the heart of England, and induced that apathetic lethargy so fatal to the national cause, which bore the hollow semblance of submission. But the Saxon and the Dane were too nearly allied to the Norman, to yield their native supremacy without a struggle—which only terminated with the intermingling of the hostile races as one people.

However, on the return of the Baron Fitzwalter to his old residence—a picturesque fortalice near Worcester, the broken friendship was renewed with the venerable Bishop, and Walter, to his great joy, was again a welcome guest at the episcopal palace, as the acknowledged suitor of that idol of his soul—the fair Edith, who, save the occasional cloud on her father's brow, could see nought but the sunshine of happiness around her.

The Bishop paused in his perambulation of the apartment, recalled to the consciousness of passing events, by the musical voice of his daughter, as she playfully repressed the caresses of her admirer, whose natural flow of spirits had imperceptibly resumed their wonted exuberance.

With all the pride of parental affection, the warm-hearted old man gazed upon his daughter—a lovely specimen of Saxon beauty. She was exquisitely fair: her neck and forehead pure as alabaster, while the delicate bloom of the blush rose mantled her lips and her cheek. Her hair was rich auburn—tastefully arranged in curls of glossy luxuriance around her graceful head. Her features were bewitchingly expressive, and remarkably resembled those of her father; while her figure was tall and commanding—a perfect model of female symmetry.

As Edith partially turned from the window, while blushingly averting her eyes from the glance of Walter, she encountered the Bishop's benevolent smile, who, sympathising in the gaiety of the newly betrothed, exclaimed, "Be happy—be happy, my children—while you may; for 'tis scarcely meet that the hopefulness of youth, should anticipate the cares and the sorrows which are ever attendant upon age."

"Dear father!" replied Edith, smilingly, "doubt not our happiness—enhanced, as we trust it will be, by the dismissal of those gloomy forebodings which have so long embittered your existence. Surely, dear father, your fears must be groundless. King William, although a Norman, knows how to respect your years and your virtues—and, not less, your loyal allegiance."

“True, my dear child,” said the Bishop. “Aye, it is even true that I have stilled the angry voice of civil dissension, and maintained tranquillity in my diocese—obedience to the laws, oppressive as they undoubtedly are, especially that tyrannical infliction the ‘curfew-bell,’—and preached submission to the Norman sway. But what is my reward?”

“The approbation of your own conscience, my dear father,” tenderly replied his daughter Edith, “which giveth that ‘peace which passeth not away.’”

“And the commendation of all good men, my Lord,” added Walter, “for nobly and faithfully have you done your duty both to Saxon and to Norman.”

“And did not Stigand, and Agelric, and Agelmare?” rejoined the Bishop. “But where are they?”

“Hark!” exclaimed Edith, approaching the window, as a bugle-blast resounded from below.

The martial summons was responded to by the warder at the gate—the drawbridge was lowered over the fosse, for even the episcopal palace of a Bishop was fortified in those troublous days—and the clatter of horses’ hoofs was heard, mingled with the clank of arms and armour, as a gallant knight and a lordly retinue rode into the court yard.

A brief interval ensued—during which the conjectures of Walter and Edith as to the rank and mission of their unlooked-for visitors, were tacitly acquiesced in by the anxious prelate, although much against his better judgment.

Suddenly, the massive door of the chamber was thrown open by an attendant, who, making a lowly obeisance, announced the arrival of the great Baron Fitzwalter.

The Baron advanced towards the Bishop with a stately step. He was harnessed in mail complete—save his head, which was unhelmed. The Bishop, still leaning upon his crozier, extended his hand, while the youth and the maiden saluted him with humble reverence, as he passed.

“My Lord Baron Fitzwalter,” said the venerable Bishop, “may the peace of heaven be with you!”

“Wulstan of Worcester,” replied the Baron, impressively, “in the name of King William, I greet you well.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the prelate, as a flush of surprise overspread his countenance, “It is long since I have been addressed so bluntly. Truly, Wulstan of Worcester careth little for the homage of your Norman titles: and yet, methinks the Baron Fitzwalter is somewhat remiss in his chivalrous courtesy—to say nought of the coolness of his ancient friendship.”

“Wulstan of Worcester,” replied the Baron, proudly, “I am a royal messenger—an unwilling one, I confess me truly, but that availeth thee little. I am the bearer of the King’s sign-manual. You are no longer Bishop of Worcester!”

