

CASTLES
AND
KINGS

Henry Treece

Illustrations by C. Walter Hodges

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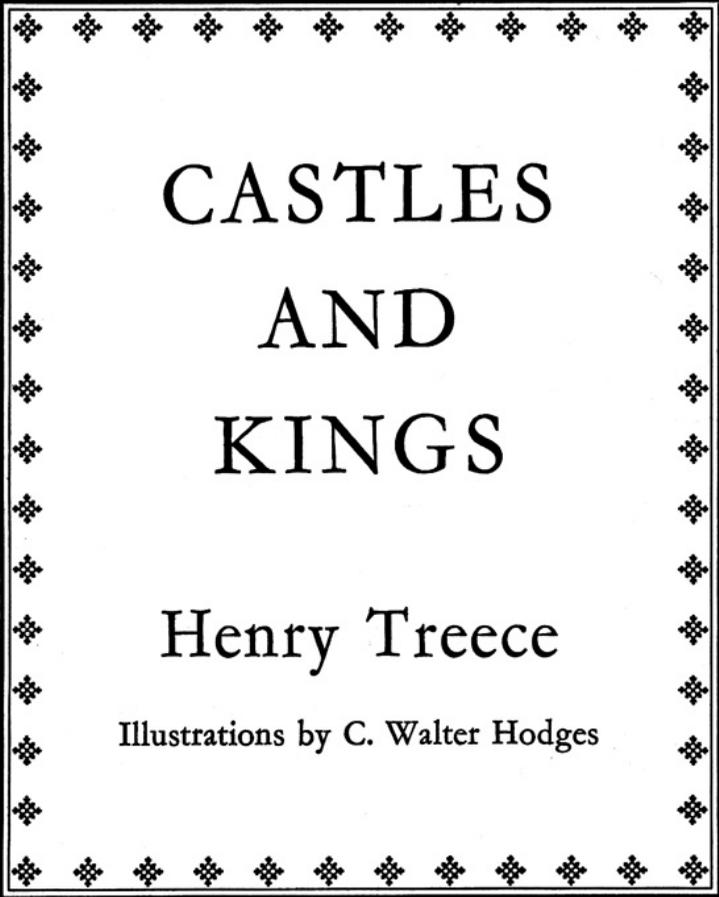
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Preface

ONLY a short time ago I stood within the tall, russet-brick keep of Tattershall Castle, near the River Bain in Lincolnshire, impressed by the rolling green vistas which can be seen from that great tower.

It was built by Ralph Cromwell, who had once fought beside Henry V at Agincourt, and who later became the Master of the King's Falcons, Warden of Sherwood Forest, and Lord High Treasurer of England: a proud castle for a proud man, I thought.

Suddenly, as I looked out through the coloured windows, I felt a shudder go through me. To the attendant who stood near one of the great stone fireplaces, I said, "It's a bit chilly up here, isn't it?"

He smiled and came over to me.

"Chilly up here?" he said. "Why, it's nothing to what it is like down in the dungeon. There are fireplaces here, but there's nothing at all down there—only stone walls and a stone floor. And it's as cold in the summer as in the winter. You wouldn't need a refrigerator here, I can tell you!"

I said, "You don't make it sound very romantic, do you?"

"Romantic?" he said. "Why, bless you, there's nothing romantic, as you call it, about a prison in a fortress. The poor souls who went into places like that didn't go there for fun—not on your life! Castles are only romantic if you read about them in story-books or see them on the pictures. No, the men who went down there were waiting to die, not having fun!"

Then he strolled back to his fireplace, and I went down to my car, glad that it had a heater fitted, on that bright spring day.

HENRY TREECE

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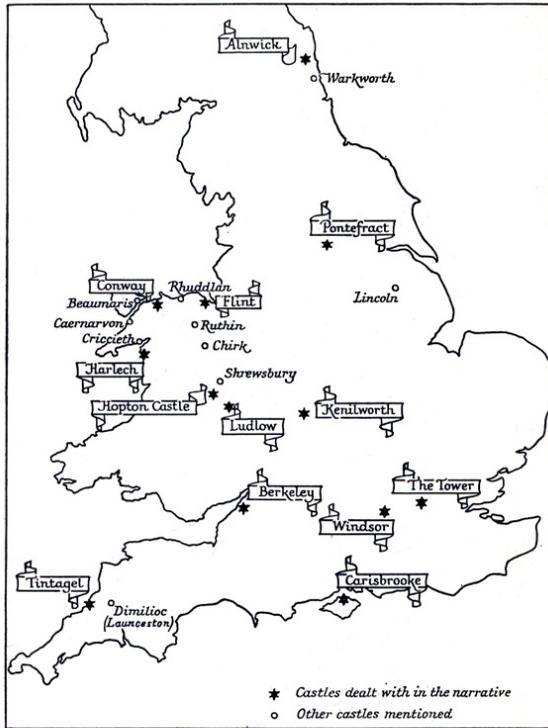
Prologue

The King of Birds and all Castles

*“Oh, what is the house that looks over the valley?”
Asked lark of the eagle, astride the blue air;
“I see five tall turrets with proud pennons fluttering
And gay booths all garlanded, as for Spring Fair.”*

*“They call it a castle, the men who created it,”
His cold eye a-glittering, said eagle to lark.
“Be still and you’ll hear all the gold trumpets speaking—
But not the deep groans of the men in the dark.”*

*“What men in the dark?” asked lark of the eagle;
“In laughter the folk that I see use their breath.”
Said eagle to lark, “For each man that is dancing
Another lies lonely, awaiting his death!”*



The Castles referred to in the Book

The Castles referred to in the Book

Chapter 1

Gorlois and Tintagel—Fifth Century

(1)

IT was the early part of the year, and the stormy sea birds rode the blustering air that swept across the sea from Ireland.

Two people, a man and a girl, walked the cliff-top above the green sea. Behind them, feeding on the wiry tussocks of grass, were small herds of thin sheep; before them, far down, lay a long causeway of ramparted stone, leading across to a castle that stood upon a mound, a squat fortress, much after the old Roman manner. The two people could see a group of young men in the castle yard pulling and pushing each other about in rough horse-play, shouting and laughing excitedly as they exercised.

“Faugh!” said the man, in contempt. “Look at them! They call themselves Romans, but look at them!”

The girl, whose bright golden hair was set high on her head with silver pins, in the Roman fashion, turned and smiled roguishly, her blue eyes twinkling. When she touched the man on the shoulder, her bronze armbands jingled.

“Oh, Gorlois,” she said, “don’t be stupid! They are just young men and like to amuse themselves. We can’t all go on pretending to be Romans—so dignified and brave—all the time. Don’t forget what fun you had, at the Beltane dancing last autumn! And look at yourself—you may wear a Roman toga, but I notice that you’ve put on your gold throat-ring, and that nice red and blue tunic. Yes, and your thick woollen breeches!”

Gorlois, who was much older than the girl, snorted.

“Uther Dragon’s Head gave me the ring,” he said. “A man must wear his lord’s gifts. As for the tunic and breeches, it is not that I like them—only they are practical at this time of year, while we are staying on the windy Cornish coast.”

Ygerne laughed at him again, the golden sunlight in her golden hair.

“Why, you are just a Celt, like your ancestors who built this castle at Tintagel,” she said. “And your other one at Dimilioc.”

Gorlois said, in a sudden anger, “And you are a Welsh farmer’s daughter. Don’t put on airs with me. One day, and perhaps soon, if this Cerdic comes pushing up from the south, you may be glad of my castles of Tintagel and Dimilioc!”

Then he turned away from her, biting his lips. *Was* he so much a Celt still, like the other war-lords from far Wales, or the north—Maelgwn and old Cunedda? He shuddered at the thought . . . in some of the outlying villages men cracked their dead wives’ bones and ate the marrow in times of famine. . . .

Hotly, he said over his shoulder, “I speak Latin. On my lands grow the cherry, the walnut, the chestnut, the poppy, the vine. All Roman things.”

Ygerne said, laughing, “Aye, and what sour wine your grapes make! You know you prefer our own native mead, husband! As for your garden, it also grows Roman cabbages. Do you consider them beautiful, my own?”

Gorlois flung a stone down on to the causeway in his anger. She was getting to be above herself. One day, if she were not careful, he would sell her to the first man who made a bid, however small—that would teach her, when she saw the slave-master’s branding-iron being heated. . . .

Then he thought again: no, she was too beautiful, as finely formed as an amphora or a gold-hiked rapier. He could never part with her like that.

He walked a few paces away, thinking, clenching and unclenching his ringed hands. Times had changed, yes. Ever since that fool Honorius, the Emperor in Rome, had sent word that they must fend for themselves against the Saxon, the Men of the Knife; ever since that British fool, Constantine, had got the common soldiers to elect him Emperor. What an emperor! To take all the Legions away into Gaul, and then get himself stabbed by a half-crazy Pictish slave in an orchard!

His mind ran on. Once there had been a time when a man could have ridden down through the land, from Edinburgh to the farthest tip of Cornwall; aye, and have travelled the length of Gaul, right to the shores of the blue Mediterranean, without needing any other language but Celtic—without even *hearing* any other language. And always the same laughter, the same cattle-calls, the same songs, sweeping on and on, to the edge of the world, to Africa. . . .

But that had all gone, Gorlois thought. In the north now, the Picts, the Painted Men, grunted over cooking-pot and midden in their hoarse tongue; in the south, the Saxons came thrusting in with every tide in their rough longships, the bark still on the planks, barbarous ruffians who worshipped horses' heads on poles and drank themselves stupid with barley beer every night.

And Ygerne had said he was no Roman. What did she mean by that—that he was like these Pictish fellows, nothing more? He shook his tawny head in anger at the thought. Why, in the time of Ambrosius, Constantine's half-Roman son, Gorlois had gone as an ambassador to the Picts. Up in Orkney he had seen what they were like in their stinking stone wheelhouses. . . . He had seen the shock-headed families run yelling down to the shore when a whale was stranded by the tide, to hack with their whalebone mattocks for the hot blubber and then to gobble it up like dogs, the fat running down their chins. . . .

He remembered their bread with a shiver—the grain roasted almost black, then ground between two stones, leaving the flour full of grit; he remembered the smell of the goats that wandered in and out of the draughty sleeping-chamber; the never-ending stench of the limpet-boxes in the corner of the room. . . .

He fingered his necklace of amber and blue Egyptian beads, his bracelet of carved ivory, his ring of Whitby jet. Then he turned.

“I am not like those savages!” he said harshly.

Ygerne laughed and came to him, offering him a harebell that shook in the wind.

“No, my love,” she said half mockingly, “you are the commander of a cavalry garrison, as your fathers were before you. What does it matter if you feel happier speaking Celtic and wearing breeches? So did Constantine, the soldiers' Emperor—and so does Uther Guletic, his only son now. It is nothing to be ashamed of, if the *Prydein Wledig*, the Lord of Britain, does it.”

Gorlois was about to say, “Damn Uther Pendragon and his heathenish ways!” But at the last moment he bit on the words and was silent. This Uther seemed to get to hear of everything; perhaps he had spies in the heather, listeners in the thatch. . . . Perhaps it was this druid of his, Merddin, who had recently given himself the Roman name, Merlinus, and boasted in the halls that he was descended from kings. Perhaps there was something in it, after

all, and Merlinus was everywhere—in the air, in the sea, in the fire, listening . . . listening, and then taking every word back to hard-faced Uther Pendragon.

Gorlois felt a little shudder run up his neck as he recalled how Uther had put his hands on his shoulders, after the battle in Wales when, together, they had defeated Gillomar, the King of Ireland, and Pascent, the son of Vortigern. . . . Uther had smiled into his general's eyes and had said, "From this day, Gorlois of Tintagel, you shall be my war-leader, my *dux bellorum*, in West Wales. Does that content you, my friend? But see that you do not play me false, for I am a hasty man. I am not like my dignified Roman brother, Ambrosius! Oh, no, I take my chance as it comes, and when I strike, I strike hard—to kill!"

And that was true enough. In the battle they had just fought, Uther himself had struck down the Irish king, Gillomar, and then had ridden hard to overtake the terror-stricken Pascent, who screamed aloud for mercy as he heard his doom approaching.

Uther had called back at him, laughing, "Wait for me, Pascent. I am coming as fast as I can, on this lame Welsh pony! Don't forget, I am a heavy man, and this armour does not make it any easier for the poor beast!"

Then, as Pascent gazed at him, bewildered, Uther struck him to the ground.

"I am going to give you a meal which will be strange to you, my friend," he said. With a swift movement, he jabbed his short sword into Pascent's mouth and pinned him to the ground.

"There," said Uther, as the man writhed, "now you have as much of Britain as you want! You shall dwell here for ever and you need never worry about where your next meal is coming from. See, I have given you all this with my own hand and no one shall take it from you!"

Those who rode away from that bloody field, under Uther's golden dragon standard, were silent at their leader's brutishness, not rejoicing as they would have been under the Roman eagles, leading their captives away. Uther Pendragon took no captives, for they needed food and care, he said, and he had neither to spare.

Gorlois pondered on all this, wondering whether after all Uther, son of Constantine, was the man they needed in Britain now, or whether someone else, someone more smooth tongued, like old Vortigern, might not be better when it came to dealing with invaders. He was smooth tongued, in all truth,

and smooth actioned, too, marrying the daughter of the Saxon war-lord, Rowen! Few men would have gone to such lengths to keep peace—to take on such a father-in-law as Hengest.

Yet, where had all this got him? Gorlois recalled the old story. . . . Poor bedevilled Vortigern, he who had brought the Saxons into Britain, had asked that old trickster, the druid Merlinus, to tell his fortune. The answer had been in the usual two-edged form: “Thou didst invite the Saxons to come over as thy bodyguard—but they have come as thy headsmen; either that, or the sons of Constantine will shut thee in a tower and burn thee!”

Vortigern had struck the smiling Merlinus across the face for these words and the druid had gone stumping off into his oak-grove, white-faced and silent.

A month later, Ambrosius Aurelianus had taken his father’s crown from the soldiers, and pursuing Vortigern into Wales had fired the castle in which the ruined king lay hiding. Those who saw it said that, when they broke in, Vortigern lay as small and black as a monkey on the hot stones; and, when they came to lift him, fell to powder, as though he were nothing but the ashes of a burnt-out fire. . . .

Suddenly, as Gorlois thought about these things, a horseman in helmet and burnished breastplate clattered over the causeway proudly and, approaching the island-gate, halted and blew upon the greet horn that hung by the lintel.

The sound came back to the watchers on the hill like cattle lowing at eventide, on the damp sea air, but more urgently, more impatiently.

Ygerne said, her eyes wide, “What is it, husband?”

Gorlois, whose sight was as sharp as that of a hawk, replied, “That is Garraig, the messenger. He is Uther’s mouthpiece to the kings of the West, my love. I must go down to see what his message might be. It would ill become a lord to stand idly upon a hilltop while his master’s words were left to grow cold in the valley bottom.”

He bowed and kissed Ygerne’s white hand. He noticed that it was trembling a little and smiled up at her, like a father smiling at his child, for she was very young, and he a grown man with grey hairs already sprouting in his beard.

“Do not be afraid, Ygerne *fach*,” he said.

Ygerne said, “But what if Uther is summoning you to battle once more? I could not bear to be left alone again, in this castle, with only my women and the rough soldiers for company.”

Gorlois said, “Have no fears, pretty one, the fighting is over for a while. We saw to that when we butchered the Saxons in the wood above York, driving them before us on their hands and knees!” Then he turned and began to stride down the hill.

A sheep grazed close up to Ygerne as she watched her husband go down towards the causeway which joined the castle to the mainland, his cloak swinging so splendidly behind him in its heavy folds.

The sheep came closer. Ygerne thought what a wise old thing it looked—though she also thought how wicked a sheep’s yellow eyes seemed. As though, if these creatures were lions, they would be terribly crafty. . . .

She turned and waved down to Gorlois, whose hair was now being blown about his face so much that, against the dark wall of the castle, he looked headless for a moment.

Suddenly a voice from behind her said, “You may well shudder, my pretty.”

Ygerne swung round, her heart fluttering.

“I thought you were a sheep,” she said, feeling very foolish as she spoke.

An old man sat cross-legged behind her in the coarse grass, his head and shoulders covered by a pieced-sheepskin cloak. The yellow eyes were the same.

He laughed and Ygerne saw that he wore an ancient gold lunala upon his breast, such as druids bore. Then there was no need to ask him who he was. There was only one druid now, that she knew of.

“No, I am no sheep,” said Merlinus. “Perhaps your eyes deceived you in this strong spring light.”

Ygerne felt the hillside spinning about her, as though the sea breeze had taken it and was whirling it round. But she knew that this was only her imagination—her imagination and the spell that was being put on her.

“I know who you are,” she said to the old man, her lips trembling. “You are Merlinus, who was once the soothsayer to Vortigern, and who now serves Pendragon.”

The old man let his yellow eyes be hooded by his heavy lids. Ygerne suddenly recalled what they *really* reminded her of—a falcon’s eyes, just when the hood was drawn over them. That was more terrible than a sheep’s eyes, or even a lion’s—for there were no lions in Britain, except perhaps in Northumberland, in the King’s cages, or in the fortress in London—in the stinking beast-pits where the combats between animals were still sometimes held, in the old Roman fashion, to delight the crowds with blood.

There was a lion there—Old Caesar, they called him—who slew all that came before him, men and beasts alike. Ygerne had seen the keepers flinging down horsemeat and dead dogs to him. She recalled his growls and the sickening sound of tearing. . . .

“What do you want?” she said, shuddering at the memory.

Merlinus said, “Hardly anything. I just came to see that Uther’s message was delivered, that is all. Yonder Garraig is a careless fellow, given to drinking in every village. Such men are sometimes poisoned, or ambushed. So I came also. That is all.”

Ygerne gazed at him in amazement.

“How did you get here, on foot, before Garraig, who is a horseman?” she asked.

Merlinus gave his strange smile, that wasn’t a proper smile at all, but more like a thought that twisted his mouth.

“There are tricks to every trade, my lady,” he said. “And my tricks are not to be revealed to any farmer’s daughter on a hillside in Cornwall.”

Ygerne stamped her foot angrily.

“I am not ‘any farmer’s daughter’, old man!” she said. “I am Ygerne, wife of a great Duke.”

Merlinus plucked a few tufts of last year’s grass and flung them into the air carelessly. They blew away, like last year’s dreams.

“Ay,” he said, “that is truly what you are now—but not what you will be, lady.”

Now the young girl stared at him. “What shall I be, then?” she asked.

But Merlinus did not seem to hear the question. He was rocking backwards and forwards, as though in a sort of trance.

At last he said, “When your fine husband comes back up the hill, to tell you that King Uther has invited you both to the Easter feasting in London, you can surprise him by telling him you already knew, can’t you?”

A gust of wind blew Ygerne’s hair across her eyes, making them sting for a moment. When she could see again, the old man had gone and a sheep, an old and tattered sheep to be sure, was grazing where he had sat.

Gorlois came upon her unawares. “What, my love,” he said. “Are you talking to a sheep?”

Ygerne nodded, in a daze. “Yes, husband,” she said. “It told me we were invited to Uther’s Easter feast in London.”

Gorlois stepped back a pace in wonder. “Are you a witch?” he said. “Or is that sheep an agent of the dark powers?”

Half afraid, he drew his sharp iron sword.

But the old sheep did not wait. It gave a wheezy “baa!” and trundled off along the slope, its matted, greasy fleece bobbing up and down on its back.

(ii)

UTHER’S EASTER festival, held in the great timber hall beside the River Tamesa, was like nothing Ygerne had ever seen before. Her father, a chieftain of Gwynedd, had been held famous for his feasting and minstrelsy, but the hall of Uther Pendragon made his feasts seem very poor affairs. All the walls were decorated with freshly cut spruce-boughs, until the place seemed more like a forest glade than a feast-hall. At each end of the long room an ox was roasting over a charcoal fire; the board tables were set with knives and dishes of gold. There was a roasted pig for every four men, a plump chicken for each one; and the loaves of white bread were so many that some of the feasters swore it had been snowing loaves all that day.