“Is it even so?” cried Wulstan, unconsciously assuming a look of defiance. “Well and truly was I gifted with the spirit



of prophecy, my children—unhappy though it be. And pray, my Lord Fitzwalter, may I crave to know the high crimes and misdemeanors with which I am so falsely and so recklessly charged by the malice of mine enemies?”

“No accusations are made against *you*, good father,” replied the Baron, with marked asperity, “although *I* have been flatly denounced of unknighly discourtesy, for simply obeying the behest of my Lord the King, as in duty bound.”

“Pardon, my Lord Baron,” exclaimed the excited Bishop, “pardon my hasty speech, *if* it wrongeth thee. But, surely, another envoy might have been commissioned for so ungracious an office—and not my neighbour and my friend!”

“Certes, thou sayest well,” answered the Baron, somewhat softened, as a momentary feeling of self-abasement stole over him, “but show me the hardy wight that dares dispute the command of William the Norman?”

“Neither Baron nor Vavasour, good sooth, as well ye know, my Lord Fitzwalter,” was the scornful reply.

“Nor Earl—nor Churl—I ween: save at mortal peril!” was the fierce rejoinder. “But I came not to wage disputation with a deposed prelate. Wulstan of Worcester, hear ye the royal mandate—and take good heed!”

Hastily unrolling the vellum scroll which he held in his hand—a fine specimen of monkish penmanship, and written in accordance with ecclesiastical custom in Latin—the fiery Baron displayed the imperious missive to the gaze of the indignant Bishop, who hurriedly glanced at the dreaded document.

“And so, my Lord Baron Fitzwalter,” exclaimed the fallen prelate, with startling vehemence, “this is your Norman craft! This is the guerdon meet for zealous service! I had hoped that my leal devotion would have met with chivalrous requital—that I might, at least, have been permitted to retain this pastoral staff, which I have borne so long with honour, for the few remaining years of my earthly pilgrimage.”

“Borne with honour!” echoed the Baron, contemptuously. “Didst thou not receive that shepherd’s crook from an imbecile monk, far better fitted to reign in a purgatorial cell than to rule a royal kingdom? Didst thou not don that priestly pall at the instance of a false usurper—Pope Benedict the Ninth, who was deposed for simony and intrusion?”

“Avaunt, thou base slanderer!” broke in the exasperated prelate, with a voice of thunder. “Vengeance is mine—I will repay, saith the Lord! Tremble, thou vile apostate—the ban of the church is upon thee! Aye, shudder at the wrath of that glorious saint thou hast so impiously blasphemed—at the curse of that holy father thou hast so wickedly vilified!”

“Rail as thou wilt, mad priest, an’ it will ease the pangs of thy mortified dignity,” exclaimed the impetuous Baron, with a withering sneer, “but I command thee, in the King’s name, to stint thy prating while I execute my commission.”

“What further indignity canst thou hurl at the defenceless head of the despised Saxon?” replied Wulstan, with the proud bitterness of a wounded spirit conscious of its own power.

“Calm thy wayward mood, an’ thou canst—ere thou hast wrought thine own ruin,” said the Baron.

“My ruin hath been compassed by that ravenous wolf in sheep’s clothing—that false hypocrite—that foul traducer—that perjured villain—Robert of Orleans!” vociferated Wulstan.

“I cry you nay, sir priest!” replied the Baron, sharply. “The King himself is your *traducer*, an’ you will have it so—or rather his conscience, which hath long been sorely troubled that so great a scandal should exist in the church: nathless—”

“Nathless, the King’s conscience was not troubled when he broke his coronation oath!” retorted Wulstan, fiercely. “Did not the King solemnly swear to govern the Normans and the Saxons by equal laws—to administer justice impartially—and to protect the church? But, hath he not grievously oppressed the Saxon people, and trampled on their liberties? Aye—or the accursed tongue of that iron curfew-bell crieth aloud to earth and heaven that truth is falsehood!”

“Wulstan of Worcester, I charge you, peace!” sternly and authoritatively interposed the Baron Fitzwalter. “I came not here to wage a war of words; but, as the royal vicegerent, to command your attendance at the Synod to be holden before our Lord the King in the Abbey of Westminster, at the festival of Whitsuntide, by the most reverend primate, Lanfranc, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, where you are required to resign your pastoral staff and ring—wherein fail not at your peril.”