Of wine, both white and red, there was enough for ten men to swim in; of mead, enough to give draught to a longship.

And the music, oh, the gallant music of flute and harp, it was enough to make a man weep with the sheer rise and fall of it, so brisk the fingers on the vents, so nimble the fingers on the strings.

Ygerne, who sat two places away from great Uther in his oaken dragon-chair, laughed and shouted with them all as the great bull’s horn, rimmed

with silver, passed again and again the table's length, and the warriors flung back their heads and drank down the sweet and potent mead. . . .

Gorlois watched her carefully, a frown darkening his brow.

"Take care, lass," he whispered. "This is no drink for womankind. I have seen great warriors fall from their benches at times like these."

Ygerne made a face at him and said hoarsely, "Does Gorlois begrudge his wife her victory toast, then? Uther Pendragon would not treat me so. Look, he is smiling at me now, and offering me a drink from his own golden wine-cup!"

Gorlois shrugged his shoulders with annoyance, but he was careful not to make too much of it, for Uther's temper was known by all to be a hot one.

Beside the great fire, a young bard was telling a tale of a god whose ears were so sharp that they could pick up the sound of wool growing on a sheep's back.

But another bard elbowed him aside. "Have done with that foolery!" he shouted. "Uther has commanded me to recite the penalty for killing a cat!"

Then he began, in his high, nasal voice, "Whoso shall kill the cat that guards a high-king's barn, its head is to be held downwards on a clean, level floor, and its tail to be held upwards. And after that, wheat must be poured over it until its tail-tip is hidden. That is the value of the king's best cat!"

Ygerne turned to her husband among all the laughter and said, "What is my value, Gorlois?"

For a moment Gorlois glowered, then said, "A bushel of wheat, like any other cat, I suppose."

And then he was sorry for what he had said, for Uther Pendragon was cutting meat from his own plate into small pieces and offering them to Ygerne on the point of his knife: and she, in her annoyance with Gorlois, was letting the King feed her, taking the meat between her white teeth like a favourite animal.

Someone called out for an Irish bard to sing "The Cattle Raid of Cualange", but the shock-headed fellow shook his head and laughed, then began a long chant about the god Diancecht, who was so skilled in surgery that he once replaced a wounded warrior's eye by that of a cat! All went well until the warrior found that by day he could never keep his eye open, while by night whenever the poor fellow wanted to sleep the least squeak of a mouse or the rustle of a reed caused his cat's eye to open wide!

The warriors in that hall, tall, fair-skinned men who had smeared their hair with clay until it stuck out like the mane of a horse, roared at the saga of the cat's eye. Ygerne laughed, too, although now she was becoming a little afraid at the fierce clasp of the King's hand about her wrist.

Most of Uther's men had their chins shaven, Roman-fashion, but wore long moustaches which hung almost to their breasts. Their shirts were dyed in many colours, their woollen trousers were cross-gartered with straps of bleached hide. About their shoulders they wore cloaks, fastened by great round brooches of silver, studded with garnets or jet.

They could not speak without boasting, whether of their swords, their sons, or the number of Saxon heads they had nailed on the walls of their houses. . . .

Suddenly, Gorlois was sickened by this noise, this boasting, by the behaviour of the King, who had once sworn before all his lords to uphold the ancient laws of Rome in Britain. . . . And now he was acting like any other barbarian . . . like a German or a Goth. . . .

Gorlois whispered to the man at his side, his leader of horse, "Pass the word along the table to all my company: I will not stay one minute longer, to sit by and watch Pendragon making eyes at my wife. Tell them to rise at my signal and follow me from the hall."

Now Uther Pendragon's cheeks were flushed with wine, and his eyes were wild in his great dragon's head.

"What are you plotting, Gorlois of Cornwall?" he shouted, scattering the dishes to one side and the other in his rage.

Gorlois rose from the bench, his hand tightly clasped about Ygerne's thin wrist. His men—and they were many—rose with him. The harps were silent in that hall. Only the crackling charcoal fires now dared to make a sound.

Then Gorlois spoke.

"My lord," he said, as evenly as his anger would let him, "I do not plot. No, not against any man. I *act*—but only for my rights. And I will not have you, or any other, take those rights from me. Ygerne is my wife and, while the blood flows through my body, my wife she shall remain. I bid you farewell, Pendragon!"

And with that Gorlois strode to the door, followed by his war-band, who held their hands close to the pommels of their swords. Ygerne wept as she

went, afraid now both of Uther and her husband.

When they reached the door, Pendragon rose from his great chair and yelled after them, “Gorlois, come back! This is no way to leave your king. Remember your oath to me!”

But Gorlois scarcely looked at him as he turned for a moment and shouted through the heavy silence, “That was no way for any king to act—not even Hengest! We ride to Tintagel, my lord. There shall I be, if further words are needed!”

Outside that door, Ygerne clung to him and said, “Gorlois my dear, you are my only love. Thank you for saving me!”

Gorlois turned suddenly and struck her across the mouth. Then, to his leader of horse, he said, “See that she reaches Tintagel. Guard her with your life. I ride for Dimilioc, my friend, with half our company.”

Then, though Uther’s chamberlain hobbled out, leaning on his white wand, to bid them stay, they kicked their shaggy horses forward and rode out of Uther’s stable-yard.

Ygerne called out to her husband many times, but he did not answer her. The young leader of horse took her bridle rein and, without looking at her, led her forth.

(iii)

THE castle of Tintagel was a fortress standing on a tall cliff, protected on all sides by the sea save that side which faced the mainland and was joined to it by a causeway which, legend had always said, could be held by three good men, against an army, because of its narrowness.

When Uther Pendragon’s message came, that he would hunt Gorlois to the death for his insult in leaving the Easter feasting, the black-haired young Captain of Tintagel had laughed, throwing his head back, so that the herald should see him.

“Tell Uther Dragon’s-head,” he said, “that my master, who has always served him well in the name of Rome, is not a man who runs away when a dog growls. Uther will find him here, or at his place of Dimilioc. And tell your master that the men who eat the bread of Gorlois and wear his gift-rings have faced real warriors in their time, without turning back when

spears advanced and arrows flew. They are not likely to change their nature overnight because a man comes with a message.”

Ygerne heard this, for the conversation was a loud one and took place under her window. It was a barred window, high above the green sea. She heard it and cried, suddenly feeling very lonely and little, like a small girl again, being locked in her bedroom for some naughty prank.

The herald spat and turned without reply, then kicked his horse forward across the causeway, his back very straight and broad. Ygerne, looking down, saw an archer fit an arrow to his string: but the black-haired Captain suddenly held the man’s wrist, so strongly that the fellow twisted with pain and let fall the bow.

Ygerne covered her face and moaned. “What have I done?” she said. “Will Gorlois ever forgive me?”

The grey-haired old woman, who sat on a stool in the corner and was supposed to care for her, smiled bitterly.

“Yon riddles are not hard to answer,” she said in her thick Gaulish accent, for she was from Brittany, where Gorlois held many lands. “You have slighted your lord—and that will bring death to many. As for Gorlois forgiving you, I think not, lovely as you are. Only a month ago I saw him put a boar-spear through a hound that refused to come to heel.”

Ygerne shuddered, for she knew that her husband was a hard man to any who offended him—as hard as Pendragon himself. And, like Pendragon, he came of a long line of war-lords, who had never known what it was to kneel before another, of whatever race or rank.

Turning to the old woman, Ygerne said, “Tell me, Mother Caitlin, what would you advise me to do?”

The old woman rocked on her wooden stool for a while, then said, “What is there to do? You can either sit in this room until *someone* comes for you, or you can squeeze between the iron bars of the window and throw yourself into the sea. That, perhaps, would be better for all.”

Ygerne flung herself on the cold stone floor and wept bitterly. “I am so beautiful and so young,” she said. “How can I destroy what the bards have praised!”

The old woman said, “Time will destroy it, whatever you do; and the bards are fools anyway!”

Then she went out, carefully locking the great door behind her. Ygerne later heard her laughing with the soldiers, telling them what had passed, no doubt.

So the nightmare went on. Always, the men waiting for Uther to attack them, saying what they would do if they got their hands on him; and always that silent, grim-faced herald from Dimilioc who stared at her, silent despite her pleas, before riding back to report on her to his stern master, Gorlois.

And at last Ygerne could stand it no longer. She climbed up to the window on a stool and began to squeeze herself between the cold, hard bars. But suddenly she heard a conversation below her in a little courtyard. A mud-spattered horseman was speaking to two pikemen.

“I tell you,” he said, “when I came away from Dimilioc, Gorlois was laughing, just like his old self. He swore that Pendragon would never breach his castle. And I’ll tell you something else, mates. . . . He swore he’d ride through Uther’s army one of these nights when the moon is clouded, and come to Tintagel to see that silly young wife of his!”

Ygerne’s heart lifted. She listened hard to hear what else the men would say, but now they were whispering and laughing, their heads close together. The wind carried away their words.

After that, for days, every horn, every hoof-beat, every call brought Ygerne running to the little window, to see who came across the causeway. But always she went back in disappointment to sit on her bed and weep. She was too proud to ask the grey-haired woman who attended her and slept at the foot of the bed at night. But one day, when Ygerne was strolling the broad platform above the sea, she came face to face with the young leader of horse who had held her bridle rein all the way from London to Tintagel.

He saluted her and was about to pass on, but she caught his sleeve and asked, “I beg you, tell me how things are at Dimilioc. How is my dear husband?”

The young man smiled and said, “No siege is pleasant, lady; but, by what I hear, the castle of Dimilioc is strong and so well supplied with all food a man might need that Uther and his thousands may well go away disappointed.”

“What of my husband, man?” she asked again, stamping her foot.

The young horseman flicked a pebble over the wall, into the sea.

“He is well, lady. What is there more to say? Gorlois of Cornwall is a man who snaps his fingers at kings and fate. If it entered his head, he would ride out of the gates of Dimilioc by night and come to his castle of Tintagel, without a care for Pendragon’s lazy guards, who think only of sleep once their king has made his nightly rounds.”

Ygerne turned away from the young man’s careless dark smile.

“Pray God such a thought will enter his head,” she said, not caring whether the fellow heard her now.

That very night, as Ygerne lay half asleep, turning over in her mind the thoughts of her fine husband—Gorlois leading his huntsmen against wild boar; Gorlois standing on the battlements, haranguing his shouting tribesmen, his teeth and armbands glistening, his great cloak swinging—there came a soft knock at the door, and a voice said, “Let me in. I have ridden far tonight.”

The old woman, Mother Caitlin, grumbled at being disturbed, and then said in her querulous tones, “What shall I do, lady?”

Ygerne’s heart beat fast: she recalled what the young leader of horse had said, and now there was no doubt in her mind.

“It is the lord, Gorlois, come to see me. Open the door without delay!”

Then in the open door stood a man. By the light of the small taper that Mother Caitlin held, Ygerne saw his cloak, his armbands, his short square beard. She wished she might see his face, but that was shadowed by his riding-hood.

Ygerne leapt up and ran to greet him.

“Put out that light, old woman,” he said. “It is painful to the eyes after much riding in the dark. And get you gone. I will guard my wife until the dawn, now.”

Mother Caitlin bobbed a curtsy and went. She knew how masterful the Lord Gorlois was, and she did not dare risk his anger at this homecoming.

When they were alone, the man put his great arms about Ygerne and hugged her to him.

“Am I forgiven, my lord?” she asked, just like a little girl.

In the darkness, the man said, “Of course you are forgiven, my only dear one. By Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, there is nothing I could not forgive you, Ygerne!”

For a moment, the girl was a little bewildered, for Gorlois did not usually swear by the Christian saints. His were the old ones—Mabon and Belatucader; but she let that pass. He had been away from her for almost two weeks and had, no doubt, picked up new habits from the people he was with in Dimilioc.

It was sufficient that he had come back to her and had forgiven her for that unhappy feasting in London, when by her stupidity she had set him at variance with the king he had sworn to serve.

But just before dawn came, there was a great banging of gates and blowing of horns. Then a loud clattering of hooves across the causeway.

Ygerne started up and went to the window. Voices were shouting, “Dimilioc is taken! Gorlois is dead! Pendragon’s lords have murdered Gorlois, and Dimilioc is down!”

The girl turned to the shadowy figure on her bed.

“Do you hear what the fools say?” she asked him.

He nodded. “Ay, my dearest,” he said, “I hear well enough. I must go down and show myself, then they will stop their shouting. Farewell, and soon, I vow to God, you will see me again, and then we will be together for ever and, when all this bother is over, you shall have a second wedding. And one day, God willing, we will have a son and will call him Artorius. Would that please you, my love?”

Ygerne said, “Yes, my lord. But let us not give him a Roman name. I am tired of this silly fashion of trying to ape the Romans. All that is old history now. Let us call him in Celtic, Artos the Bear—or Arthur, if you prefer it.”

The man said, “I care not what he is called, as long as he grows to be a great warrior and helps me to drive the Saxon out of Britain.”

Then he kissed her hand lightly and went through the door, just as dawn was breaking. A draught of wind blew in from the sea, and suddenly Ygerne felt chilled to the bone. As she pulled the warm fleece bed-cover about her, she saw someone enter and stand by the window.

At first she thought it was the old man, Merlinus, who had turned into a sheep above Tintagel that day, nearly a month ago now. There was something so like him in the set of the head and the clasping of the hands. But it was old, grey-haired Mother Caitlin, who spoke to her in a strange voice—as though she were trying to sound sad, but secretly rejoiced in her heart.

“My lady,” she said, “I have bad news for you. Castle Dimilioc is down by siege, and your lord, Gorlois, is dead. The king’s henchmen ambushed him last night and struck off his head.”

Ygerne began to laugh aloud then, clutching the fleece coverlet to her in the cold dawn.

“Why, you fool!” she almost shouted. “You opened this door to Gorlois himself last night. His head was on his shoulders then, I do assure you. And still was when he left me a short while ago!”

Mother Caitlin said in a hoarse whisper, “True, the man who entered this room last night had a head upon his shoulders. But it was a dragon’s head—not the head of Gorlois. He passed me but a minute since, on the battlements, and he was not Gorlois, though he wore the clothes of Gorlois and had his beard trimmed in the same manner.”

Ygerne’s laughter turned to a horrified silence. She saw Mother Caitlin go to the door and open it. A soldier came in, pale and wounded, the blood upon his face caked stiff and brown in the dawn light. She recognised him as Gareth the sword-bearer, who always stood close behind Gorlois in every battle.

The man swayed before her, his dark eyes downcast.

“Gareth,” pleaded Ygerne, “tell this old fool of a woman that the lord Gorlois is still alive and will soon be victorious.”

The sword-bearer heaved a deep sigh and said, “That would be a lie, lady. Gorlois will never be victorious now, for he is dead. I was close by him when the first sword struck him down. I saw what they did to him, lady. I heard his heels drumming the earth.”

After a long while, Ygerne turned her staring eyes on the tottering soldier and said, in a voice which she did not recognise as her own, “Why are you still here, fellow?”

Gareth, the sword-bearer to dead Gorlois, said gently, “Uther Pendragon has sent me to guard you, for I am his man now. He tells you to make ready for your second wedding, lady. And he bids me to remind you that your first son shall be called Arthur—according to the promise you made to him in the darkness.”

Only then was Ygerne able to weep: and her weeping was caught up by the swooping gulls, and flung hither and thither about the stone battlements

of Tintagel, back across the causeway to the mainland, where staring peasants heard it and shuddered in their cold, wattle huts.

Chapter 2

Fulk Fitzwarine and Ludlow Castle— Twelfth Century

LUDLOW CASTLE has stood immense and dignified above the River Teme since the year 1090. About it has grown up a pretty town of Tudor and Stuart and Georgian houses, each one a member of a handsome family, settling in together over the centuries, a harmonious whole.

Within the great castle walls have lived many famous ones—Edward I, Edward II, his bitter rival Roger Mortimer, the two little Princes who died in the Tower, Catherine of Aragon, Mary Tudor, Sir Philip Sidney. Such names ring like the very bells of English history.

Across its inner courtyard once sounded the words of Milton's masque, *Comus*, and the solemn, plaintive music of Henry Lawes. . . .

Ludlow has known many exciting times, as a watchdog of the Welsh Border, when the sky was only too often red with fire, and when men lay only too frequently, red throated, in the ditches, all their dreams forgotten. . . . Dreams of Llewelyn or of Owen Glendower, and the greatness of Wales.

Yet of all the stories told about castles, the *Geste of Fulk Fitzwarine*, the only medieval romance written around an English castle, is perhaps the most appealing.

In the turbulent days of Henry I, Warine of Metz sent his son Fulk to live at the castle of Ludlow, and there to learn all things that became a gentleman from the holder of that castle, great Josse de Dinant, one of the King's favourites.

In those days the barons who had their castles set along the Welsh Border were for ever at war with each other when they had no Welshmen to butcher; and Josse de Dinant, the Lord of Ludlow, was at daggers drawn with Walter de Lacy, whose family had once held the manor of Ludlow in the Conqueror's days, and Hugh Mortimer, one of whose descendants was to put foolish Edward II to death at Berkeley Castle, and another who, in the time of childless Richard II, was to become the heir to the English throne. . . . Josse chose no puny opponents; he did everything on a grand

scale! After all, he was the favourite of the King himself, and such a man must show himself worthy of powerful enemies, if only for pride's sake!

One day, young Fulk Fitzwarine stood in a tower at Ludlow, wishing he had a sword and a horse, like the grown-up gentlemen, and a hawk and hounds, and a lance, and a great suit of armour that clanked as he rode . . . for he was only a page, made to fetch and carry, to help the knights off with their helmets, and then carve the meat for them at table.

And while he was day-dreaming of the famous deeds which Josse de Dinant would not let him share, the wild horns blew and the outer gates swung open. Men-at-arms ran from their places to greet the incoming horsemen. Among them was Hugh Mortimer, who had been captured in an ambush, his white face streaked with blood, his hands bound behind his back. Fulk noticed that this great warlord's armour was sadly dented, as though the axes and maces had been at work on it, and he wished that he had been there to see what happened. . . .

But then his thoughts were distracted as the soldiers dragged Mortimer down from his horse, for the captured lord was shouting at the top of his hoarse voice, "I curse you, Josse de Dinant! I will have vengeance on you for this day's work, if I have to come back from Hell to get it!"

A soldier standing by Fulk said with a wry smile, "Pay no attention to such butter-woman's curses, young sir! They are naught but air issuing from the mouth. Yon Mortimer will away to Hell, and no mistake, but I have yet to hear of a man coming back from that lodging to eat a piece of barley bread even, much less gain vengeance!"

Fulk watched as the men dragged Mortimer roughly away to a far tower, raining blows on his head whenever he tried to hang back, digging his iron heels in the turf.

And then he forgot the man; forgot him, that is, as far as one *could* forget a poor wretch whose curses gradually turned to piteous pleas, whose thin white hands, that had once held swords and maces, were stretched out in supplication through the bars of his cell door in the lonely tower.

But Fulk had other things to think about, for Josse de Dinant had two fine daughters, Sybil and Hawisse, beautiful girls but as fierce as hawks. They taught Fulk how a gentleman should behave in the presence of a lady, how to play upon the Welsh harp and how to make love.

Yet all the time they mocked him, saying that he was only a mere boy, a toy, a plaything, and hardly fit for their company. At other times they swore

they wished they were men, and then they would show some of these lazy pages how a warrior should behave. All of which depressed poor Fulk until he would have done anything to prove to them that he *was* a brave fellow and worthy to be treated with respect. He climbed sheer walls, wrestled with the soldiers, sent arrows into a stripped willow wand at fifty paces—but still he was not allowed a sword and armour. And still the girls laughed at him over their embroidery frames.

Then, one day, these things changed suddenly, almost as though what he had dreamed about had come to pass, by some divine chance.

He was standing on the platform of the outer wall with Sybil and Hawisse, looking down over the fields, when all at once there came a great thundering of hooves and soon appeared four horsemen, riding like fiends.

Sybil cried out, “*Mon Dieu!* That is de Lacy. I can tell by his crest and banneret! And he has three knights with him. My father and his company have driven these foxes under our walls! We can look to see other guests for our dungeons before an hour is out!”

“Ay,” said Hawisse, grimly, “or corpses to sing Mass over, sister! For I cannot think our father and his men will have much mercy when they ride up! This de Lacy has plagued us too long already. Well, thanks be to God that the quarrel has come to such a good end.”

Fulk said, “It has not ended yet, my ladies. Do not eat the venison pasty before the deer is skinned!”

The two girls looked at him as though he were a fool.

“What do you know of such affairs, boy?” asked Sybil, flicking him across the face with her sleeves. “Better to go down and play with your wooden sword in the inner yard—it is safe there for young lads like you!”

Fulk’s face went red and his hands shook with temper, but there was nothing he dared say to the daughters of his overlord. They had already had him locked up for two days and two nights, with only water to drink and no bread, for singing a certain naughty song—which, in any case, they had taught him weeks before. “A young fellow like you must learn his place,” said Josse de Dinant, as he turned the great key. “I’ll not have my wenches spoken to as though they were market-women, Fitzwarine. You can thank your stars and my mercy that I do not send you back to your father with the skin off your back. Now mind your manners in the future. What grown men do is one thing; what young lads do is another. Good night!”

Then from out of the wood burst a single horseman, who spurred his charger so cruelly and shouted so wildly, that he seemed more like a fiend than a man.

“*Splendeur de Dieu!*” said Hawisse. “That is my father, and alone! He has outstripped his company and thinks to take these rogues single-handed!”

Fulk said, “Then you two girls had better go down and get out the candles for his bier. He will not be long with us, rest him!”

But the girls did not answer this time; they were leaning over the battlements, their faces white and set.

Below, great Josse de Dinant drove in at de Lacy, shattered his enemy’s sword and then swept him from his horse with a flurry of blows.

Sybil and Hawisse began to call out, praising their father, who stood above de Lacy, demanding his surrender, when the three others swung their horses about and came in to the charge.

“It is unwise to cheer before the play is played,” said Fulk, sad in his heart that his lord should be so outnumbered, for now Josse was driven against the castle wall and was hard pressed to defend himself.

Suddenly, Hawisse turned to Fulk and said most bitterly, “If you were a man and a warrior, instead of a useless child, my father might still live! Oh, what fools we were to take into our house a youth who can fight well enough with his mouth but not at all with a man’s true weapons!”

Now Fulk became furious at these unjust taunts. No one had ever spoken to him as cruelly as this before.

He did not stay to answer, but left the girls and ran down the spiral stairway until he reached the hall. The place was empty, for all the men-at-arms had ridden out with Josse that day. The youth took down a rusty helmet and an old Danish battleaxe, which hung upon the wall, and rushed into the courtyard.

A cart-horse stood there, nibbling what grass he could find. Fulk leapt on to his back with a shout, and kicked him forward towards the great gate, which stood wide, since there was no one to defend it.

He was upon the attacking knights before they heard him, for they were very busy at their trade just then, hewing and hacking at Josse de Dinant, who stood in their midst, fending off their blows as best he could with sword and shield, making a great puffing and blowing, for it was a warm day.

The cart-horse, as inexperienced as Fulk, bundled in among the other horses, knocking them aside by his great weight. Fulk swung his ancient axe; it took one knight on the crest and felled him. Fulk turned again and struck sideways. The second knight slithered from his saddle, howling, his ribs broken.

Now the remaining knight turned and, seeing that he was outnumbered, tugged at his reins to be away. But Fulk and Josse between them drove him to the wall and so battered him that he threw away his sword and begged for mercy.

But the two whom Fulk had struck were beyond mercy now. They lay still upon the tussocky grass, their arms spread wide.

So, de Lacy and the captured knight, Arnold de Lisle, were taken prisoners, just as the men-at-arms rode up, cursing that they had not been there to gain a reward from their master.

After that, there was nothing but praise for young Fulk. Sybil and Hawisse ran down and almost fought with each other to kiss him. Great Josse de Dinant swore upon all holy relics that this lad, who had saved his life and had captured his greatest enemy, should marry Hawisse, the most comely lady along the Welsh Marches, and should have a wedding feast that lasted a fortnight at the least.

Fulk would rather have been given a knighthood, a sword and a full suit of armour; but Josse was not the sort of father-in-law to reason with at that moment. Indeed, when the wedding had been celebrated and the long feast ended, Josse de Dinant insisted on accompanying the young couple on their honeymoon, into Hartland, to see that they behaved as befitted gentlefolk. He wished them to create a good impression in the countryside, among the small lordlings of the Border.

Neither Hawisse nor Fulk cared greatly for this arrangement; but they both knew Josse well enough not to contest his judgment in such a matter. . . .

So Ludlow Castle was left without a lord for a while; and it was during this time that tragedy happened.

Josse de Dinant had a ward, a spirited young Norman girl named Marion de la Bruyère, who spent much of her time alone in that great castle, despising the company of Sybil, and contemptuous of the rough pastimes of the place. Always Marion dreamed of meeting a perfect knight who would

ride away with her, away from the restrictions of Ludlow, and set her up as his lady in some strong castle of his own.

And one evening, as she paced past the cell where de Lacy and Arnold de Lisle lay imprisoned, she knew that her dream had begun to come true, for de Lisle was as handsome a fellow as ever sat a horse. More to the point, he indicated to Marion that he had never before set eyes on a creature so lovely and so desirable.

It was not long before this lonely girl crept back to the cell and flung to the captured knights a stout rope, of knotted linen; and it was not long before the two knights had made good use of that rope, letting it down from the window into the courtyard.

By dawn the birds had flown.

But after a week or so, Marion de la Bruyère came to realise that there was little point in having found the man of her dreams if she could not enjoy his company; and so she bribed a young servant to take a message to de Lisle, telling him that the place was almost empty of guards, and that if he came to Ludlow she would see that her window was open and a rope hanging down for him to climb.

When Arnold de Lisle received this news, he laughed mightily. This was the chance both he and his friend, de Lacy, had been waiting for. The chance to humble Josse de Dinant and to take the fortress which de Lacy regarded as being his own, because of his own family holdings there, which had been wrested from him when Josse became the King's favourite.

Arnold sent back word to the girl that he would visit her as she wished; and when the messenger had gone, he arranged with de Lacy to fling open the castle gates as soon as he had gained entrance himself.

That night Arnold de Lisle lay in the arms of Marion de la Bruyère, telling her of the sunlit life they would soon live together at his manor house, where the white doves flew about the eaves and the deer grazed in the park beyond the heronry. . . .

And while the poor girl listened to him, her eyes like dark stars, de Lacy entered Ludlow Castle with a force of men so strong that the few men-at-arms left by Josse de Dinant were overpowered and butchered without a chance of defending themselves.

Suddenly, Marion de la Bruyère became aware that all was not well below in the courtyard. Hearing the de Lacy war-cry and the screams of

dying men, she ran to the window and looked down. De Lacy saw her and waved up at her, laughing, thanking her for her aid that night.

Marion de la Bruyère was as proud as she was passionate. She saw instantly how easily she had been deceived by the man who lay smiling at her. Then, with a bitter laugh, she went forward and, snatching up Arnold's sword, which lay beside a chair, she drove it through him before he could take hold of her to prevent the blow.

So, with her only lover dead upon her bed, and her guardian's castle in the hands of his worst enemy, Marion de la Bruyère flung herself from the window by which Arnold de Lisle had entered her room.

It was a far drop from the casement of her North Tower, and there were rocks below. The girl who had been betrayed, and who had betrayed her guardian, died instantly.

Chapter 3

Llewelyn Ap Gruffydd and Three Castles —Thirteenth Century

SIMON de Montfort's great red sandstone castle at Kenilworth towered high above the Midland countryside—its proud turrets a hundred feet above the courtyard, the walls of its keep, "Caesar's Tower" as the peasants called it, high on fourteen feet thick. A proud castle for a proud lord!

Simon had once sworn, "This castle shall never fall to any man, king or common man!" And it seemed that he would never be proved wrong. . . .

One evening in the spring, in the pleasant room of the Water Tower, which overlooked the Great Lake, Simon's young daughter, Eleanor, a girl of twelve years or so, sat with her companions pretending to work at her embroidery, but really listening with both ears to everything that the tall, dark, young man said.

This tall, dark, young man lounged with a noble negligence by the window ledge, his white smile seeming to give a radiance to every word he spoke, his long and ermine-trimmed sleeves wafting so splendidly with each gesture of his fine hands, like the banner above the square keep.

Eleanor dropped her eyes when he turned his own dark ones upon her in an open and teasing stare. She found that her embroidery needle would not go where she wanted it to go for a while, and she even pricked her finger without crying out. One of her maids, Maud, whispered, "There, my lady, now we know your secret! Your heart is given to the Welshman!"

Then Eleanor pretended to frown, as though she was cross with the girl—but in truth she was glad to have someone to share her secret with; it had been killing her for days now, ever since the Prince, Llewelyn, had cantered through her father's gates with his laughing men-at-arms, his ringed hand on his hip, his hawklike nose held high—rather, she had thought at the time, as though this heir of an ancient line disdained her father's great Kenilworth. . . .

But she soon found that he didn't; that a prince must put on a show of arrogance when he rides in public, and especially among Normans. . . .

Eleanor's needle came under control once more, as she began to wonder what it would be like to be the mistress of a stout Welsh castle, and to ride out hawking with a retinue of wild horsemen, who dressed in the old manner, their long hair blowing, their cloaks of coloured squares floating behind them in the wind. . . . In her mind, she could already hear the strident horns hallooing across the moorland, and see the men leaning low over their horses' necks, galloping against each other to show off their prowess to their master's new English wife. . . .

She came back from her day-dream to hear Maud, her companion, say cheekily, "Will you not sing us that song again, Prince Llewelyn? The one about the Celtic princess, my lord?"

Llewelyn ap Gruffydd bowed his fine head towards the girl, and nodded to the young boy who stood behind him, holding ready a small gilded harp.

The boy swept his fingers across the strings, and for a moment the Water Tower seemed to dissolve, as though the great red stones that made it had melted into air, to let all the listeners float out into a magic world where golden apples grew upon the trees, and water that tasted of wine flowed in every mountain stream.

Maud whispered, "These folk have magic at their command, my lady. Oh, how I wish such a gentleman as this might be my own true-love!"

But that notion did not appeal to Eleanor. She gave a little sniff of annoyance and put on the sort of face which she hoped might bring Maud to her senses. . . . But the waiting-woman was too far gone in rapture by that time, for the Prince Llewelyn was singing in his high tenor voice that seemed to float above the heavy oaken rafters of the room, like a bird among the boughs of a forest tree.

*White is my love as the apple-blossom,
White as the ocean's spray;
Her face shines like the pearly dew on Eryi;
The glow of her cheeks is like the light of sunset.
Whosoever beheld her was filled with love for her;
Four white trefoils spring up wherever she treads!*

The harpist's fingers plucked a last breathless chord from the golden instrument, and then his hand fell gently to his side. The Prince Llewelyn stood silently for a moment, then bowed towards Eleanor and said softly, "My voice is a poor messenger to send words of the heart to such a lady as you are."

Eleanor felt his dark eyes upon her once again, and suddenly became very much afraid that she would disgrace herself by weeping if he didn't look away.

“Forgive me, my lord,” she said suddenly, and, putting down her embroidery frame, a little too hastily, signed to her ladies and went towards the door.

There she stopped for a moment and said, “My small hounds have not been fed today. It is a thing I like to attend to myself, sir.”

Llewelyn was still gazing at her, smiling his warm gentle smile, as she ran down the spiral staircase.

At the bottom, Maud said, “But, my lady, you know well enough that we fed your hounds less than an hour ago.”

Eleanor nodded, and smiled through her tears.

“Yes, you goose,” she said, “but don't you see that I had to say something—or I should have been on my knees before him in a minute, begging him to marry me! And that would never do. I am a Norman.”

Maud sighed and said quickly, “In a minute, you say! How slow you are, my lady! I would gladly have wed that fine gentleman the moment I clapped eyes on him—he is so splendid.”

But Eleanor was not listening; she had already run down the next flight of stairs and was wondering what excuse she could find now to run all the way up again!

In the years which followed, Llewelyn the Prince often called to mind that spring day when little Eleanor had run from the room to feed her small hounds, for that was the day when he had first realised her love for him. Like Maud, he knew that the hounds had been fed but a short while before.

Now he was more than the mere “Lord of Snowdon”—he was “the Prince of Wales” itself, and was addressed as such by the King of England even. The great chieftains of the south and of the border lands had kneeled before him and had put their hands in his, bowing their shaggy heads in allegiance. Once more the bards had taken out their harps and had called him: “Eagle of men that loves not to lie nor sleep; towering above the rest of men with his long red lance; his red helmet of battle crested with a fierce wolf.” . . . Just as they had sung about their other, earlier Princes, filling them with pride.

But for poor Eleanor, life had not been so good. Her father had died at the battle of Evesham, in 1265, caught on a mound with only a handful of knights about him, joined by a crowd of unruly Welsh tribesmen who began to fade away at the first charge of the royal knights. The English king's army, riding knee to knee, and led by the young Prince Edward, whom Simon himself had trained in battle, chopped down the Welshmen ruthlessly, wherever they tried to hide, in cornfields and gardens; and then turned their full attention to the rebel Earl, Simon de Montfort.

Earl Simon shrugged his great shoulders as he watched the lines of cavalry pressing up the hill towards him. He knew what the end must be.

“Let us commend our souls to God,” he said to the men about him, “for our bodies are the foes!”

No one wanted to leave the Earl, though he commanded them to ride away, knowing that they were already exhausted from a long march.

“If you die, my lord,” they said, “we have no wish to live.”

And then the royal force came driving in, with shock upon shock of shield and breastplate. Swords rose and fell, rose and fell. Horses whinneyed and tossed their spiked heads, their iron-shod hooves beating down again and again on all who fell before them in the confusion of that awful attack.

Like the house-carls about Harold Godwinson at Hastings, the rebel knights clustered round Simon, falling one by one, until at last only he was left alive, still flailing about him with his great sword.

The battle had been two hours raging when a lance took Simon de Montfort, and a blow from a mace struck him from behind.

“It is God's grace,” he called out, as the horsemen circled round him, pushing each other aside to strike down at his body, cursing him as though he had been an outlaw wolf to be slaughtered by any man with a club in his hand.

Prince Llewelyn had wept when the news came to him.

“What of Eleanor, my beloved?” he had asked the Welsh knight who had ridden from Evesham to tell the sad tale.

“My lord,” said the man, his head bowed, “she and her mother have already sailed for France. There is a place for them in a Dominican nunnery, they say, and there they will stay until, by the grace of God, they may return safely to their own country once more.”

The day he heard those words, Llewelyn left his companions and rode among the hills alone, spurring down valleys, scrambling up scree slopes, leaping chasms, as though trying to drive from his heart the great anger he felt towards Edward, Prince of England.

That night the harps were silent, and no man dared speak to the Prince of Wales, for his dark face glowered along the board as though he would have split the thick oak with his gaze. . . .

The next day, before a small body of his closest companions, he said, "One day, gentlemen, I will teach the English what it is to spite a Welshman. When I wear a crown in London and stare down upon them all, then they shall know what harm they did to me and to Eleanor at Evesham!"

And the bards had gone out among the villages then, their harps in their hands, singing at feast-boards along the valleys, telling that once Merlin had prophesied. . . .

"What?" asked the rough-haired Celts, drinking their mead and metheglyn. "What did he, the old one, the ancient one, prophesy?"

Then the bards sang that Merlin had once told the world that when money became round, a Welsh king should wear the crown in London Town itself. And who better, they asked, than a true Prince of Wales—the last of the Welsh Princes, Llewelyn ap Gruffydd?

The years passed, slow as water wearing a runnel in the slate below gaunt Snowdon; and at last Llewelyn received the message he had been waiting for. A brown-faced shipman from Calais brought it one summer morning. He stood in his horse-hide jerkin and spoke the words to the Prince himself, though the tribesmen who gathered close to him could make little of his speech, it being a lingua franca of the ports of Europe, a mixture of French and German and English . . . the tongue that merchants used when bargaining in Bruges, or Hamburg, or Brest.

But Llewelyn understood the words. He had waited so long for them, he would have understood them if they had been spoken in Crusaders' Arabic!

"Master," said the sailor, "I am to tell you that your love, Eleanor, is coming to you with all speed. She will arrive with her brother, two noble knights of France, and two friars. Have patience but a little while longer. She will arrive safely, I can assure you. It is my own brother, Dickon, who will guide her ship into harbour."

That was in the year 1275.

In that same year a bard, singing before the impatient Llewelyn, said, “Prince, there are three castles in your life; Kenilworth and Conway are two of them.”

“And which is the third?” asked a chieftain who sat beside Llewelyn.

The bard said softly, “The great Tower of London, master.”

Then the chieftain who had asked offered the bard a gay knife set with garnets and with a pommel of jet, but the bard shook his white head and rose from his chair by the fire.

“Why do you not take the gift?” asked Llewelyn.

The bard said, “Gifts are for bearers of white tidings, sire.”

Llewelyn thought for a moment, then asked, “Are your tidings black, then?”

The bard bowed his head and said, “Who am I to tell the colour of greetings? I only know that when I speak of death, the strings of my harp snap. And now they have all broken, although I did not mention mortality.”

After that, Llewelyn was not surprised when a Norman herald rode along the valley asking for him, and telling him that Eleanor’s ship had been captured by a merchantman of Bristol, when it was passing the Scilly Isles.

“Where is my loved one now?” asked Llewelyn, puzzled.

The herald said with a soft smile, “She is staying in the house of her cousin, Edward, who is to be the King of England.”

The Welsh Prince said gently, “I am to marry her. Does Edward not know that?”

The herald nodded. “Yes, my lord,” he said. “He knows that only too well. And so you shall—the moment you have kneeled before him and have sworn to take him as your liege lord before all London.”

Then Llewelyn broke the wine-cup at his side and said, “When I kneel before the man who killed Simon de Montfort, may my right hand fall from my body, and may my eyes turn to stone!”

The herald bowed and said, “I am not versed in prophecies, my lord. I deliver my message, and only that. I am a Norman, not a Welshman.”

Those who were with Llewelyn snatched the herald away, then, and put him on a horse and sent him down the valley quickly. For they knew their Prince, and the black look which sat on his brow was the look of death that night.

And after the herald had gone, Llewelyn the Prince came to his senses and ordered a letter-writer to come forward and set down a message to Edward, the new King of England. In that letter, he told King Edward that he would not come to London to swear fealty, not even for the hand of Eleanor herself.

“How could she love a coward?” he asked the scribe.

The man stared at his Prince in fear.

“I do not understand the ways of women,” the poor man said. “And noblewomen least of all.”

In Westminster Hall, King Edward I, still brown-faced from the sun of Palestine, struck the arm of his throne-chair with a mailed fist.

“By God,” he said, for all to hear, “but this Welshman shall not defy me so! I once led a charge up the hill of Evesham and struck down the greatest warrior this land has known. . . . In the stony desert, where nothing can live but snakes and carrion-kites, I have beaten back the fierce Turk and have sent the Bedouin howling to their tents. Who is this Welshman that he thinks to succeed where so many others have failed?”

A captain of archers, who stood but a few yards from the King, near a pillar, said softly, “He is no Bedouin, to run when anyone cracks a whip at him. His is the oldest blood in Europe.”