“Oh! my father!” cried young Walter Fitzwalter, hastily advancing between the angry disputants, with an anxious gaze at the troubled countenance of the Baron, “surely my Lord the King knoweth not how universally the good Lord Wulstan is respected—esteemed—beloved—admired—revered? Oh! my father, one word from thee would suffice—”

“Peace—peace—rash boy!” harshly interrupted the Baron. “My Lord of Canterbury—to whom such office more properly belongs—hath prayed the King’s clemency in vain.”

“My good Lord Bishop!” interposed Walter, respectfully, endeavouring to soothe his rage, “I beseech you chafe not your noble nature at this cruel indignity. Edith and myself—”

“Must part—to meet no more,” said the Baron, coldly and decidedly, finishing the sentence.

“No! father, never!” cried the youth, firmly, with a half-reproachful glance, as he returned to the side of Edith, who, pale and agitated, was reclining on a seat near the window. Encircling her waist with his arm, he exclaimed, passionately gazing in her face, “Although I may not wed the heiress of my Lord the Bishop of Worcester, yet is the daughter of the venerable Wulstan mine—and mine only; and that, father, as well thou knowest, by the solemn betrothal of holy church.”

A cloud—dark, and deep, and ominous—gathered upon the Baron's brow. "Walter!" said he, evidently striving to quell the fierce conflict of painful emotion which raged in his breast, "when I gave my consent to your betrothal with this gentle damsel, whom truly it grieveth me to pain, her father had not fallen under the displeasure of the King. Yet, as such is most unhappily the case—whether justly or unjustly, mattereth but little—certes, it would ill become the son and heir of the Baron Fitzwalter to espouse the daughter of a man who hath been bereft of his benefice, and degraded from his dignities!"

"My Lord Baron Fitzwalter," furiously retorted the fearless prelate, stung to the quick by this additional insult, "Wulstan of Worcester—the representative of a long line of illustrious Saxon ancestors—whose brow was honoured with the sacred mitre by the pious hands of the saintly King Edward of ever blessed memory—was never degraded till this moment, when a Norman adventurer, whose fathers, forsooth, were nought but Norwegian marauders and pirates, has dared to assert that his family would be disgraced by the union of his son with a daughter of the royal race of the Saxon Witikin!"

The eyes of the Bishop flashed fire as he spoke: his haughty brow and bold bearing evincing an indomitable spirit, which somewhat intimidated the Baron, whose hand had instinctively grasped the hilt of his sword. Edith, alarmed at the hostile aspect of the Baron, and anxious to calm her father's almost ungovernable rage, clung around him in tearful anguish; while Walter stood watching the angry speakers, for whom he felt an equal respect and veneration, ready to repress the first outburst of aggressive violence in either.

"Wulstan of Worcester," said the Baron, drawing his son's arm within his own, and attempting to lead him forth from the chamber, "fail ye not to meet the King in the Synod to be holden at Westminster, at your uttermost peril!"

"Peril!" echoed the veteran warrior, scornfully, "Wulstan of Worcester hath never yet quailed at peril—in field or hall."

"Oh! Walter!" murmured Edith, gazing at him with the most inexpressible sorrow.

The youth, releasing himself from his father's grasp, sprang towards her, but was confronted by Wulstan, who, raising his hand as in denial, exclaimed "Nay—nay, Walter, it must not be. It shall never be said that Edith besought the favour of him who spurned her! Thou art free from thy bond."

"Walter!" cried the Baron, "Art thou mad? Thou hadst better be in thy grave, than wedded to a disgraced house!"

"Edith!" cried Walter, clasping his hands convulsively, and raising his eyes to heaven, "thou art mine own affianced in the sight of the Most High, and I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Rank and wealth weigh as nought in the just balance of Honour, and never will I yield thee or resign thee, but with life. Fare ye well awhile—we shall meet again."

“My Lord Baron Fitzwalter,” added the incensed Wulstan, drawing himself up to his full height, and darting a fiery glance at his antagonist, “*we* too shall meet again. Farewell.”

“Be it so,” replied the Baron, turning on his heel—grasping the arm of his son—and hastily leaving the apartment.