King Edward heard these words and turned in his chair, with such a smile on his face that all the lords about him were still, and the page-boys trembled in their shoes. Even the dogs stopped rolling in the straw.

“You are Gwyn of Beddgelert, are you not?” the King asked evenly.

The captain of archers first bowed his head, and then answered in a firm voice, jutting his black spade beard forward towards the King.

“That is my name, sire,” he said, “and Beddgelert is my place. I am a Welshman—but I have always stood where the arrows fell the thickest, beside your Majesty.”

King Edward answered, “It is not your courage that I doubt, Gwyn of Beddgelert, but your wisdom.”

The Welshman took half a pace forward and a great sigh went round the Hall. Four men-at-arms crossed their pikes before him, but he waved them aside with contempt.

“Sire,” he said, “if I have shown lack of wisdom at all, it is in leaving the service of the most ancient line in this land, to follow you.”

Now all were aghast at the man’s daring, and the King’s uncle, Lancaster, gritted his teeth like a furious wolf.

But Edward only smiled and said, “There is little virtue in wine merely because it is old. Old wine can become sour, and then it must be drained away.”

As he spoke, he flung the contents of his cup to the floor. The red wine splashed over the grey stones and trickled among the straw. Gwyn of Beddgelert looked away in disgust.

Later, after Edward had sent his second letter to Llewelyn, commanding him to come to London and bow his head before him, the King remembered Gwyn of Beddgelert and, calling to one of the guards, said, “Here, man, take this bag of gold to the Welsh captain and tell him that I think none the worse of him for his loyalty to his own countryman.”

Then, when this man had gone, the Duke of Lancaster sent three of his own men-at-arms to the street in Cripple Gate where Gwyn lodged.

“Watch his house as dogs watch the foxes’ bolt-hole,” he said. “If that Welshman escapes free out of London, I will hang you from the highest gibbet in the city.”

The King did not know of this.

Three times the royal messengers rode into north Wales, always bearing the same command; and three times Llewelyn the Prince sent them riding back to London, grim faced and afraid of their reception in London when they told of the Welshman’s refusal of the English terms.

The Earls of Lincoln and Hereford were present when the heralds returned for the third time. They smiled at each other, then Hereford said, “The fox that barks too often asks to be dragged down by the pack.”

King Edward rose and clapped his hand upon the pommel of the great sword he had worn outside Jerusalem.

“So be it,” he said, his narrow face working in silent anger. “Let us assemble the pack, my lords.”

In the autumn of 1277 the English army rode into Wales. King Edward commanded the Chester division which rode on Rhuddlan. The Earl of Hereford marched on Brecon, while the Earl of Lincoln struck inland through Montgomery. Edmund of Lancaster, leading a fourth army, based his great force on Carmarthen, in the south.

Moving like victorious pieces in a grim game of chess, the English hosts pressed towards the centre of the board, always hemming the Welshmen in; until at last Llewelyn, realising that his wild tribesmen, with their furious berserk charges from the hills, were no match for the tight and ruthless squadrons of Norman cavalry, sounded the horn which summoned all his followers to withdraw into the mountainous heights of Snowdon.

There, at least, a foot soldier fought on equal terms with a cavalryman.

Penned in on every side, proud Llewelyn learned that the English fleet had cut off any possible retreat to Ireland; that soldiers had landed on Anglesey and, after butchering everyone they could find, had burned the fields of standing corn. Now those islanders who were left made their way painfully to the mainland and came to beg food from a prince who had little enough to feed his own hungry forces.

As winter closed in upon the land, the starving Welshmen understood at last that their cause was hopeless. On the wind-swept heights of Snowdon men and women crouched beneath any sheltering rock that they could find, clothed like their earliest ancestors, in little more than sheepskins. By the time Llewelyn's pride was shattered there were few old folk or children left upon that mountain.

With the wailing of his suffering people ringing in his ears, the Prince Llewelyn rode slowly down the hillside and gave himself up to the hard-faced men of Edward, hoping that at least he would prevent further bloodshed by his surrender.

In 1277, on a bitter November day, Llewelyn signed a treaty, almost at the sword's point, by which the great cantrevs and commotes of Wales were split up into counties, in the hated English manner. Most of the Welsh Prince's land was taken from him, except the Snowdon area, unproductive

and wild, incapable of rendering to the Prince a revenue that would enable him to live like a nobleman, or to raise a rebel army again. . . .

The rest of the land was farmed out to Norman adventurers whose only law was their own, which enabled them to wring the last penny out of the Welsh peasants they ruled.

The noble men of Tengegle and Flint sent petitions to Edward, and to their now powerless Prince, telling of the new terror they were in and begging for relief from their Norman overlords.

But nothing was done: true justice was denied all Welshmen (and would not be restored until 1536, by that Welsh king, Henry VIII, Henry Tudor). In the meantime, the legalised brigands who misruled Wales could murder as they chose, sell positions of power to others like themselves, and exact the heaviest fines for the most trivial offence.

Just as, once before so long ago, the Celts sent petitions to the Emperor of Rome begging for help—"The Saxon drives us to the sea, and the sea drives us back to the Saxon"—so did the Welsh chieftains come to Llewelyn with their woes.

But there was nothing he could do. He had no army, and Edward had left him no legal powers in his own land. He could only counsel his people to be patient, to bear the yoke until such time as the Normans relented.

Those of the bards who had once sung of Llewelyn as "Eagle of men", now swept their fingers across the strings contemptuously and called him "Sparrowhawk", in the dim halls of Wales.

That winter, by royal command, Llewelyn went with his closest chieftains to London, where he was made to bow the knee in homage before Edward at Westminster.

Although the Christmas bells filled the snow-white air, the Welshmen felt no happiness. They had come into England dressed in their tribal fashion, with brightly coloured cloaks over their sheepskin jackets, and cross-strapping the length of their wool-clad legs. They wore their hair long or in plaits, and their throats and arms glimmered with gold as old as Caesar. . . .

Wherever they went, crowds followed them, rudely snatching at their clothes and laughing to hear them speaking in their own native language.

A bard who was there wrote later: "They call us savages because we attire ourselves as we have always done, against the winter's cold; and

because we wickedly permit our tongues to talk the only language that we know and that our mothers taught us. Yet, when we ask them for bread or milk, or even the way to another part of their city, they spit in our faces and then laugh for each other's amusement. Who are the savages, I ask you?"

At last the Welshmen were permitted to go home, after Prince Llewelyn had been allowed to spend a short while in the presence of Eleanor, under the watchful eyes of two guards. She tried to console him, she whose own father had been butchered at Evesham by this same King Edward.

"One day, my love," she said, "you will laugh at all these indignities."

Llewelyn answered, "Dear heart, I do not think that I shall ever laugh again."

But Edward did, when these words were reported to him.

In the autumn of 1278, Eleanor was married to her love at the great door of Worcester Cathedral. Edward was there, and so was King Alexander of Scotland, who had been commanded to attend, as though this wedding were a military occasion. So the proud Scots should be shown that Edward of England had power even over the most private affairs of his subjects. . . .

Then Llewelyn was permitted to return to his country, a man made small in the eyes of the one woman he wished to impress. No longer did his high tenor voice float above the rafters for her delight: those days were over now, over and almost forgotten. If there was an instrument to play on now, it had an edge, not strings.

Dafydd ap Gruffydd, brother of Llewelyn, came to the Prince's house one day, his face dark with fury.

"How long shall I call you 'brother'?" he asked. "If our father were alive, he would die again with shame."

Llewelyn, who now looked like an old man himself, said, "Patience, brother; we have no fighting men, and we are ringed about with castles."

Then Dafydd tore off his tunic and showed the marks of the lash upon his back.

"Four years of marriage have softened you, Llewelyn," he said. "But would you have patience if you had been treated so? If I were Llewelyn and you were Dafydd, do you think I would sit with my chin in my hand, fondling the ears of my dog at the sight of such wounds?"

Then he took the Prince by the arm and led him to the window which overlooked the long valley.

“Between those hills lie your people,” he said. “They call themselves less than men now, as they sit over their fires. They say that their Prince has forgotten them and that they cannot hope to find relief until Arthur comes again from under the hill to lead them.”

Eleanor rose and took Dafydd gently by the arm. He shook her hand away roughly.

“Have your women not told you, sister,” he said, “that no baby has been born alive along this valley for half a year? Does that not touch your heart, even if my wounds leave you unmoved?”

Then Eleanor began to weep. “Oh, yes, it does, Dafydd,” she said. “It does indeed. If I were a man, I would do all I could to set my people free, though I lost my own head for doing so.”

Dafydd turned and smiled at his brother before going out once more.

In 1282 the Welsh revolt broke out, led by Llewelyn and his brother Dafydd. Word was passed along the valleys and across the hills, and the waiting chieftains began to feel under straw and in the thatch for swords and shields that had lain almost forgotten for years.

Once more the bards began to string their harps and to recall the old battle songs.

But there were spies everywhere, and in a short time King Edward knew that Wales was seething from north to south, like a pot on the boil and about to bubble over.

Then the bards sang:

*A Welsh king crowned in London be found.
Old Merlin said when money be round*

That year, Edward had commanded the Royal Mint to strike round coins, to defeat those tricksters who clipped the corners off the older, irregularly shaped ones. To many Welshmen this seemed an omen of victory: they could not wait to march out and claim their inheritance at last. . . .

But the hard-faced soldiers of Edward, men who had stood among the arrows from Palestine to Perthshire, smiled slowly and swung their great

swords, to get the feel of them once more.

“The only good Welshman is a dead Welshman,” one said. Then the others laughed to think of the work which lay before them.

Yet not all Englishmen were of this mind. The Archbishop of Canterbury rode hard into Wales, against the wish of King Edward, and personally implored Llewelyn to accept a great estate in England, together with a life-pension, rather than take arms against the King in another campaign.

Llewelyn listened to the Archbishop and then asked, “And what if I tell you that I refuse? That I would die rather than hand over my country and its good folk to such men as those who took Anglesey?”

The Archbishop shook his tired head in despair.

“My lord,” he said, as gently as he was able, “if you refuse this offer you will bring disaster upon the people you profess to serve, for our King will not be flouted a second time. He will lay waste to Wales. As for your own death, my lord, it will not be a pleasant one, I promise you: for I am under oath to excommunicate you if you refuse the offers I bring. Your soul will burn for ever in the fires of hell.”

Then Llewelyn helped the old man to his feet, smiling quietly, and said, “I am prepared to face even that, sir, if Wales may be free once more.”

Personally, he led the Archbishop back to the place where his escort was waiting and bade him a good journey, though the old man would have given anything to change the mind of this proud Welshman then.

The end of the story comes swiftly now.

With the massed might of England once more hemming him in, the Prince rode southwards to assure himself that the men of Carmarthen were still loyal to his cause.

Near Builth he saw a little wood and, fatigued by his long ride, he halted there.

“Captain,” he called to the leader of his troop, “set my bodyguard of eighteen good men of Caernarvon about this wood. It comes upon me that I would like to walk alone among green places and to think of the things that are nearest to my heart now.”

The captain saluted his Prince, and went about to station the bodyguard at regular intervals round the little wood.

Llewelyn, the last native Prince of Wales, in whose veins flowed the oldest blood in the western world, flung off his helmet and put aside his sword and lance. He tethered his war-horse to an ash tree, patted him on the neck, and walked forward into a glade where a clear spring bubbled among the ferns and reeds.

And there, for a while, he sat upon a flat stone, thinking how sad it was that men should for ever be trying to force others to obey them, when it would be so much more pleasant for them to sit with their families before their fires. . . .

Suddenly, his day-dreams were shattered. Without warning, a horseman broke through the tangle of wild alder and gorse at the farther side of the glade, his rusting visor down and his lance at the ready.

Llewelyn gazed at him, astounded, for this was no Welshman. This was a wandering English knight, foraging alone for what spoils he could find.

“Edward and St. George!” the man cried as he set his horse towards the place where the Welsh Prince now stood, helpless, staring—his own sword fifty yards away, hanging from the pommel of his high saddle.

Llewelyn held out his hands wide, not to beg for mercy—he had never done that—but as a sign that he was unarmed.

The English knight swept on in brutal triumph. His lance-head took Llewelyn in the side and carried him onwards for a few yards, helpless as a spiked boar, with the rush of the charge.

Then, laughing, the knight twisted his strong wrist over, as he had done so many times before in his twenty years of fighting, and Llewelyn was flung sideways, among the reeds about the babbling stream. His dark hair now dangled in the little pool; his white hand, wearing the ring which Eleanor had given him at Worcester, four years before, searched about to find the sword it would never hold again, and then lay still.

The Englishman, Adam de Francton, stayed only long enough to assure himself that a second thrust would not be necessary; then he took a narrow bridle-path and left the wood at Builth, in search of other Welshmen.

Towards sunset the knight returned, recalling the rich surcoat and belt of the man he had overcome in battle. A white friar was sitting beside Llewelyn, still holding his hand.

“Who is this man, that a priest should stay beside him so long?” asked Adam de Francton.

The white friar said, “Sir, this is the Prince Llewelyn, who has suffered an unlucky blow and whose men have now ridden away to seek his murderer.”

The knight said, “Now, God be praised! It is not every day of the week that such spoils come by a man!”

He leaped down to the turf and began to draw the gold ring from Llewelyn’s finger. But the priest stared at him in horror.

“Are you a Christian?” he asked. “Can you not see that the Prince is still breathing?”

Adam de Francton shrugged his shoulders and smiled. Then he sat down upon the flat stone, where Llewelyn himself had sat only a few hours before.

“I am a patient man, Father,” he said. “I can wait.”

Then, when the sun had almost fallen from sight, the white friar stopped praying and rose from the still body.

“There is nothing more that I can do now,” he said sadly, and made his way from the glade.

Adam de Francton smiled grimly and said, “Nay, but there is something I can do—something that should get me a barony, at least.”

He drew his long sword and hacked off the pale head of the last Prince of Wales, then, only stopping to wash it in the clear stream, hung it by the hair from his saddlebow, wrapped round with a strip of velvet from Llewelyn’s own cloak, and, whistling gaily, began to make his way northwards.

King Edward I was at Conway, walking the scaffolding of the castle he was causing to be built there—Conway Castle. Beside him paced Master James of Savoy, the architect who also built the castles of Caernarvon and Harlech, having learned his trade among the castle-builders of the Holy Land, whose walls and turrets were splendid.

Master James was in the middle of a long lecture on curtain-walls and barbicans when Adam de Francton rode up, holding Llewelyn’s head by the hair.

Edward gave a peremptory wave of the hand to silence the talkative builder.

“Here is a matter which claims my close attention, sir,” he said. “Your stones and timbers can wait a while.”

Then King Edward climbed down the mason’s ladder with some haste, anxious to be sure that this *was* the head he had dreamed of taking for so long.

Master James of Savoy shook his own grey head and, muttering about ingratitude, went back to study his parchment plans.

So, set on a pole, Llewelyn’s head was displayed to the assembled English army. A great roar went up and the soldiers shouted, “Send it up the mountain, to remind his brother David of the end which awaits him!”

But Edward said, “Nay, lads, Black David knows well enough what is coming his way, when once we can get at him! This trophy is going to a place where common men’s hearts will rejoice to see it!”

And so old Merlin’s prophecy was fulfilled. A Welsh prince reigned in London.

The ghastly head, crowned derisively with a wreath of ivy leaves, was carried through the crowded, laughing streets, before being set on a pole high above the Tower of London. Llewelyn had come to his last castle, but not in the way he had dreamed.

And his brother, Dafydd—the fiery warrior who gave and asked no mercy—he was starved out of the high mountain of Snowdon, taken in chains to Shrewsbury and there disembowelled, as a lasting proof to all Welshmen and Englishmen that King Edward was the master in his own kingdom.

Eleanor, who had enjoyed so little of her husband’s company after so many years of waiting, was again left alone.

But Dafydd joined his brother. The two heads, preserved by the wind and the rain, gazed sightlessly over London Town for many a year, until at last the boys stopped pointing them out to each other, and the birds perched on them undisturbed.

Chapter 4

Edward II and Berkeley Castle— Fourteenth Century

EDWARD I, who killed Llewelyn, had a son of his own. Young Edward was born at his father's new Welsh castle of Caernarvon, the little baby boy in the shield, and died an agonised death at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire, forgotten by all save his murderers, who, it is said, never knew peace of mind again after their ghastly deed.

But, between birth and death, he moved within the walls of other castles—sometimes happily, sometimes in mourning, but always with that characteristic flamboyancy of dress and that turn of witty phrase which singled him out from his crude contemporaries, the Lords Ordainers, the barons.

Llewelyn ap Gruffydd was very much like Owen Glendower, in his life and aspirations; and in many respects, Edward II resembled his great-grandson, Richard II. Both kings, though the sons of warrior-fathers, loved the comfortable elegances of life rather than the hardships; both were unhappy in their marriages, for one reason or another; both turned to favourites for their friendship, to the bitter annoyance of their powerful relatives; and both died violently, far from London, in remote castles. History repeats itself because men are sometimes like each other.

To complete the comparison, it should be added that these two kings were also alike in being tall, handsome and athletic, fond of hunting, clothes, reading and gay companions. They both were brave, but uninterested in pursuing war for its own sake. In many ways they were *modern* rather than *medieval* in their outlook. For them, life was to be lived to the full—the sound of the flute was dearer to their ears than the trumpet's snarl, the touch of velvet more desirable than the cold clasp of armour.

Such men are always doomed, from the start, in a world where the majority despise artistry and grace.

Edward's doom is foreshadowed by the place in which he was born, on April 25th, 1284, two years after Prince Llewelyn had died.

In the Eagle Tower of Caernarvon Castle, at the head of a flight of winding stairs, is a small and oppressive cell of dour grey stone, no more than twelve feet long and eight feet wide. A cold, dim prison of a room; a place where a man could cry out with fear or agony, and never be heard.

This is the room where Edward II was born.

The room in which he was imprisoned at Berkeley is rather lighter today, since it has latticed windows almost down to floor level. But, in all essentials, it is the same room as the one in which he was born. A place where a man could cry out in fear and agony, and be unheard.

Edward, a gay butterfly, a firefly, a flame, passed from one dark den, through life, to another dark den, to be extinguished after enjoying what pleasures the grim world agreed to loan him for a while.

In primitive communities since the dawn-world, certain men have been chosen, or have sometimes, perhaps unwittingly, chosen themselves, to die for their people; to act as scapegoats, as sacrifices; to draw upon themselves rather than upon their fellows the wrath of whatever gods they prayed to. So disaster would pass from the tribe, the village or the country, and corn would spring again, the seas give fish, the forests deer. Enemies would draw away from the frontiers and life would be peaceful again.

Perhaps the “old religion” persisted longer than we think, and in strangely tortuous directions. A red-haired youth, having been chosen as a sacrifice, and having been permitted a year of life’s pleasures, was laid upon the altar-stone of Stonehenge and “sent to join his father, the sun”, so that his folk should live well through the coming harvest and winter-time.

William Rufus, the red-haired one, fell, pierced by the very arrow he had given his huntsman, in the New Forest—an almost sacred grove, if we are to judge by the strict laws which governed hunting there. This could have been an accident, as most history books tell us it was—but for the fact that men in distant parts of England, and even on the Continent of Europe, were *expecting* the “accident” to happen that day. “Has *he* died yet?” they asked travellers from the south of England.

Both Edward II and Richard II had light auburn hair. They both led lives of pleasure, which culminated in an almost ritualistic death. It was as though they had *been chosen*, by the men about them, the barons, even the clergy, just as many others had been chosen, “to die for the people”, though they did not die in the dark groves or upon sacred stone.

But back to the beginning. Prince Edward was born, his mother being Eleanora of Castille, a Spanish Princess; his father, Edward I, “The Hammer of the Scots”, a stern-faced, unbending man, who was at Rhuddlan Castle at the time, contemplating his punishment of the headstrong Welsh after the downfall of Llewelyn.

The story goes that he hurried to Caernarvon Castle and carried the baby out on his shield, to offer him, as their new Prince, to the Welsh chieftains who had lost their true Prince, Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, so short a time before in the wood at Builth.

But in fact, Edward was not pronounced Prince of Wales until 1301, when he was a strapping young fellow of seventeen. And the place was Lincoln, where a Parliament was being held, and not gaunt Caernarvon. Nevertheless, the inaccuracy matters little. What does matter is the Prince’s temperament.

He was unlike all the men about him, his father included. Edward I trained his son in war, taking him to fight the Scots at an early age, and making him swear to carry his father’s bones into Scotland one day, just as Crusaders carried Holy Relics against the Saracen, to bring the northern rebels to their knees.

Prince Edward, of course, made the promise—but was too delicately disinterested to carry it out. He was more attracted to his gay young favourite, Piers Gaveston, a knight from Gascony, than to his father—or to his great bully of a cousin, Thomas, Duke of Lancaster, who was the leader of the baronial hounds that yapped constantly about the Prince’s heels.

Edward and Gaveston, who was given Carisbrooke Castle, in the Isle of Wight, were merry companions and frequented taverns and such play-houses as there were. Edward, who was fond of buffoonery, once honoured a jester by making him a Bishop for leaping over a table. Gaveston, who was a great teaser, nicknamed most of the English barons and used these names publicly, to the barons’ embarrassment: Lancaster was “the Actor”, Pembroke “the Jew”, and Warwick “the Black Dog”. And when these noblemen showed their resentment at the Gascon’s wit, he challenged them to combat and unhorsed them all at a tournament held in Wallingford, near Oxford.

Edward I disapproved of Gaveston and exiled him; but when Edward II succeeded to the throne, he not only fetched the Gascon back, but created him Earl of Cornwall and married him to his niece, Margaret of Gloucester.

The barons fumed still more when Edward went to France, in 1308, to bring back his future wife, Isabella, the daughter of Philip the Fair, and left Gaveston in charge of England as the Regent!

Such insults could not be endured for ever by the proud barons. In 1312 they rebelled, chased the King and Gaveston as far as Scarborough and then, by an act of treachery, having offered him safe conduct back to France, captured the Gascon and murdered him. This was the particular revenge of Warwick, the “Black Dog”. By a curious quirk of history—which is never tired of repeating itself—another of the lords most concerned with the capture and execution of Gaveston was Henry, the first Lord Percy of Alnwick, whose descendants harried Richard II and his favourites to death!

For ten days after that, Edward took a spade and dug ditches in Clarendon Park, as though to work off his vengeful energy.

Now it was Thomas of Lancaster’s turn to gain his revenge on the King. In 1314 he forced Edward to ride against the Scots under Robert Bruce. The battle of Bannockburn resulted, in which Edward’s force was bitterly humiliated by the Scots—due, it is thought, to the fact that Lancaster had come to a secret agreement with Bruce not to press his side of the engagement. . . .

Edward was now humbled, but not defeated, by these lords, who called themselves the Ordainers and ruled England with the King as their puppet, led by Lancaster, who now held five earldoms. But the King planned revenge secretly, and soon found a new favourite, Hugh Despenser, a different type of man from the gay and witty Gaveston, but one capable of beating the barons at their own bullying game. . . . A merciless warrior.

Isabella, the French Queen, once more neglected by her scheming husband, and being a woman of a vicious temperament, formed an alliance with Roger Mortimer, one of the lords who were supposed to protect the Welsh border, a descendant of those Normans who ground Wales down.

At last rebellion flared up again, and in a great battle at Boroughbridge, Edward and Despenser utterly routed the barons.

By a strangely prophetic chance, the King had the furious Duke of Lancaster taken to the beetling castle of Pontefract in Yorkshire—the fortress in which Richard II was later to be murdered—and there beheaded him. All England was shocked that he should have treated his cousin so, but Edward, drunk with his new power, laughed in the faces of his people, and settled down to enjoy his favourite’s company, as he had enjoyed that of

Gaveston in the early days, by feasting and drinking and listening to gay music.

Edward spent much of his time now at Windsor Castle, hunting with his favourite and leaving Isabella to her own devices. The Despenser family ruled England, at first well, and then with an ever-growing selfishness which the idle, pleasure-loving King completely ignored.

Such a situation could not go on for ever. Queen Isabella found a way to put an end to it. In 1325 she went to France, taking with her the heir to the throne, Edward of Windsor, later to become the great warrior, Edward III, who fought at Crécy.

To all intents and purposes she had gone on her husband's behalf, and with his permission, to do homage for Aquitaine, an English holding in France. In actual fact, she had gone to raise an army, together with Roger Mortimer, so as to punish the carefree husband who had so humiliated her. In this matter it is interesting to note what power a French Princess had in English affairs: four generations later, another French Princess, Katherine of Valois, wife of Henry V, was to show how she too could sway the fortunes of England, but in a less brutal way than Isabella.

Edward II's Queen returned in 1326, with Mortimer and a great army, landing in Essex and declaring—for want of a better excuse—that she had come to avenge Thomas, Duke of Lancaster, who had been butchered at Pontefract Castle. . . .

Edward's sun had set. He and his favourite were hunted like stags across the country and took refuge on the Despenser estates in Glamorgan. They tried to escape by sea, but winds as contrary as those that kept Richard II in Ireland flung them back on to the Welsh coast, where they were captured, ironically, by the *new* Earl of Lancaster, who had his father's death to avenge.

Despenser, not given the noble privilege of the axe, was hanged from a gibbet fifty feet high, "so that all the countryside should see what fate awaited the men who misled a king!"

As for Edward of Caernarvon, he was taken in chains to the castle where Llewelyn ap Gruffydd had first met his sweetheart, Eleanor, daughter of Simon de Montfort—the great red sandstone castle of Kenilworth—and there was imprisoned until such time as the barons, led now by Mortimer, should decide on his fate.

In that massive keep, perhaps even in that terrible and lightless dungeon that plunges down, sheer, into the ground, Edward thought on his past pleasures, and feared for the future of his young son, Edward III, a boy he had always loved, but had had little chance to play with.

In the weeks when he lay, half starved and in utter misery, the player-King found the opportunity to write some strangely pathetic verses:

*In winter-time death found me,
By cruel Fortune thwarted,
My life a wormy ruin
And all my dreams aborted.*

*Fair Isabel I dearly loved,
But now the spark is dead;
But now the spark is dead;
Dead, dead, the spark is dead!*

*Upon my son, in stately pomp,
A crown of gold they've placed:
Keep him, dear Jesu, Son of Grace,
From their usurping hands.*

*Let them all be brought to shame
Who seek to injure him. . . .*

On April 3rd, 1327, the sad King was secretly moved to Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire, where he was subjected to the harshest treatment possible, in the hopes that he would die. But physically he was so robust that he survived damp dungeons, filthy water and polluted food.

Late in September, after over five months of persistent cruelty, he still survived somehow, the flame of revenge burning in him, against his wife and Roger Mortimer, keeping him alive.

But by this time Edward's continued existence was an embarrassment to the Regent and the perfidious Queen. Mortimer sent to Berkeley Castle and, with the excuse that Thomas, Lord Berkeley, was treating the royal prisoner too luxuriously, replaced him as gaoler by a pair of reliable murderers, Lord Maltravers and Sir Thomas Gurney.

What these two did to lonely Edward, in the great and rambling red stone castle on the night of September 21st, will never be known. According

to the playwright Marlowe, Edward was smothered with a mattress in a stinking dungeon; but another account alleges that the tormented king's shrieks could be heard beyond the high walls of Berkeley—which would seem to argue that he was not smothered, whatever else happened to him.

The room in Berkeley Castle in which Edward met his end can still be seen through a grill in the “King’s Gallery”. Its walls are ten feet thick. Even the voice of a strong man in his direst agony could scarcely be heard far from such a place.

So Edward, born in a dark cell in Caernarvon, died in a dark cell in Berkeley—the gay bird whose wings were cruelly clipped. It was given out that he died a “natural death”.

It was left to his son, Edward III, the boy for whom he had once written a poem, to grow in strength and to execute Roger Mortimer one day. Isabella of France was sent into close confinement in a convent at Hertford. The body of poor Edward II was buried in the Cathedral at Gloucester and a magnificent tomb raised over it by the boy who, one day, was to become the father of the Black Prince, and conquer France, Isabella’s country, once more.

Chapter 5

Richard II and the Tower of London— Fourteenth Century

To young King Richard, who was only fourteen at the time, came frightening news, as he sat lonely in the White Tower of his castle in London, one of his many royal homes.

The year was 1381, and from many country districts of England came news that the ordinary folk, the peasants, were gathering together, murmuring angrily that they were being treated like slaves by the gentlemen of England.

In Kent, Essex, Sussex and Bedford, these country-folk were most infuriated, for they were bound by law to plough the lands of the gentry, to harvest their grain, to thresh and winnow it and to carry home the hay harvest, without payment, just as slaves might do. They felt tied to the land, while their noble masters rode freely here and there, leading a life of gaiety. To make matters worse, the Poll Tax, first introduced to pay for wars against France, had recently been trebled, and so bore heavily on every labouring man.

“For what reason do they hold us in bondage?” demanded the Kentish priest, John Ball, as he assembled the crowds about him every Sunday, after Mass. “Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve? Why should they be more masters than ourselves? They are clothed in velvet and rich stuffs, ornamented with ermine and other furs, while we are forced to wear poor clothing. They have wines, spices, and fine bread, while we have only rye and the refuse of the straw; and when we drink, it must be water. If we do not perform our service, we are beaten, and we have no sovereign to whom we may complain. . . . Let us go to the King and remonstrate with him; he is young, and from him we may obtain a favourable answer; and if not, we must ourselves seek to amend our condition.”

Now John Ball had already been thrown into prison three times before, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, for this kind of mad speech. He was such a man as could excite all who heard him, by his great voice and his savage

gestures. His rebellious sayings echoed through the countryside, from tavern to tavern, and the simple cottagers began to think of him as their saviour as they passed on his curious rhymes against the gentlefolk of England.

Even the citizens of London began to gossip in the narrow streets and ale-houses, saying that Ball was right, and that the gentlemen of the City had gathered great riches for themselves while the poor starved in the gutters. They even went so far as to send messages to John Ball and his companions, encouraging them, and telling them that London would welcome them if they cared to march to the city and demand their rights.

But John Ball, rough as he was, was nothing when compared with his two closest friends, Jack Straw and Wat Tyler. They were the sort of men who felt a constant grudge against life, and who were as ready to cut a man's throat as to tie up their shoelaces. Those country-folk who were not willing to march with Wat Tyler were as good as dead men already, for he was a violent man, of a temper so savage and brutal that no one dared stand against him. Once a collector of the Poll Tax had treated Tyler's young daughter with such harshness that her father had struck him dead with a hammer; after which, the killing of men came easily to him.

When Richard, the young King, heard that these fellows had sworn to come to London and seek him out, he was uneasy in his mind. His uncles, the Dukes of Gloucester and Arundel, had never liked him. They were scheming barons of the old sort, domineering and at times even murderous to all who would give in to them. And Richard was a gentle boy, delicately featured, and interested in books, not at all the sort of son one would have imagined the famous warrior, the Black Prince, might have had. . . .

Richard of Bordeaux, for he had been born out of England, was not a favourite with his blustering uncles. Only the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, came near to understanding him—and John of Gaunt was away on the Scottish Border with his army when the peasants began their march on London. The peasants hated Gaunt, who knew well enough where he was safest, on this occasion. . . .

From time to time Richard even wondered about this one good uncle. Was John of Gaunt deliberately staying away from London at this time, leaving him to deal with these affairs alone? Was it because Gaunt wanted Richard to fall beneath the pikestaves and axes of the peasants? Did Gaunt want his own son, Henry Bolingbroke, to become king when Richard was gone?

The boy was beset by such doubts, for though he had been king now for four years, he had never known what it was like to trust anyone, not even his own relatives, who had squabbled like creatures of the forest to have power over him. He had never known what it was like to be king in his own right; always one uncle or the other had dictated what he was to do, to say, which clothes he was to put on. And usually they were such ugly clothes—especially when chosen by Uncle Arundel!

As for Uncle Gloucester—he *would* keep reminding Richard of his father, the Black Prince, who had been so brave at Crécy against the French nearly forty years ago, and had died in the Palace of Westminster on Trinity Sunday, only five years before. Richard wished to God that his famous father were still alive to deal with Wat Tyler and his rabble. *He* would have known what to do.

And he wished that his uncles would stop sneering at his own differences from his father, would stop telling him that he was more like his great-grandfather, Edward II, than anyone else. . . . Edward II, poor deserted man, a lover of books and of fine clothes, but never of war. Edward II, who had hated *his* relatives, too, and had ended his days in mortal agony at Berkeley Castle, after being chased over his own kingdom like a stag before the hounds.

As he sat in the White Tower, receiving messages of the peasants marching towards London from all directions, Richard of Bordeaux wondered who was his friend now. Sir Robert de Namur, the Earl of Salisbury, the Chancellor, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and good Sir William Walworth, Mayor of London? Walworth was perhaps the best of the bunch; he at least was an honest man with no favours to ask. But would the others still stand with the King when the rebels came nearer?

Richard's spies had brought him word that sixty thousand rebels were coming up from the southern counties alone, destroying wherever they could, even the holy relics at Canterbury, and forcing certain knights to march with them. In fact, he had heard that there were a great many noblemen who had already thrown in their lot with Tyler, simply to keep their own heads on their shoulders!

But not Sir Robert Salle of Norwich. He at least had been loyal when the men of the Midlands, under William Lister, had commanded him to ride with them. But then, Salle was no nobleman; he was an honest fellow who had received his knighthood because of his faithful heart and his good services to the Crown, a common man who had risen to high rank. Which

was what William Lister had told him when the rebels stood outside Norwich, waving their pikes and flaming torches.

And Sir Robert had ridden forth alone to order them to disperse, or he would send them packing himself! One against sixty thousand! They had jeered at him and dragged him from his horse; but Salle was a stout fellow and not one to be frightened by shag-haired rogues with axes and butchers' knives. He had turned on them and driven them before him, flailing his good Bordeaux sword about him, putting paid to a dozen of them before they turned and overwhelmed him, like a pack of hounds smothering a great buck. They had torn his body to pieces in their rage, this brave subject.

Richard went to Mass in the Tower, but his thoughts were anything but holy ones. If God willed it, he would have revenge on these rascals, these butchers; he would have revenge on his uncles, too, except Gaunt, one day—the men who had deserted him in his time of need.

Suddenly there came the clatter of wheels within the courtyard, and his mother's carriage came rolling in, sadly battered. His mother, the Princess of Wales, lay back on her cushions, bruised and moaning, in a state of wild hysteria. She had been returning from the Shrine of Saint Thomas at Canterbury when the rebels had ambushed her, treating her so roughly that the poor lady was afraid for her life. As Richard listened to her almost incoherent story he learned that the rebels had been feasted wherever they stopped, as though they were the saviours of England and not the destroyers. Richard sent his mother to a secret house, called the Wardrobe, where he hoped that at least she would be safe. The poor lady was near to madness at that time, because of the fright the rebels had given her.

Then Richard gathered his few friends about him.

“Sir William Walworth,” he asked, “what of my good subjects, the citizens of London? Will they stand by me, do you think?”

Sir William Walworth, the Mayor of London, hung his head in shame.

“Sire,” he said, “already thirty thousand of them have declared they will side with these crazy wolves.”

Richard of Bordeaux shrugged his thin shoulders.

“Very well,” he answered. “We must do the best we may, Sir William.”

It was at this point that a certain knight was rowed across the Thames to the Tower, sent by the rebels as their messenger, though he would gladly have been anywhere else at that moment, for he had no liking for his task.

He was conducted to the King's apartment, where he announced that the rebels were encamped at Blackheath in immense numbers, and that Wat Tyler had commanded Richard to go to them there and discuss the problems which had caused them to march.

At first the King was afraid that this was some trap, but the knight said, "Sire, they swear they will not harm you. Besides, there are sixty thousand of them and nearly a quarter of them without food or drink. If you do not go, God knows what they will do out of revenge. They hold my own dear children as hostages that I shall return to them with a good message from you, and if you refuse me, then I am certain that my own flesh and blood will be destroyed."

After a while Richard turned to this knight and said, "Very well, you may return to Tyler and his fellows and tell them that if they will choose leaders who can put their case fairly, I will go to them and listen to their grievances."

So, on Corpus Christi day, Richard heard Mass in the Tower Chapel and then boarded the royal barge, together with the Earl of Salisbury and other faithful gentlemen. At Rotherhithe the rebels were massed as thick as starlings, until the shore seemed black with them, and all of them shouting and waving their rude weapons like savages when they saw the royal barge heading towards them. Among them was that knight who had brought the message to the King; for he had been told by Tyler that if the King did not arrive, as promised, he would be cut to pieces without mercy.

But when the gentlemen who attended Richard saw how these scoundrels were behaving, they shook their heads and advised the King not to pull in to shore, where he would be at their mercy. And certainly the boy King felt much of his bravery desert him when he saw what mood these men were in. They were standing chest deep in the water and baying like hounds at him.

Then Richard suddenly realised that he was in a cleft stick; if he went ashore, they would assuredly strike him down in their crazed fury; but if he turned and went back across the Thames, they would consider that as an act of betrayal and march on the City like an army of avengers, for their pride was immense at that time.

He did the only thing he could think of, and had the barge rowed up and down, just off-shore and out of range of their missiles. In as loud a voice as he could muster, he called, "My people, what do you wish for? Tell me, for I am your King."

Then one of the great ruffians, who had been elected as a spokesman, waded into the water and yelled out, "We want you to land here, and then we will tell you what we desire, Richard!"

At this the mob began to laugh and scream so wildly that the King knew he would be going to his death if he set foot on shore at Rotherhithe.

And while the boy stood, confused and trembling, the Earl of Salisbury took the law into his own hands and went to the side of the barge.

"Gentlemen," he called out in a clear voice, "you are not properly dressed, nor are you in a fit condition for a king to talk with!"

And as he spoke a great silence fell upon the crowd. It was as though they were struck dumb with fury for a while. Then, before Richard could find his tongue, Salisbury gave orders to the oarsmen to make their way back to the Tower without delay.

Behind them the mob suddenly found their voices again and howled like madmen that it would not be long before they spoke to the King in a language he would well understand, whether they were properly dressed or not!

Within a few hours Richard learned what he had to deal with. The rebels came into London with a vengeance! They burned down the houses of lawyers and courtiers as they marched, demolished the Marshalsea prison and set free all the rogues and vagabonds who were in the cells, and then broke into the palace of the Savoy, which belonged to John of Gaunt, the only faithful uncle.

Here they gave a taste of their temper, for they killed everyone they could find in that palace, even the common porters, whose honest duty it was to stay in the house; after which they set it on fire, as they did later with the church and hospital of St. John, which dated back to the time of the Crusades.

Then, in the City, they hacked down every Fleming or Lombard they could find, cheered on by the Londoners themselves, and so marched to the Tower, where they encamped like a heathen horde in St. Catherine's Square, lighting their fires and roasting what meat they had laid hands on from grazing-plots and butchers' stalls. Groups of rebels walked to and fro through the City, knocking on doors or stopping anyone they met and commanding their victims to say the words, "Bread and cheese". Whoever spoke these words with the slightest foreign accent was butchered on the spot. The slaughter that night was appalling.

If the King had any doubts that he had treated Wat Tyler's demands unjustly, they were soon dispelled; for that night Tyler searched out the house of one Richard Lyon, a gentleman he had served in France and who had once had occasion to punish him for theft. With a gang of shrieking butchers, Tyler broke into this house, found his old master and hacked off his head, which he afterwards carried on a pole to the gates of the Tower itself.