The glowing rays of the setting sun were gilding the west, when Edith retired to her chamber to weep and to pray. It was indeed a lovely evening: the gentle breeze, laden with fragrance, was murmuring amidst the boughs of the oaks that overshadowed the window against which Edith was leaning, absorbed in painful reflections. Gazing on the gorgeous hues of the firmament—radiant with scarlet and purple, and crimson and gold—she insensibly stilled the throbbings of her agonised bosom, and her troubled spirit imbibed the calm of the “dewy twilight,” as the deepening shadows were closing around her. Immediately below the episcopal palace, winding at the foot of a rocky declivity, flowed the broad and rapid Severn, whose grassy banks were picturesquely studded with noble specimens of magnificent forest trees; while the stately towers of the fair cathedral arose in massive grandeur on its opposite bank, and the lofty summits of the Malvern Hills, clothed in the awful sublimity of primeval majesty, hazy and indistinct in the gloom of the distance, bounded the horizon. Gradually the last faint gleam of light departed, and all was darkness and silence—save the hoarse murmurs of the swiftly-flowing river—for the hour of “curfew” had long passed, and no glimmer was visible in the lone cots of the rude Saxon peasantry. At length, slowly emerging from the dark mass of wood which crowned a rugged eminence, the full-orbed moon arose in peerless splendour—silvering the tops of those eternal hills—the battlements of that venerable pile—the wavelets of that glittering stream. Wrapt in “moody melancholy,” Edith surveyed the sleeping beauty of the woodland scenery with listless apathy, until the magic wand of Memory—that potent necromancer, which hath been so wondrously gifted with the mystic attributes of immortality—recalled the fleeting visions of the happy past. Her soft blue eyes were suffused with tears as she beheld the “trysting tree,” and thought of Walter—of their wanderings through the mazes of the “greenwood gay”—of their rambles by the river: while the echoes of Love’s “flattering tale” seemed lingering in her ear, mingled with the “fairy-like music” of her “lover’s lute,” as it sighed “o’er the rippling waters,” responsive to his song, in adoration of her loveliness. But, alas! the blissful illusion passed away like a dream, before the sorrows of reality.

With a sigh of despondency Edith closed the casement; but, as she turned from the window, she started—paused—listened! ’twas the soft sweet sound of “wood-notes wild” floating in the breeze. Suddenly her heart thrilled with emotion, and her pale cheek flushed. She had recognised the voice of Walter—and his own much-loved song, the “Troubadour!”

“ Oh! Love! when wilt thou cease to wage,  
 This conflict in my heart?  
 So fierce is thy relentless rage—  
 So keen thy cruel dart!  
 Still, as of old, a tyrant proud—  
 Thou conquering lord of all,  
 Oh! who hath never captive bowed  
 To thy resistless thrall?

“ Oh! gentle Mercy, hear my prayer—  
 Thou angel pure as light,  
 And make my wounded soul thy care,  
 Which Love hath in despite:  
 Arrayed in all thy beauty, thou  
 But deign on Love to smile,  
 So shalt thou smooth his frowning brow,  
 And all my grief beguile.

“ Ah! sure the wise—the good—the great,  
 Have Love and Mercy sued!  
 Then, lady, stay their dire debate,  
 And heal their graceless feud:  
 For thou canst blend in union sweet  
 More ardent foes than they,  
 Like mingling roses let them meet—  
 Such as thy cheeks betray.

“ While Love and Mercy ne'er shall part—  
 But stars of glory shine,  
 Hope, like a seraph, doth impart  
 That peace which is divine:  
 Like Hope, my fluttering soul upsprings,  
 With heavenly bliss in view,  
 And, rising on ethereal wings,  
 Hath flown away to you.

“ 'Tis Love that gilds the gloom of life—  
 'Tis Hope that Love sustains,  
 'Tis Faith that stills the bosom's strife,  
 And tells that Mercy reigns:  
 Then, oh! let Mercy smile on Love—  
 Let Faith and Hope entwine,  
 And till we're called by Him above,  
 Oh! be for ever mine.”

Edith hastily unclosed the casement. A light skiff was on the river—stealing along under the shadow of the overhanging boughs: at length it emerged from the gloom, and, dashing into the broad expanse of glittering moonlight, rapidly approached the massive walls of the episcopal palace.