Then, outside the strong walls of that fortress, the mob called upon the King and his Chancellor to render a full account of all the money which had been collected and spent in the kingdom. For a time it was as though the peasants were the rulers of England and not the King and his officers, so crazy were their demands and executions.

That evening, Richard and a number of his more trusted gentlemen, including Sir William Walworth, the Mayor, gathered together in council, watching the uncouth antics of the rioters in the square below; and for a while it struck them that if only they could get word round to the still loyal citizens of London to arm themselves and attack the rebels while they slept, this nightmarish situation might be ended before dawn.

But one of the gentlemen spoke up and said what was already in young Richard's mind: "Sir, if we begin what we cannot carry through, it will be all over with us and our heirs, and England will be a desert."

So that brief council ended, and in the morning Richard sent out a herald to tell the peasants that if they would gather in the great meadows at Mile End he would meet them there and grant all their demands.

At this there was a great deal of shouting and cheering and most of the mob set off to assemble in the fields, which in those days were used as parks by the citizens of London. Later, King Richard passed out of the Byward Tower, with an escort, and all seemed to be going well for the moment—but what the King did not know was that Tyler, John Ball, Jack Straw and over four hundred of their most bloody-minded henchmen had stayed behind, lurking in any house which would shelter them, in the vicinity of Tower Hill.

And when the royal party had ridden out of the Tower these ruffians rushed into the fortress like avenging furies, striking down all who stood in their way. Before long they had beheaded the Archbishop of Canterbury and other churchmen, a doctor and a sergeant-at-arms. Then, carrying the gory heads with them, they broke into the apartments of the King's mother and, from sheer savagery, cut her bedding to pieces and destroyed what furniture they could.

In the meantime, not knowing about this, the King spoke to the great crowds in the meadows, telling them that he would grant their demands, sending letters stamped with his seal to every village, stating that thenceforward the country-folk should not be treated as slaves. Moreover, he added he would order that his banners should be sent to each corporation of every rebellious county so that in future these country-folk should have a royal banner to march behind and so should become the King's men and not Tyler's.

For a time there was great rejoicing among the simple-hearted fellows who had been tricked by Tyler and his henchmen; and after the secretaries had drawn up the many letters needed, these country-folk set off home once more, almost before the ink was dry.

But the three ringleaders of this great revolt had no wish to receive such trifling things as letters and banners; they, and the many thousands who felt as they did, wanted to rob and to pay off old scores to their hearts' delight. For two days they kept London in a state of panic, as they broke open houses and stole whatever took their fancy, or stormed into taverns and drank their fill of Rhenish wine and Madeira, without offering a penny in payment.

And then, on the Saturday morning, about twenty thousand of these traitors gathered at Smithfield, joined by a great number who had turned back into London, still carrying the King's banners, almost as an act of mockery.

It was at this moment that young King Richard rode into view, accompanied by a small number of knights, on his way from hearing Mass in Westminster Abbey. Immediately, Wat Tyler called out to his companions that when he gave them the signal with his hand they were to step forward and kill everyone save the King.

"But hurt him not," the rebel said, "for we can do what we please with him; carrying him with us through England, we shall be lords of the whole country, without any opposition!"

Then, with the laughter of his companions in his ears, Wat Tyler spurred his sorry nag forward until its head touched the crupper of the King's fine charger, as though in contempt.

"King," he called out roughly, "dost thou see all these men here?"

Richard answered calmly, "Yes. Why dost thou ask?"

“Because,” answered Wat Tyler, with a great laugh, “they are all under my command, and have sworn to do whatever I shall order.”

Richard stared at the man coldly and said, “Very well, I have no objection to it.”

For a moment, blustering Wat was taken aback. Then he said the first thing he could think of.

“Ought they to depart without having thy letters?”

The boy on the fine horse smiled gently and said, “The letters will be delivered to them, by towns and villages, according to our agreement. I do not go back on my word, man!”

Now Tyler was at a loss, for he had not expected young Richard to take it all as calmly as he had done, and he wondered what else he could do or say which would give him reason to raise his hand so that the King’s party might be butchered. Then his eyes lighted on a young squire who rode beside the King, carrying a sword.

“What hast thou there?” cried the rebel. “Give me thy dagger.”

“That I will not,” said the squire, hotly.

But Richard of Bordeaux turned to the young man with a smile and whispered, “Give it to him, my friend. What’s in a mere dagger?”

And when Wat Tyler had the dagger he began to fling it into the air and to catch it, in derision.

“Now give me thy sword,” he commanded, as though he were a nobleman and the squire a servant.

This time the young squire was beside himself with anger. No words on earth would have made him give up that rich weapon.

“This is the King’s sword,” he said, “and thou art not worthy to bear it. If only thou and I were alone together thou wouldst not have dared to say what thou hast, for a heap of gold as high as the church yonder!”

Now Wat Tyler’s temper overcame him. To be spoken to in this manner before all his ruffians was more than he could bear. He began to spur his horse towards the squire, his face red with fury, the dagger still clenched in his hand.

“By my troth,” he yelled out, for all to hear, “I will not eat this day until I have thy head!”

Only then did King Richard lose his coolness of manner. In a low voice he said, "Lay hands on him!"

Immediately twelve gentlemen rode forward, surrounding the rebel leader, and under their long, church-going robes they were fully armed. They formed a screen about Wat Tyler, who suddenly felt himself cut off from his fellow-murderers.

Turning to Sir William Walworth, Tyler said, "What has this to do with you?"

The Mayor of London said grimly, "It does, fellow, and I will not live a day unless you pay for your insolence!"

As he spoke those words, Sir William Walworth drew from under his robe a short and heavy-bladed sword, shaped much like a Saracen scimitar. Tyler, who had butchered many men in his time, sat with the little dagger in his hand, staring in terror at this thing. He saw the harsh face of the loyal Mayor, the red and furious face of the squire he had so insulted, the cold, impassive face of the boy King he had meant to capture and use as a puppet. He read his death in their eyes.

There was no room even for him to turn his nag about, for the King's gentlemen hemmed him in completely. And as he swung his head round, to yell out to his rebels, Walworth struck him coldly and carefully behind the neck. Tyler fell instantly from the saddle to the cobblestones, under the hooves of the King's horses.

Then, as he writhed, the squire, John Standwich, quickly dismounted and made a sharp thrust with that very sword which Wat Tyler had so roughly demanded only a minute before. The rebel's life was ended.

And so was the rebellion. As the King's gentlemen drew back their horses to expose the still body, the great crowd of peasants gave a cry of despair. Some of them aimed their arrows at the young King, who rode forward towards them, still smiling, looking more like his warrior father, the Black Prince, than he had ever done before.

"Gentlemen," he said, in tones of authority, "you shall have me for your captain: I am your King, remain peaceable."

And while the ashamed rebels stood, undecided what to do, over eight thousand of the loyal citizens of London, some of them fully armed, arrived and moved towards the rebels, relentlessly and full of grim purpose, for many of them had lost their homes and their families in this awful occupation of the city. They were men who had a debt to pay now.

And while Richard knighted John Standwich on the spot, together with the draper who had led the force of Londoners, Sir Robert Knolles, a brave soldier, rode among the frightened mob and took back all the King's banners and letters of pardon.

“Now trust that the King will have mercy upon you,” he said to the peasants. “Get you home and pray! You will have need for prayer!”

And that night heralds went from place to place in the city, announcing that all men who had not lived for the space of one year in the city were to return to their own villages without delay, on pain of instant death. The remaining rebels poured out of London, anxious to be gone before dawn, when the executioners were to be waiting with their axes.

But before they went, they told the officers where John Ball and Jack Straw were to be found, hiding in an old ruin. It was only an hour before the heads of these ruffians grinned down from London Bridge, in place of those they themselves had set up in their brief space of victory.

And Richard returned to the Tower, to comfort his distressed mother.

Chapter 6

Richard II and Windsor Castle— Fourteenth Century

BUT there were days of happiness in the life of Richard as well as days of darkness. There were the joyous years when he hunted through the Great Park of Windsor with his pretty young wife, Anne of Bohemia, hawk on fist and harness jingling, and all thoughts of Wat Tyler gone from his mind, all thoughts of that bloody day at Smithfield when Walworth drew the curved and vicious sword from beneath his robes. . . .

Windsor, where the vines planted by Henry II now grew in such abundance that it was impossible to convert them all to wine, so that they must be sent for sale in the common market; Windsor, where the poet Geoffrey Chaucer held the office of Clerk to the Works, at a salary of two shillings a day, but seemed reluctant to carry out his duties of pressing carpenters into service when there were fine resounding verses to set on paper and good wine to drink in the buttery. . . .

Windsor, where the young keeper Herne was always ready to ride or hawk or bend the long-bow with his King.

Whenever Richard stayed at Windsor his first request was for Herne to attend him, for among all the keepers there, no man could equal Herne—at hunting the fox, the marten, the badger, at starting up a wild boar or letting fly a falcon. No one could pick out and head off a great buck more skilfully than Herne, and Richard knew it, and many were the rewards and favours given by the King to this arrogant young rider.

Indeed, so close was the King to Herne that before long the other keepers began to hate the young fellow, to wish that some misfortune might overtake him in his pride, so as to humble him. And certain of them even went so far as to vow that one dark night, if he did not mend his ambitious ways, they would lie in ambush for him and slip a hunting-knife between his ribs.

But, if he knew of this, young Herne paid little attention to such jealousy, and still continued to wait on the King as he had always done,

thinking, like many other favourites, that the good days would never come to an end.

So it happened that one day when the Earl of Oxford, Richard's dearest friend, was staying at Windsor, the King commanded a chase in the forest, and soon Herne had found for them a great hart near Hungerford, a splendid creature that the King swore to ride down before the day was out.

As usual, it was not long before the other huntsmen were outstripped by Richard and Herne. Even Lord Oxford, a daring rider, lagged behind, as these two plunged on and on through the forest, shouting like madmen and burying their light hunting-spurs in their horses flanks with excitement.

Then, suddenly, the tragedy happened. In a clearing of the forest, the maddened hart stopped and turned at bay, shaking its great head with fury as the riders, unable to halt, came on at it.

Richard's horse, powerless to swerve at such a speed, took the horn in its chest and, terrified, reared so violently that the King was flung like a rag doll on to the ground and lay dazed as the hart set its great head and charged him.

In another few seconds the King of England would have been gored to death, but Herne, seeing the situation, leaped from his horse and, flinging himself forward, took the hart's horn in his own side as Richard rolled clear. Then, grappling the furious beast about the neck, Herne drew his hunting-knife across its throat so that it should do no further damage, and fell backwards, groaning.

Now Richard was upon his knees, beside the bleeding huntsman.

"What can I do for you, my dear friend?" he asked, sadly.

Herne gazed up at him, his eyes starting with pain. "Nothing, my lord," he groaned. "All I ask is a grave from you, for this wound is beyond curing. I have seen enough of such things to know."

King Richard wrung his hands. "Do not speak such words," he said. "You shall have the best doctor in my kingdom to tend to you, Herne."

Herne smiled grimly and spoke an old forest proverb: "Hart's horn bringeth to the bier," he said.

Now Richard was beside himself with grief.

"If God will let you live, my friend," he said, "I swear that you shall be the head keeper of my forest, with twenty nobles a year for wages."

Now Herne was beyond speech. Yet with his last strength he set his hunting-horn to his pale lips and winding the *mort*, the death-call, fell back in a faint. And as the King stood over him, the other huntsmen rode up, headed by Lord Oxford.

The first to leap down was the head keeper, Osmond Crooke, a brutish fellow who had never liked Herne. He made little attempt to hide his satisfaction that his young rival had been so terribly hurt.

Winking at his comrades, he drew his keen-edged hunting-knife and said, "It is a shame that Herne should suffer so. It will be an act of Christian mercy to put him out of his misery, sire."

And with that he would have drawn his blade across the wounded man's throat had not the King stepped forward and pushed him away.

"Stand back, you dog!" said Richard wildly. "This man has saved my life! By all the saints, I would give a great reward to anyone who could heal poor Herne!"

The King had hardly spoken when a dark and haggard-faced man, mounted on a wild black stallion and dressed most curiously in hides, pushed his way forward and said in a harsh voice, "I accept your offer, sire. I will heal this man!"

Richard stared at the fellow, whom he had never seen before and who looked more like a corpse cut down from the gibbet than a huntsman in a royal forest.

"Who art thou, fellow?" he asked, feeling much as he had done that day when Wat Tyler had thrust forward at him in Smithfield.

The man laughed lightly. "I am a forester, sire," he said. "But I am not unskilled in surgery, of a sort."

Osmond Crooke, the head keeper, stood before the man, his knife still in his hand, his face hard set with the thought that this stranger might be as good as his word and get Herne upon his feet again.

"You remind me shrewdly of Arnold Sheafe, who was outlawed for deer-stealing in this very forest," he said viciously.

But the stranger only smiled down at him and said, "I am no outlaw, master. My name is Philip Urswick and I live in a cottage on Bagshot Heath, which is no crime that I have ever heard of."

Then King Richard waved these fellows to silence and said, "Have done with this mummary. A man lies bleeding here. Cure him, Urswick, and whatever crimes you may have committed, I shall pardon you."

The dark-faced man smiled, a strange and wrinkled smile, and bowed towards the King. Those who saw that smile felt as though a winter chill had blown across their hearts suddenly.

"You have said enough, sire," he whispered, so low that few beside the King heard his words.

Then he sprang from the saddle and went to the dead hart. With his broad-bladed dagger he sliced off the head of the beast, from nape to underlip, and then fastened the still bloody mask, horns and all, over the white face of Herne, with two leather thongs.

Those who watched gazed in astonishment. The King, who was used to delicate things and lived among music and scents and silken brocades, felt his gorge rise within him at the sight. He was almost sick.

But when Urswick commanded that the keepers should bear Herne's body to the cottage on Bagshot Heath, Richard bowed his head in consent, as though he too approved of all that had been done that day.

As Osmond Crooke, the head keeper, helped to roll Herne on to a hurdle, he turned and whispered wickedly at the dark stranger, "I have been watching thee, fellow, and now I am certain that thou art Arnold Sheafe, who was outlawed for deer-stealing."

The man gazed back at him with a twisted smile.

"What does it matter," he said, "as long as I have the King's pardon? Yet, in any case, I can assure you that Herne will relieve you of your post as head keeper! There is nothing so sure!"

By this time Richard and the Earl of Oxford had ridden away, unable any longer to stand the sight of Herne with that blood-soaked mask upon his head. Osmond Crooke moved closer to the dark-faced stranger so that the other keepers should not hear his words.

"Finish the job the hart has begun," he said, "and you shall never go short of venison from this forest, I swear it!"

The man who called himself Urswick laughed quietly.

"Thank you for nothing, master," he said. "But I am in a mood to assist you, on one condition—that you will swear to grant the first request I make

of you, only provided it lies within your power. What do you say?"

Now Osmond Croke felt his jealousy so strong within him that he took the stranger's hand in a hard grip.

"I will agree, with all my heart," he said. "Only kill Herne!"

Urswick shook his dark head.

"That I may not do," he said, "having given my word to the King. But I tell you this—though Herne will recover, he shall lose all his skill as a bowman and all his craft as a hunter. Will that suit you?"

Osmond Croke looked at him wryly.

"If you can bring such a thing to pass, then you are the Dark One himself, I'm thinking," he said.

Urswick shrugged his thin shoulders.

"I cannot control the thoughts that pass across your mind, master," he said. "But what I promise will be done."

Then the keepers rode away, leaving Herne in the wind-swept little hut on the Heath.

Four weeks later Herne came to the King at Windsor Castle, at eleven o'clock in the morning, as Richard was sitting with his wife under a mulberry tree, near to the royal apartment in the castle wall built by Henry III, listening to a bailiff who was reading from a paper.

But it was scarcely the same Herne, for he was thin and pale, and his hands shook like those of a man with the palsy. King Richard gazed at him with some misgiving as the hunter grinned at him, much in the manner of an ape; nevertheless, he kept his kingly word and gave Herne a purse full of nobles and a silver bugle. Then he placed a gold chain about the poor fellow's neck, and gave orders that from this time forward he was to become the head keeper at Windsor and to be lodged in the great castle itself, as though he were a nobleman.

King Richard never forgave an enemy—and never forgot a friend. This Herne had saved his life, he remembered. Yet there was now something about the hunter which raised doubts in the King's mind—those wide, empty, staring eyes; that continual shaking of the head; the trembling of the hands; the hollow, dispirited voice that seemed to find words hard to come by. Surely, such a man could not sight a trail, or follow it surely, or draw the bow swiftly when the hunt was up and put an end to the quarry?

A week later Richard called upon Herne to ride with him in Windsor Great Park. The man came with him sluggishly, and scarcely had they begun to gallop across the green turf in search of game than Herne's horse reared and flung him to the ground, a thing which had never happened before.

As Herne rose, gazing wildly about him, the other keepers nudged each other and smiled.

And when they found a buck at last, Herne came in at the tail end of the chase, although Richard had mounted him on the swiftest black horse in the stables, so that he should be first at the kill.

Now there was so much muttering among the keepers that Richard, who was well used to the signs of man's discontent, said, "Thou art out of practice, old friend. A man must ride every day if he is to keep a good seat on a mettlesome horse. But show us thy skill in another way. Put an arrow into yonder buck; he is but seventy yards away, and I have seen thee strike down one at twice that distance."

Herne took the cross-bow and aimed. The bolt missed its mark so widely that no man could have leapt the distance between bolt and buck.

Richard's face grew dark, for he had grown to be a demanding man, much like his father, the Black Prince. All saw that look and understood it. Even poor Herne, who seemed to shrink in stature.

But the King made his mouth smile again.

"Osmond Crooke," he called out, as pleasantly as he was able, "lend Herne thy bow. It is a truer one than the cross-bow he carries. Let us see him put a shaft into yon magot-pie that sits on the bough before us."

The shaft sped and buried its head in a tree beside the magot-pie, which flew away with a cackling cry, and those of the keepers who dared laughed in unison with the bird.

That evening Richard sent for Herne to the Winter Parlour, where the King sat with Queen Anne before the fire, playing chess.

"Herne, dear friend," he said, "today was a bad day. To tell the truth of it, I cannot keep thee as my head keeper unless things change."

Herne bowed his pale head and went from the King's presence. And the next day he went out into the Great Park alone, with arrows, horse and hounds. But those keepers who spied on him saw that not a shaft went straight, not a hound would come at his call—and his horse carried him wherever it wished, in spite of rein or spur.

A week later the King called another hunt; and this time Herne's failures were so frequent that on the way back to the castle King Richard rode beside him and whispered, "This is a bad business. Take a week's rest, my friend. Then I must try thee again, for there is great unrest among the others, and if thou canst not show thy old skill, then I shall be forced to discharge thee."

As soon as the King spoke these words Herne gave a great cry and swung his steed about. Then off among the trees he galloped, laughing in a shrill, high voice. No one followed him, but there was much nudging of ribs and quiet laughter.

Late that night Herne came back to Windsor Castle, but looking so strange that the cooks in the kitchens flung down their ladles and ran away from their fires. Instead of a tunic, he wore a greasy old horse-hide, jagged and tattered at the edges. On his head, worn like a helmet, was the shrivelled mask of the hart, its antlers sticking up on either side. About his waist he wore a rusty chain which, all men knew, came from the gibbet at the entrance to the Park. His face was that of a madman now, and the words he spoke could not be understood by anyone who heard them.

And when Herne had danced about the rooms and passages, he stood upon a bench and screamed out, "My skill I leave to the scoundrel Crooke!"

Then, laughing wildly, he ran from the castle among the dark trees of the forest, his chain clanking as he went.

An hour later a pedlar, who was crossing the Park to sell his wares to the serving-wenches at Windsor Castle, ran in to say that he had seen a man with antlers like a deer, hanging by the neck from an old oak tree, dead.