As Edith appeared at the window, Walter waved his hand in salutation, and pointing to his bow and arrows with a gesture of peculiar significance, which the agitated maiden intuitively comprehended, she instantly stepped aside. In a moment the short sharp twang of the bowstring resounded in the air, as Walter drew his "shaft" up to the head, and "loosed." The formidable "broad-arrow," borne upon its "grey goose wing," rushed into the chamber, and quivered in the oaken panelling of the opposite wall. Edith seized the shaft, and releasing the little missive which it had safely carried, unfolded it hurriedly, and, with changing colour and fluttering bosom, read the brief but momentous intimation which it contained.

The maiden reappeared at the window, and, smiling through her tears, waved her hand in acquiescence: the welcome signal—ardently and anxiously prayed for—was joyfully returned by Walter, who, skilfully guiding his frail skiff amidst the eddies and shallows of the rapid stream again sought the shelter of its shadows, and silently glided away.

At length the feast of Whitsuntide approached, and the day arrived for the departure of Wulstan of Worcester for the court of Westminster. The morning was bright and sunny, and all the great thoroughfares leading to the metropolis were thronged with spectators. From an early hour the bustle of preparation had commenced, and group after group of Barons and Knights, arrayed in martial panoply, and attended by stalwart bands of armed retainers, took their departure from Worcester and its vicinity. The Baron Fitzwalter, at the head of a gallant train—Robert de Courcy, surrounded by his men-at-arms—Jasper Montfaucon, with a goodly assemblage of esquires and pages—Hubert Fitzarcher, with his bowmen, and Ranulph Malvoisin and his veteran "plump of spears," formed a splendid cavalcade of Norman chivalry. Onwards they rode, with banners and pennons fluttering in the wind—chargers neighing—arms and harness clattering and clanking—amidst the fierce multitude of Saxon serfs and villains, burghers and bondmen, whose sullen scowl of hatred dire, and muttered curses, "not loud but deep," were ominous indications of popular discontent. As the hour of noon tolled from the great bell of the cathedral, Wulstan of Worcester issued forth from the episcopal palace, escorted by a numerous retinue. Mounted on a noble white charger, arrayed in rochet and hood, mitre on head, and crozier in hand, the commanding form of the venerable Bishop appeared to much advantage. He was received with every demonstration of the utmost respect—with cordial and affectionate greeting—with boisterous acclamation; while prayers, and blessings, and good wishes for his welfare were liberally showered upon him by his grateful and admiring countrymen, who honoured him alike for his piety and his valour. Later in the day, that "proud prelate," Robert of Orleans, escorted by a strong body of men-at-arms, under the command of a distinguished Norman knight,

Raymond de Caen, rode through the streets of Worcester. As he traversed the metropolis of his long-coveted diocese, he was assailed with curses and execrations that chafed his imperious spirit, and well nigh goaded him into madness: his tyranny and cruelty were notorious, and had gained him the not inapt although unenviable appellation of the "Black Wolf!"—but had his nefarious plots been known—or, that he had succeeded in effecting the ruin of Bishop Wulstan, it would have gone hard with him, for the populace were as ready to smite as to rail. Spurring onwards, the martial train crossed the bridge, and leaving both town and river behind them, entered the open country intersected by various fosseways of Roman origin.

On arriving at the summit of a steep eminence, commanding an extensive view of the surrounding country, the suspicions of Robert of Orleans were aroused by the sudden appearance of a couple of equestrians, who emerged from a wood some distance in advance, and, on having a glimpse of the cavalcade, hastily put their horses to full speed, as if anxious to avoid recognition.

"Ha!" shouted the wary Norman, pointing to the fugitives, "what spiest thou yonder, Raymond de Caen?"

"Certes, 'tis a sturdy youth and a gentle damsel," responded the knight, "yet, methinks, they have but marvellous small liking for roadside greeting—or the honour of benediction from your *gracious* reverence!" added the warrior, with a smile.

"Spur after them, good Raymond!" exclaimed the Norman "wolf!" with well-assumed suavity of demeanour, "spur after them. I would fain learn somewhat of the reason why you timorous travellers are in such haste to flee from the benison of holy church—as well thou sayest, brave sir malapert."

"Good, my Lord," replied Raymond, with a wicked laugh. So saying, and beckoning some half-dozen of his comrades to follow, the dashing young cavalier clapped spurs to his charger and started off in pursuit. The heavy tramp of the rushing war-horses shook the very ground beneath them, and, in a few minutes the excited pair were surrounded and brought to bay; but, had not the maiden been evidently unequal to the *manège* of her high-mettled palfrey, the fugitives would certainly have made good their flight, and escaped.