Immediately there was a great commotion among the keepers, who ran out excitedly and congratulating each other to the tree, led by the pedlar.

But when they got there, the body had gone; not even the rope remained. And when the King was told, he sent for priests to say Masses for the dead man, but no man would perform such Masses. A man who took his own life, they said, must go his own way to Hell.

As they said this, a great thunderstorm arose, and lightning jagged through the black sky, lighting up the Great Park. In the morning the King saw that the oak tree on which Herne had swung had been blasted.

He sent for old Osmond Crooke and reinstated him as the head keeper of Windsor. And that day King Richard left the castle to go to the Tower of London with his wife Anne, for there was some unrest among the citizens of London which must be attended to.

And when he had gone, Osmond Crooke and his band of laughing men rode out into the Great Park to knock down a deer or two that they could sell for their own profit in the villages round about.

But every shot which Crooke made went wide of the mark. His hounds snarled at him when he spoke to them. His horse carried him this way and that, as though it despised him. Seeing how things were going, he complained of a pain in the stomach, and left the hunt in charge of one Roger Barfoot. But Roger was no luckier—nor were any of the others. It was as though every man of that party had a curse upon him.

That very night, they rode in a body to the hut on Bagshot Heath, to find Urswick and to ask him to release them from the spell which so hampered them. The dark-faced forester smiled into their anxious faces, as though he recalled how Osmond Crooke had once accused him of being an outlaw in the presence of the King. Then he shrugged his gaunt shoulders and said, “Such a curse is not soothed away with a hot poultice, my friends. It calls for a sharper cure.”

Old Osmond Crooke fell upon his knees before the man and held up gnarled hands in supplication.

“For the love of God, master,” he begged, “how can we be free of it? Our living depends on our skill at the chase. What can we do?”

Urswick said, “Go to the tree where Herne destroyed himself. There, mayhap, you will learn how to act.”

Then he turned his back upon them, as though they were already ghosts, and so, crestfallen, they mounted their horses once more and rode into the forest.

It was midnight when they reached Home Park, and reined their horses before the whitened tree trunk.

Putting on a show of bravery, Roger Barfoot said, “By the Mass, but this is as daft a piece of foolery as ever men got up to! I’m for my fireside and a jug of the King’s wine, if I can persuade the buttery-wench to draw me one!”

He had no sooner spoken than a strange blue flame began to flicker about the bole of the tree. Then, as the light grew, they all saw standing before them a ragged figure, dressed in horse-hide and rattling a rusty chain in its shrivelled hands. Upon its head was a ghastly helmet crowned by the antlers of a stag. For a while, as the keepers gazed at this awful sight, it

waved its bony head and laughed so witlessly that even Osmond Croke, a brave man in his way, knew terror in all his limbs.

“What must we do, master?” he asked at last, when speech came back to his tongue.

For a while Herne laughed on, as though the world stood still. Then, in a hoarse and charnel whisper, he seemed to say, “I’ll see thee here at midnight, Osmond Croke. Fail not our tryst tomorrow, fellows. And see that I have my two black hounds, and the black horse that Richard gave me when I was his man.”

And as they watched, the blue light dwindled to nothing but a faint shadow, and the antlered thing had gone, as though into the ground.

The keepers rode home in silence, and the next day every one of them avoided the other’s eyes, for it seemed that a great guilt now hung over them like a dark thunder-cloud. But that night they gathered together again, and now Osmond Croke led Herne’s black horse, while Herne’s two black hounds ran beside him.

Once more before the blasted oak they halted, when suddenly the two hounds began to howl so brutishly and the stallion to paw the air and whinny so savagely, that all men drew back.

Then, with a sudden rushing sound, as of a great wind, Herne was seated in the saddle, the blue flame flickering up and down his body. His black hounds leapt up about him, slavering, and his stallion began to toss his head as though he had the devil himself upon his back.

“To the hunt! To the hunt!” screamed Herne, and set his horn to his lips. The high screeching that came from it echoed in men’s ears for many a day—indeed, there were those who never afterwards were free from its sound—and then the strange hunting-party set off at a furious pace across the park. For five miles Herne led them, putting his horse at all that stood in the way and sailing over it as though his mount was a creature of air and fire, not of common flesh.

And at last, when the terrified keepers were afraid that they were riding to doom itself, their antlered captain drew up at the edge of a marsh, where a huge beech tree grew. And there, leaning against the tree, the moonlight playing on his dark and evil face, stood the man they all knew as Urswick.

“Hail, Herne,” he called, raising his right hand in a mocking salute. “Hail, lord of the forest! I see that you ride well-attended this night! So shall

you ride every night, and with the same companions—if they wish to keep their reason!”

Then, turning to Osmond Crooke, the dark one said, “Obey Herne in all things, old man, obey him in all things.”

But even before his last word was spoken, Urswick had thinned into the mist which now swirled about the tree. Then Herne set up a great laughing and swung his horse about, again and again, until the keepers thought he would ride them all down; while his hounds slavered and bellowed and bayed so fiendishly that John Gosford, who had fed them since Herne’s death, was struck with a mortal terror of ever coming near them again.

And so they rode that night behind Herne the Hunter, killing, killing, killing. And just before dawn they dragged four of the fattest bucks beneath the huge beech tree on Herne’s orders, and there left them.

And as the first cocks began to crow, Herne swung round to Osmond Crooke, who by now was shuddering with cold and exhaustion, and said, “Fail not our tryst at midnight tonight, old fellow. But see that this time my companions are more suitably clad.”

And when Osmond Crooke turned to ask Herne what he meant, dawn struck through the leafage of the oak trees, and the head keeper found that he was talking to the rotten stump of an old elm tree.

That day the keepers rolled into their beds, too weary to lift horn spoon to mouth; and that night they rode out once more, now wearing horse-hide and antlers, like their ghastly leader. And again and again they slew the fat bucks, and rode shrieking across the Great Park, under a spell so strong that they did not know night from day, friend from foe, dream from actuality. Their souls were lost.

But at last, when they had grown tired of thinning the herds of deer, Herne led them to other sports, such as riding down travellers who made their way across the park to Windsor.

And once they took as their quarry three pilgrims who had journeyed unscathed from Jerusalem itself.

“Come, fellows,” howled Herne in the voice of a wolf, “here be stout bucks who will give us a run!”

And so, screaming like demons, the antlered band plunged after the terrified travellers, who got almost to the safety of the castle before Herne’s

black hounds dragged them down, and Osmond Crooke and Roger Barfoot drew their keen hunting-blades for the *coup de grâce*.

Then Richard came back to Windsor, and calling his head keeper to him one sunny morning said, "Friend Crooke, is thy bed not comfortable?"

The man looked shrewdly at the King.

"Ay, master," he said, in his own rough way, "it is a bed of goose feathers."

King Richard said, "Then why are thy eyes so red-rimmed? A man on a goose-feather bed should sleep sound at night."

Osmond Crooke rubbed his eyes and said, "It is a touch of the wind, master. It comes from riding thy parks and attending to thy deer, nothing more."

King Richard said to the Earl of Oxford, who was stringing a lute by the fireside, "Robert, this honest fellow is the one to lead us to the place where the ghostly hunters meet, think you not?"

The Earl of Oxford smiled and said, "From the colour of his nose, I would guess that he could lead us to where the King's wine is stored, but little else!"

Then he went on stringing the lute, which was a difficult instrument to get in tune.

And King Richard said, "Crooke, I am a patient man, as thou well knowest. Is there anything I should hear from thee now?"

Osmond Crooke put on the best face he could and said, "Master, I can only tell thee that all is well in the Great Park. I am no scholar, to report aught else. I am no hand at playing on the lute, for example."

The Earl of Oxford began to smile at this, and struck up a merry little air which he had picked up in Aquitaine. And while he played, King Richard said, "Crooke, dear fellow, in the farthest barn there are a dozen suits of horse-hide, with antlered helmets to go with them. Does that surprise thee?"

Then Osmond Crooke knew in his wicked old heart that the secret was out, but he was so stubborn that he would fight to the end.

"Master," he said, "such a thing does not surprise me, for I have been alive many years—many years longer than thee."

Richard nodded and said, “Ay, that is so, fellow; but all things have an end. Every dog has his day, and thy day has come! I cannot have my Parks used as pleasure-grounds for rogues, nor can I have the villagers and their children terrorised, as thou hast terrorised them in my absence.”

Then he blew on a little silver whistle that he always wore about his neck, and two tall men came from behind the hangings. They wore their visors down, and carried daggers in their hands. Osmond Crooke did not know who they were, but he knew well enough what their trade was.

And he knew well enough that he would not eat his dinner that day, or any other.

The riven oak tree from which Herne had once swung was still strong; strong enough to bear the weight of the bodies that hung from it that day, the bodies of the keepers who had once envied gay Herne, and who now were no more, and no less, than he was.

Chapter 7

Richard II and Conway, Flint and Pontefract Castles—Fourteenth Century

RICHARD of Bordeaux had told Osmond Croke that every dog had its day, and that saying applied to every hound, too; every hound of the finest quality, every kingly hound. Every King.

Richard's own day was short, but his pilgrimage towards death in a foul cell at Pontefract Castle must have seemed long enough, in all conscience.

The wicked uncles, Gloucester and Arundel, had always oppressed him, even from the days of the Peasants' Revolt, when they formed a Council and ruled "on the King's behalf"—and became kings themselves, in effect, a position which they found it hard to give up, being men who hungered for power, just as Osmond Croke had done.

True, Richard had his loving young queen, Anne of Bohemia, to console him, and also Robert de Vere, his dear friend, the Earl of Oxford. But de Vere was sent scuttling abroad to save his skin, and in 1394, at Whitsuntide, Anne was stricken down with the plague and died.

Gay Richard, gay despite his enemies, was left alone again, for his one friendly uncle, the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, was more often out of England than in it—finding himself new lands, new marriage alliances.

Most of Richard's other friends, such as Bramber and Burley and Tressillian, good men who had stood by him through thick and thin, counselling him wisely, were captured by trickery and their heads smitten off. Indeed, poor Simon Burley, in 1388, had the unwelcome distinction of being the first man to be executed at Trinity Square on Tower Hill.

The people of England, who for a while had looked on Richard as their saviour after he had got rid of Tyler and his rogues, now began to remember that the King was no warrior, no man to bring home foreign victories, as his father, the Black Prince, had done.

No, Richard had been to Ireland, where there were many rough-and-ready kings, who lived much in the style of the old Celtic chieftains, and bowed the knee to no one, and he had knighted and feasted them to keep

their friendship, instead of slaughtering them as his uncles and his subjects would have wished.

Besides, the Earl of Northumberland, who ruled in Alnwick Castle, and his son, Harry Percy, or “Hotspur” as he was called, had turned against him; and that was serious, for Northumberland was a great earldom then, and the Percys were a great and powerful family who could make or mar a king. Not only did they keep the Scots in check on the Border, they sometimes made alliances with them, and then their combined armies could be really dangerous.

But Richard was still the same stubborn fellow who had ridden out of the Tower to outface brutal Wat Tyler. He had that much of his father in him. He was not one to be bullied all his life by his uncles or his subjects.

He called Uncle Gloucester to him and asked, “How old do you say that I am, my lord?”

Blustering Gloucester said, “Why, you are in your twenty-second year, why ask me?”

“Then I am old enough to manage my own affairs,” said Richard. “I thank you for your past services, my lord, but I need them no longer.”

In 1396, Richard married little Isabella, daughter of the French King, and thereby concluded a permanent peace with France. But though all men of sense saw the wisdom of this, the people of England and the wicked uncles and the treacherous Percys did not. They felt that the King had lost face in obtaining peace; besides, the barons had lost many fine pickings, for they had come to regard France as a land created by the gods for them to loot as they wished—much as the early Vikings had looked on England!

But Richard, with his young Queen at the Tower or at Windsor, brushed away all dark thoughts, and danced and hunted and read his books. He was used to being unpopular; after all, he had known nothing else all his life, so what did this matter?

Though this is not to say that Richard could not show his teeth at times. He came of the wrong father to be a coward.

In 1397, when Gloucester had been unusually offensive, Richard sent to him, while the Duke was feasting at his great castle of Fleshy in Essex, on the pretext of discussing State affairs. When Gloucester arrived on the outskirts of London, Thomas Mowbray, the earl marshal and Duke of Norfolk, quietly arrested him on a charge of treason. Soon afterwards, despite the great Duke’s alternate bullying and pleading, grim-faced

Mowbray put him in a waiting ship and sailed with him to Calais, which was still an English possession, and of which Mowbray was the Captain.

There, according to an old chronicler, Gloucester was effectively silenced, out of hearing of his friends. It is said that as he washed his hands before going to the dining-table, four men came in silently and, slinging a towel round his neck, strangled him. Then they laid him in state on his bed, covered with a rich fur mantle. The report given out was that Gloucester had died of apoplexy while washing his hands before his meal. The men said innocently that they had found it difficult to carry him to his bed, for he was a big man and not over-thin. . . .

Strangely enough, both the French and English people were relieved at this death: the French because Gloucester had never been in favour of peace with them; the English because he had always been a tyrant and they feared that if he came to rule them their taxes would be heavier than before.

Then Richard arrested Arundel and the proud Earl of Warwick—and began to settle down once more to a quiet life.

Quiet, that is, if he disregarded the constant raids of the Scots over the Border, and the incessant feuds and risings of the Irish, who had never taken to English ways, but still lived much as the old Celtic clans had lived, before the Romans came, collecting the heads of their enemies and dressing and behaving as though chivalry had not come into being, as though silks and satins were not known. . . .

The Welsh were an exception, of all the Celtic peoples in Britain. In the main, they had quietened down after the murder of Llewelyn, and had done their best to adapt themselves to the ways of their conquerors. It was almost as though they were already preparing for the time when one of their own families, that of the Tudors, should come to London and reign as kings there. . . .

And among the great Welshmen of that time was one Owen Glendower, a gentle but proud man who had studied at Oxford and at the Inns of Court, who was related to many great Border families, and who traced his descent to Llewelyn the Great, the last native Prince of Wales.

This Llewelyn had been treated treacherously by Lord Grey of Ruthin, in the time of Edward I; and Owen Glendower still held it against Grey's family that they had helped to destroy a relative.

But in the meantime, Glendower attended King Richard faithfully, respecting him, as most Welshmen did, for his bravery and fine manners—

qualities in which the Welsh have always excelled. Owen, too, was brave and civilised. Wearing the plume of a flamingo in his tall helmet, he fought in France, Ireland, and Scotland, beside the English. At Berwick-on-Tweed he galloped at a Scots knight and unhorsed him; then, finding his lance shivered by the impact, he used its splintered stump to drive the other Scots before him like wild goats!

Owen's house at Sycherth, in the parish of Llansilin, not far from Oswestry, was appropriate to the chief Lord of Powys, and is described minutely by his bard, "Iolo Goch".

Iolo tells us that this manor-house, of an Italianate style, stood against heaven on the summit of a green hill and had eighteen apartments. Below it lay the moat, and then the wall, in which was set a costly gate that was never locked and never guarded by a porter, so great was Owen's confidence and hospitality. This does not sound like the braggart Shakespeare has described for us!

Beside the house stood a guest-place of wood, containing eight chambers; a church in the form of a cross with several chapels; a pigeon-house; a mill to which Owen's tenants brought their grain to be ground for them; a well-stocked fish-pond.

In the park were orchards and vineyards, a heronry and a warren. Herds of deer roamed in the woods and meadows.

"The wine and ale, white bread and metheglyn which accompanied the music and song were unstinted and of the best, and no traveller was ever refused admission in this house."

As for Owen's wife, the lady of that manor, "She was the best of wives, the generous mother of a noble family. Happy am I," wrote Iolo, "in her wine and metheglyn. Her children come two by two, a beautiful nest of chieftains."

It was this Owen, this gentleman, who fought beside Richard, just as a later Welshman, Owen Tudor, was to fight alongside Henry V at Agincourt. It was already an old pattern of behaviour, that the Welsh should aid the English, and then suffer for their loyalty. . . .

And in Richard's day, as in the time of his father, the Black Prince, there was no fighter to equal the Welsh archer, the long-bowman, who could clap a shaft through a knight's armour at two hundred yards.

So Richard, sitting in the Tower, or at Windsor, surrounded by truculent English barons, or muttering commoners (who had already forgotten how he

had saved London from the rebels), kept a warm spot in his heart for his good Welshmen and his faithful subjects of Cheshire, who lived on the doorstep of Wales and shared with the Celts an affection for a king who did not harass them at all turns.

And soon he was to need the loyalty of these men—though when that need came, fate prevented him from using it. The story is almost as tragic as that of an ancient Greek play, for it has a ruthlessness, a foregone conclusion in which the hero must pay for his past mistakes, which makes the King's death seem inevitable. Better, perhaps, that Tyler had struck him down that day at Smithfield, or that the hart in the Park at Windsor had rushed in and gored him on the spot. At least, Richard's courage and pride would not then have been broken. He would have died a hero, not a poor humiliated puppet.

It happened this way. Richard had a cousin, the Duke of Hereford, and son of John of Gaunt—Henry Bolingbroke. This Henry Bolingbroke was a surly and ambitious man, who had always envied Richard his position and power, and had wondered how he could humble the urbane King and bring him to his knees.

And the more Henry thought of it, the more he realised that the weak spot in Richard's armour was the murder of his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, at Calais. If only he could expose Richard as the murderer, then the people of England (though they had been pleased enough to be rid of Gloucester at the time) might rally round and drag down the King who, by his extravagant living and high taxes, had fallen from favour.

But Henry Bolingbroke was crafty enough to see that he must not name the King openly as a murderer of his own uncle, for that would amount to high treason, the punishment for which was death on the scaffold. Henry had no wish to end like that, before his ambitions were attained. So he went about the business another way.

During the Parliament held at Shrewsbury Castle, Henry suddenly rose and accused Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, of being a traitor to the King and an enemy of England. He said that Mowbray and he had held a long conversation a short while before, as they rode between London and Brentford, and that during that talk Mowbray had confessed to having murdered Gloucester at Calais.

In the uproar which followed, Richard realised that one accusation would soon lead to another, and that before long he himself would stand accused, as all the circumstances of Gloucester's death were laid bare.

So Richard ordered Henry to be kept in the charge of certain relatives; while Mowbray was packed off immediately to Windsor Castle, and there placed under guard, so that he might not reveal any secrets.

Six weeks later Richard held a meeting in the Great Hall at Windsor, to which were invited both barons and churchmen, with the object of reconciling the two Dukes before this matter might proceed to a more dangerous stage.

But once again, anger flared up like a fire; each accused the other of treachery, each challenged the other to combat to the death. Now Richard knew that these two warriors would never be reconciled—moreover, he knew that Thomas Mowbray expected him to act on his behalf in return for what he had done to Gloucester. Suddenly Richard could stand this situation no longer; he commanded both Dukes to appear in the tournament lists at Coventry on Saint Lambert's day, and there to fight to the death, as a means of settling this affair.

Now nothing could have suited them better, for each hoped to gain a great deal from his victory; Henry expected to establish himself in the eyes both of the barons and the common folk as a warrior-chief, superior to his pleasure-loving cousin, Richard; while Mowbray hoped to gain greater favours from the King by killing Henry, as he had once killed Gloucester.

In the time at their disposal before the combat, Henry sent to the Duke of Milan, begging the loan of his best plate and chain armour. The Duke replied by sending the finest armour he possessed, together with four of the finest armourers in Lombardy, to see that Henry was properly prepared.

Mowbray, on the other hand, sent to friends in Germany for his armour, and was fitted out with the utmost magnificence. Each tried to outdo the other, it seemed, for they knew that the eyes of Europe were upon them, and that many great men would travel to be at Coventry on that day.