"Ha! ha! Master Walter," laughed Raymond de Caen, as he recognised the son and heir of the Baron Fitzwalter, and his fair *fiancée*, Edith of Worcester, "well met, by good St. Hubert! Save you and the gentle lady! His eminence, the holy father Robert of Orleans, sendeth courteous greeting, and would fain have speech with you at leisure."

"Robert of Orleans!" echoed the youth, fiercely surveying his antagonist. "And pray, Sir Raymond, what meaneth this unseemly intrusion of his graceless reverence?"

"Certes, Master Walter, methinks thou art strangely ruffled at so fair a salutation!" replied the knight, with a provoking pleasantry. "Truly 'tis an honour of no small moment."

“Who have we here?” cried Robert of Orleans, breathlessly galloping into the armed circle which environed the hapless captives, and reining-in his foaming horse. “Ha! what is it thou, Master Walter! good sooth, but I little thought of being honoured with the charge of such a distinguished personage on my way to Westminster. But who is this fair damsel?”

“Edith of Worcester: who is journeying under my escort to the Abbey of St. Anne,” responded the youth, fiercely.

“’Tis a very likely tale, Master Walter, and I doubt me not of its truth,” replied Robert of Orleans, with a significant look at the lady. “Ye timed your plotting bravely; and, had I not been fortuitously delayed, ye had now been safe in sanctuary. But ye shall answer for this before my Lord the King.”

On the morning of the festival of Whitsuntide the whole population of London and of Westminster seemed assembled around the Abbey of St. Peter. The rumour that Wulstan of Worcester had been summoned to the Synod by the King, for the resignation of his pastoral staff, had spread far and wide, and had created a most extraordinary sensation amongst his Saxon countrymen, by whom he was almost idolised. It is true, that Bishop Wulstan was reputed to be but an indifferent scholar, yet he was noted for his eloquence—his generosity—and his many virtues: his patriotism was proverbial, and he had, moreover, held high place in the estimation of the late popular monarch, Edward the Confessor, whose memory was enshrined in the hearts of his subjects, and whose name was subsequently canonized by Pope Alexander the Third.

As Bishop Wulstan moved through the crowd, attended by the Saxon clergy of his diocese, arrayed in his episcopal robes, with the mitre on his head, and the silver crozier in his hand, the multitude knelt down reverently before him, and bowed their heads to receive his blessing; and, as he passed through the gates of the Abbey, to the great annoyance of the Norman prelates, he was greeted with a tumultuous burst of applause, which was, however, immediately suppressed by the men-at-arms, although they were unable to silence the angry whispers of the dense throng of murmuring spectators.

Before the high altar—near the splendid tomb of Edward the Confessor—on the royal throne of England, surmounted by a rich canopy of state, robed and crowned, with his great sword in his hand, sat King William the Conqueror. On his right, somewhat lower, was seated Lanfranc the Monk of Milan, who had recently been raised to the primacy, and who, in virtue of his office, was President of the Synod—surrounded by several Bishops, and Abbots, and other dignified ecclesiastics, amongst whom was Robert of Orleans. On the left of the King, sat the Baron Fitzwalter, with a host of Earls, Knights, and Vavasours—the knightly representatives of Norman chivalry.

As Wulstan entered the royal presence, and made obeisance before the King, Lanfranc arose, and thus addressed him—



“Wulstan, sometime Bishop of Worcester, I am commanded by our puissant Sovereign Lord King William, to inform you, in consideration of your being an unlearned clerk—unskilled in the Norman language—unable to instruct the Church—and unwilling to counsel the King, that he has been pleased, in his clemency, to release you from the grave responsibilities of your high station. I am, consequently, empowered to demand the immediate resignation of your pastoral staff and ring.”

Wulstan proudly drew himself up to his full height—his stalwart form and sinewy limbs seeming to expand to colossal dimensions as he spoke, “I well know, my Lord Archbishop, that I am unequal to the task, and unworthy of the honour—and yet, methinks, I have done the King some service in the hour of his need. But let that pass. This crozier I received from the sainted hands of my good master, King Edward of blessed memory, and ‘hap what hap,’ to none other will I ever yield it!” So saying, with an air of defiance, he strode across the church towards King Edward’s tomb.

“Bold traitor!” cried the King, “art thou mad? Whither would thine insolence lead thee?”

But Wulstan heeded not. Approaching the hallowed shrine, he exclaimed in a loud voice, “Thou knowest, O glorious King, that with much unwillingness did I take this office upon me—even in obedience to thy command. But the good old times are changed: and now, an alien monarch hath challenged thy decree, and censured my assurance. Nevertheless, not unto him but unto thee do I resign my staff.”

As Wulstan finished his wild invocation, which rang through the sacred Abbey, and awed the dense multitude into breathless silence, he struck his pastoral staff deep into the royal tomb!

The King, who had risen from his throne, on witnessing the impassioned gestures of Wulstan, reseated himself with a smile of contempt, when he saw the impotent display of his passion. “My good Lord Robert of Orleans,” he impetuously exclaimed, “pluck away that episcopal staff, and keep it for thy pains.”

The haughty Norman hastily descended from his seat, and, proceeding to the tomb, joyfully seized the symbol of his new honours—but he might as soon have uprooted the oak of the forest with his single arm, as removed the staff.

Chafing with anger at this untoward circumstance, the King turned to Lanfranc, and shouted in a voice of thunder, “My Lord Archbishop, bring me that crozier.”

The Primate approached the tomb, but his efforts were as unavailing as those of the discomfited aspirant for its dignity.

The King was amazed at their imbecility, and at length, in a rage, promised the bishopric to him alone who could release the pastoral staff from its thralldom.

The holy fathers, one and all, laboured long and painfully to win the rich prize—the much-coveted guerdon of success—but in vain: they were obliged to abandon the task in despair.

Furious at the obstacles which had successfully resisted the utmost efforts of his stalwart priesthood, the King leaped from his throne—rushed to the tomb—seized the silver staff in his own herculean grasp: but it was immoveable.

Gasping for breath with the violence of his exertions, and conscious of his failure—notwithstanding his gigantic strength—the King relinquished his hold.

As he did so, Wulstan advanced, and, taking the staff in his hand, “removed it as easily as Samson broke his manacles!”

“A miracle—a miracle! Blessed be the memory of sainted King Edward! All honour to his servant Wulstan!” burst spontaneously from the amazed auditory; and the enthusiastic shout was echoed and re-echoed by the Saxon populace, until the Abbey rang with its reverberations.

“The will of heaven be done!” said the King, approaching Wulstan. “Keep, my Lord of Worcester, that pastoral staff which you have so long borne with honour.”

“My liege,” said Robert of Orleans, addressing the King with a semblance of the deepest humility, while the smothered flame of envy, hatred, and malice, was raging in his heart, “after the awful and wondrous scene we have just witnessed, it grieveth me sore to be compelled to lay a charge of serious import against my Lord of Worcester.”

“Ha!” cried the King, with a sudden glance of surprise, as he resumed his seat upon the throne, “say on.”

“My noble liege,” replied Robert of Orleans, as the captive lovers—Walter and Edith—were led into the royal presence, “I charge my Lord of Worcester with the practice of magic—witchcraft—and other diabolical arts, whereby he has not only deceived you and this reverend Synod, but has also seduced this youth from allegiance to his King, and duty to his father, by unlawful enthrallment and betrothal, and—”

“Robert of Orleans!” thundered forth the King, “beware!” He paused: and then, turning to the Barons with a smile, he exclaimed, “Certes, my Lords, ’tis a gallant youth and a lovely maiden! But what sayeth my Lord Fitzwalter to the charge of witchcraft? Methinks the practice pertaineth more to the damsel, than to my Lord of Worcester.”

“My liege,” replied the Baron, “the youthful offenders have been lawfully betrothed in holy church, by mutual consent—formally ratified by the Lord Bishop of Worcester and myself.”

“Ha! say you so, my Lord Baron,” cried the King, “then earldom and lands for the youth and the maiden. Lead to the altar, Lanfranc, my Lord of Worcester shall wed this loving couple, and William of Normandy will give away the bride.”

A shout of applause—which rang through the noble Abbey, and resounded to the heavens—burst from the delighted crowd, and the merry bridal was solemnised amid the mingled plaudits of the Norman and the Saxon, who generously combined to honour the brave-hearted Bishop—WULSTAN OF WORCESTER.

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