Indeed, many of the barons of England, including John of Gaunt, Henry's father, felt that Richard was most unwise in drawing attention to the fact that there was any disagreement at all among his noblemen. Gaunt was especially afraid that the French, who were a subtle race, might gain courage from this tournament and might take it as a sign that the *whole* country of England was divided. From that, it would only be a short step to the French making a new attempt to throw the English out of France completely.

And Gaunt's doubts must have found an echo in Richard's mind during the days before the tournament at Coventry. It was as though the King's

confidence left him suddenly, as though his mind wavered between one thing and another.

Possibly, he saw that he would be in the power of whichever Duke won the day—and that would be an intolerable position for a king who had spent all his life trying to shake off controls, of one sort or another.

Perhaps that is why, after the contestants had roared out their challenges, magnificently accoutred on the green sward of Coventry, he flung down his staff and commanded them to await his decision.

He kept them waiting in the saddle so long that the horses became tired and restive, and the throngs of people who had gathered from all over the Midlands became impatient and abusive.

And then, like a man who is baffled by a problem too big for him to solve, Richard acted with a savagery quite out of keeping with his usually gentle behaviour. Without giving any reasons, he banished Mowbray from England for life, and exiled his cousin Henry for six years.

This he did after keeping them waiting for two hours for his royal judgment, all the time encased in steel and sitting in their high saddles.

The fine armour and the armourers went back to Milan or to Germany. Mowbray was conducted quickly and firmly to the coast, a broken-spirited man. Henry went to France, contemptuous and full of revenge.

But by that judgment, Richard of Bordeaux sealed his own fate. By his impulsive actions *after* that judgment, he brought his fate rushing down on him like an avalanche. For John of Gaunt, Henry's father, worn out by a life of warfare and grief, soon died at Ely House, whereupon Richard, anxious to break Henry for ever, declared him an outlaw and confiscated all his titles and estates.

For a short time, Richard must have felt that he had now put an end to all rebellion in his country, and could turn his attention again to Ireland, where the wild clansmen were burning and pillaging again, mocking at the gentle English King who had feasted with them and had given them knightships so freely when he visited them before.

This time Richard determined to punish the Irish war-lords as harshly as he had once punished the peasants, or the rascally keepers at Windsor, or his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke.

So, in the month of April, Richard set out from Windsor Castle for Milford Haven, to sail with two hundred ships and a great force of men-at-

arms and archers for Ireland, leaving another of his uncles, the decrepit Duke of York, as his Regent.

Poor Richard never chose his friends wisely; sooner or later they all betrayed him, in one way or another. All, perhaps, except Owen Glendower, the Lord of Sycherth, the Welshman whose gate was never locked and to whose table all men were welcome.

When Richard had gone to Ireland, it was not long before Henry Bolingbroke, furious that the King should have disinherited him, had sailed back, with ships and men supplied by the Duke of Brittany, to land on the Yorkshire coast, where he was greeted by the Duke of Northumberland and his son, Harry Percy, among hosts of others from Westmorland, Yorkshire, and Lincolnshire—men who clutched greedily at this chance to destroy Richard and to better themselves.

In the march to London, Henry Bolingbroke's power grew by leaps and bounds. The doddering Duke of York, in whose care Richard had left the army, joined Bolingbroke with hardly a protest. The Welsh levies, who had always been faithful as hounds to Richard, became troubled, for "in this yeare old bay trees withered, and, afterward, contrarie to all mens thinking, grew greene againe; a strange sight, and supposed to import some unknowne event".

The event the Welshmen feared was that the King was already dead, for no news had come from him for six weeks, and these superstitious Celts were unwilling to wait in arms to defend a ghost.

So, as they disbanded and went back to their homes or at last to Bolingbroke, Richard found a favourable wind to bring him from Ireland at last, and landed, almost friendless, at Milford Haven once more, to find his kingdom already lost.

There is a certain glamour attaching to kingship which sometimes blinds us to the essential *man* beneath the regal robes; take away the trappings and see what is left. George of Hanover, a fat and not too intelligent farmer; Harold Godwinson, a bad-tempered bailiff; Edward II, a superbly built athlete, a young buck with a taste for French literature; Charles Stuart—if we are to believe Le Sueur's statue—a beaky man of business; and Richard of Bordeaux, a gangling, petulant, red-haired misfit, absurdly brave, absurdly unhappy, absurdly blinded by his dreams of power. . . .

At Milford Haven the dreams were broken. For the first time in his life, Richard really understood that he was not wanted. The lords who had been

with him to Ireland drifted away, with their companies, like spectres in the night. He had heard that the citizens of London said, "Richard of Bordeaux must be arrested and confined in the Tower. His acts are so infamous that they will condemn him." The Earl of Northumberland and his son, Harry Percy, whom he had banished for refusing to sail to Ireland, had taken refuge with their old enemy, King Robert of Scotland. And Robert had actually welcomed them, assuring them that six hundred lances were theirs the moment they needed them.

On Welsh soil, Richard stood almost alone at last.

Bitterly, he swore to his few remaining friends that if ever he had Henry Bolingbroke again in his power, he would give him such a death that it should be spoken of with fear—even in Turkey!

But that was not to be, ever again. The chance was gone. Richard and a handful of loyal men, including Owen Glendower and the Duke of Aumerle, a cousin, made his sad pilgrimage to Conway Castle, where he heard the Earl of Salisbury was waiting with an army to welcome him. To Conway, one of the few castles that had not declared for Henry; Conway, which it had taken Edward I eighteen years to build when he was fighting the last native Prince of Wales, Llewelyn.

And at Conway, Richard found that Salisbury's men had gone home. There was little welcome for him, but black bread, and mouldy straw to lie on, he who had been used to fine silks and a lavish table.

And at Conway, in the ruined chapel, Earl Percy came to him, proud with revenge near fulfilment, and swore on the Sacrament that he intended no treachery, but advised Richard to ride to Flint and there come to some agreement with his cousin, Henry, who was "a just man, ready to listen to him in friendship".

So poor Richard, with fewer than twenty men, rode on to the castle of Flint, cursing Percy, cursing Bolingbroke, even cursing the good Welshmen who had waited for him so long and had then slipped away home before they were overwhelmed needlessly by the oncoming English.

Henry was followed by at least sixty thousand Londoners, as well as the forces he had gained from Yorkshire and Northumberland and Lincolnshire.

At Flint, the Earl of Salisbury said, "Sire, have confidence in your cousin. He can wish you nothing but good."

Fatigued and disheartened, Richard gave consent for Henry Bolingbroke to come before him. Bolingbroke came, and made a pretence at kneeling at

the King's feet; but Richard signed to him to get up. He knew that such protestations of loyalty were false and futile.

“What do you want?” he asked the smiling Bolingbroke.

“I want to help you,” said Henry. “Your people complain that for the past twenty years you have ruled them harshly; but I will help you to rule them better, if it please God.”

Richard looked out of the window and saw the swarming mass of Londoners, howling and shaking their weapons up at the castle. Once before he had seen just such another scene, when he was a young lad of fourteen, and also on his own, save for the good Mayor of London and a few others. This was a recurrent nightmare, it seemed, that he would never shake off.

“What do they want?” he asked, pointing to them as negligently as he could.

“They want *you*,” answered Bolingbroke. “They want to carry you prisoner to the Tower, and there is no pacifying them unless you yield yourself my prisoner.”

The King looked away, the tears running down his face, for now he felt that God had deserted him, too; the God who appointed kings and made their every action sacred.

Bolingbroke said, “Have you broken your fast? I advise you to eat and drink heartily, for you have a long journey in front of you, and a king should ride gaily.”

Richard made some attempt to break his fast, but the meagre food stuck in his throat, as the new Duke of Lancaster, Henry Bolingbroke, stood by, his helmet under his arm, waiting. Outside the mob still howled.

Once long ago, the ivy-crowned head of Llewelyn had made that same journey from north Wales to London, to be set above the Tower. Now Richard made the journey, mounted on the sorriest nag that Bolingbroke could find for him—he who had ridden the finest Arab stallions.

And that, in effect, was the end of King Richard. After a short stay in the Tower, where once he had kept his finest armour, he was released to go to Westminster, on the last day of September, 1399, where Henry Bolingbroke accused him, and even doubted his royalty, declaring that Richard's mother, the Princess of Wales—she who had been so frightened by the ruffians who followed Wat Tyler—had been unfaithful to her husband, and that Richard was no true king.

Now almost voluntarily, in the great White Tower, Richard signed the document of abdication and gave up the crown, his only thoughts being for his little French Queen at Windsor, who knew no English and who had no playmates or friends. He was assured that she would be well cared for; and then, his world shattered about him, he allowed the triumphant Bolingbroke to send him north, under a strong escort, to the castle of Pontefract, where, said Bolingbroke, he would be “safer” than in London, whose citizens hated him and might break in “to do him an injury”. This was in September 1399.

Once more, a long journey among grim-faced enemies, and the dead leaves from the trees swirling about him as he rode northwards.

What happened at Pontefract no one knows, and no one in England at that time cared.

His favourite dog had taken Bolingbroke as its master. His Barbary horse was now the mount of Bolingbroke. His crown rested on Bolingbroke’s head, making him King Henry. . . . King Henry IV.

Owen Glendower had followed him to Conway loyally; and now had been appointed squire of the body, to the new King Henry, a man he loathed, and would soon find occasion to strike at.

And in the meantime, Richard languished at Pontefract Castle, in a dungeon, like his great-grandfather, Edward II, the man they all said he so resembled.

But now he had no fine clothes to wear, fine food to eat, gay companions to chat with, as he had chatted with Robert de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, long ago in the Winter Parlour at Windsor when Osmond Croke came in to talk of Herne the Hunter.

There were only straw and rags, and a constant fear of being poisoned by the filthy food which he was allowed. Until one day, according to the old historian Holinshed, an insolent young squire came into the cell and flung down his meal, saying, “Eat this, for it will be a long time before you taste meat again!”

Richard’s patience could tolerate such treatment no longer. He rose, the carving-knife in his hand, and struck out at the squire. “The devil take Henry of Lancaster and thee!” he said.

At this the door opened and a knight named Piers of Exton ran in, followed by eight strong fellows, axes in their hands, as though they had been waiting for this moment, as though it had all been arranged.

Richard of Bordeaux, son of the warrior Black Prince, did not need to be told what their intentions were. With a roar he leapt at the first man and wrenched the axe from his hands. Then, running berserk among the men, who had little room in that narrow cell, he struck down four of them before the others could get at him effectively with their clumsy weapons.

But Piers of Exton, knowing that he had to answer to Bolingbroke for his actions, got up on to the chair on which Richard usually sat and, taking careful aim, struck Richard so deeply in the head that the poor wretch died instantly.

Then, in that shambles at Pontefract Castle, Sir Piers of Exton broke down and wept “right bitterlie, as one stricken with the pricke of a gilty conscience, for murthuring him, whome he had so long time obeyed as king”.

It was February in the year 1400.

But the sad tale is not yet ended. The dead man’s body was embalmed, and covered with lead, all save the face, so that men should see that Richard of Bordeaux had indeed departed this life.

And so, with dirges, he was carried on a litter covered with black and drawn by four black horses, accompanied by four knights in mourning, to the Tower of London, where a Requiem Mass was said for his soul.

And for three days the body, with its face uncovered, lay on show in Cheapside, where twenty thousand Londoners filed past it, weeping now that they had got the vengeance they had so long shouted for.

Masses were sung at Saint Paul’s and at Westminster, and at last the ruined King was taken away to Langley, where he was buried in the church of the friars preachers.

The Tower of London was his beginning and end, as a king. At Windsor he was happiest; at Flint most sad; at Pontefract most terrified and brave. All his life there had been castles about him; but now, lapped in his own private castle of lead, he was free of them at last.

He was thirty-three years old and left no son to follow him.

Chapter 8

Owen Glendower and Conway and Harlech Castles—Fifteenth Century

AFTER the death of poor Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, in the sunset wood at Builth, Edward I—the Hammer of the Welsh no less than of the Scots—determined that never again during his lifetime should a Celtic prince thwart his ambitions to be the uncontested monarch of Britain.

So he divided Wales up into shires, much on the English pattern—Anglesey, Caernarvon, Merioneth, Cardigan and Carmarthen, and in them established certain towns under Royal Charter: Builth, Cardigan, Welshpool, Montgomery, Rhuddlan, Aberystwyth, Conway, Caernarvon, Criccieth, Caerwys, Newburgh and Beaumaris.

And in these towns he placed, as settlers, many Englishmen known for their loyalty and forcefulness. They would teach the wild Welsh how to behave, he told himself.

Then, to make sure that the Welsh never became inspired by rebellious ideas again, he caused to be built his great ring of castles, which enclosed north Wales as a dog-collar encloses the neck of a dog: Conway, Beaumaris, Caernarvon, Criccieth, Harlech. . . . Castles erected—many of them by Master James of Savoy—by builders and architects who had travelled in Palestine and through Greece as Crusaders: men who had set admiring eyes on Constantinople and Antioch, Acre, Jerusalem and the great Krak des Chevaliers—that many-walled, many-towered fortress which had been erected by the Knights Templar as their fearful citadel in a foreign land.

Edward himself had been a Crusader: he knew as well as any man how to build, and use, a castle.

Behind his ring of new castles lay the clenched fist of older ones—Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Stokesay, and so on, down to Cardiff. The Welsh army that could march past this line would have to be led by a genius—or a devil!—it was said.

Soon a man came to light who was both—depending on who described him, a fellow-Welshman or an Englishman!

But in the meantime, to make sure that the already intimidated Welsh chieftains had someone to regard as their natural leader, subtle Edward did another thing: he arranged that his baby son should see his first light in Wales. The child who was to become the ill-fated Edward II was born in the fortress of Caernarvon and offered, by a typical act of trickery, as a “native Prince of Wales” to the Welsh chieftains, who had demanded a new ruler “who could speak no word of English”.

That baby Edward could speak no word of any known language, Welsh included, mattered not to the King; in his mind he had given these simple tribesmen what they had asked for. Now they must be satisfied, or else. . . .

And for ninety years it seemed that they were—on the surface. Now Welsh students passed freely to Jesus College, Oxford, to pursue their studies in philosophy and rhetoric, and walk the green and shaven lawns discussing Plato, not in their native Welsh, but in Latin, or in French, to suit their tutors. And sturdy little Welsh bowmen with a trade in their muscles and finger-tips sold their services all over Europe. No army of the time was complete without its contingent of Celtic archers, who could clap four shafts into a charging horseman so quickly that he had scarcely time to draw breath between the first and the last. They were in high demand, these marksmen; they helped to win Crécy and, later, Agincourt, for their English masters, and, like Fluellen in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, were both absurdly brave and absurdly loyal. But theirs was a loyalty which demanded justice and respect from their overlords. The Welsh bowman was courteous and gentle with his captains as long as he might be permitted equal rights with the English pikemen who fought behind him. But an offended Welshman was another story; he was liable to turn his bow on the man who had ill-treated him or, in a last gesture of proud defiance, cut his own bowstring and let the French cavalry ride him down, defenceless.

Once upon a time the Celts had captured Rome itself; and later, under Uther Pendragon and “King” Arthur, they had inflicted such slaughter on the Saxons at Mount Badon that peace settled on Britain for fifty long years. The spirit which had flared out under Brennus, and Vercingetorix, and Caractacus, and “King” Arthur was not to be damped by a ring of castles and a haughty Norman voice. Use them well, and they were as amenable as good horses or hounds or hawks; treat them with contempt, and their ferocity became unequalled in the whole of Europe. They were the men who had put to flight the greatest of the Viking “berserks” who attempted to ravage their coasts; the men who had spat in the face of Caesar at

Uxellodunum, though they knew the headsman's axe was waiting for them. . . .

But here the story must look back again for a while, to the days when Edward I was harassed by the Welsh Princes—whose great leader became Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, that sad prince who died in the wood at Builth.

In 1270 died another Welsh lord, Gruffydd ap Madoc, Prince of Powys, leaving behind him his English wife, Lady Emma, and four sturdy young sons—the “young eagles of Powys, whose wings will one day grow, to let them swoop upon their land's enemies”, as the bard sang.

But these boys were not to enter into their vast inheritance of land as easily as that. Their mother, Lady Emma, was at times dismayed by the turbulent brood she was rearing; the boys, having spoken with the Welsh soldiers and serving-men, often referred slightly to Englishmen as fat pigs who would look better with an apple in their mouths and a frill round their necks.

Lady Emma began to feel that she could hardly manage these young eagles and secretly appealed to her brother, Lord Audley, asking him for advice on the matter. This Lord Audley was no man to be trifled with; he was known throughout Wales as a pitiless ruler, who had imported squadrons of heavy German cavalry to ride the valleys and to cut down all the tribesmen they chose, without fear of any consequences.

Lord Audley had little time or love for the young eagles; to him, they were “Welsh brats who had best be kept on a chain, lest they grow to do decent men an injury, one day”.

His brusque advice to his sister was, “Put them in the charge of the King. He knows well enough how to curb a forward hound!”

Lady Emma dutifully followed her brother's advice. The two elder orphans were packed off to King Edward, but he was too occupied to concern himself with them, and straightway put them—and their estates—in the keeping of two of his favourite Barons of the Marches, Roger Mortimer and Earl Warren.

These two lords chose a simple method of dealing with the situation. First, they raised two great castles at Chirk and Holt, to be sure of having adequate garrisons to “protect” the estates of the Welsh boys; then, at an opportune moment, Roger Mortimer and Earl Warren drowned the boys in a waterlogged hole, fed by the Dee, near Holt.

Edward asked no questions. Lady Emma was too terrified to meddle in the politics of the time, having been advised by her brother to “make no enquiries upon this sad affair”. But when the third boy died in his bed, smothered by a pillow, it is thought, she saw that the long arm of Roger Mortimer was one to be feared, and she retired with her remaining little son to the castle of a friend who had sworn to protect her.

That was how things were along the Welsh Border in the thirteenth century. The only law was that of force, and force was held largely by such men as Mortimer and Earl Warren; men who, like the Percys of the Scottish Border, sometimes even cast longing glances at the throne itself!

But this part of the story ends on a lighter note. Lord Warren awoke one morning to find that his limbs were shaking as though with palsy. His head felt twice the size it should, and there was an impediment in his speech. Moreover, the veins of his neck throbbed so violently that he feared someone had tried to strangle him with a cord as he slept!

Then he remembered the gibe of the dead “young eagles”, that the English pigs would look better with an apple in their mouths and a frill round their necks.

“By Holy Sepulchre,” he swore, “but such an apple and such a frill I cannot tolerate any longer. They have put a spell upon me, these little Welsh sorcerers. I had thought that once they were in the slop-pool their trickeries were ended—but it is not so.”

Then, aching from head to foot and hardly able to keep his seat in the saddle, Earl Warren rode to the castle of Rhuddlan, near Flint, where King Edward was holding a Council, and there, upon his knees, the frightened lord begged Edward to settle on the remaining “little eagle” all the land from either bank of the Dee above Berwyn down to Corwen, besides the estate of Cynllaeth, which had once belonged to Lady Emma.

Edward, too busy with the task of dividing Wales into shires and with the building of his ring of castles, agreed, and waved Earl Warren away. Half-way home the Earl’s pains left him, and for a moment he considered riding back to persuade Edward to cancel this redistribution of land. Then, suddenly, a fire shot through his head so fiercely that his brains seemed to boil, and he fell from his horse.

Four men carried him home on a hurdle, and the next week Lady Emma and her remaining young eagle entered their estates with the King’s consent.

So the last son of the Prince of Powys took up his residence in Glyn Dyfrdwy, the Glen of Dee, a valley of peacefulness, its looping river full of salmon and trout, its roads twisting and bending among the gentle green-clothed slopes of the hills.

As time went on, this valley and the manor of Sycherth, ten miles to the south, came into the possession of the “little eagle’s” great-grandson, Owen Glendower.

A fine manor for a fine man. “A Neapolitan building of eighteen apartments, a fair timber structure on the summit of a green hill, reared towards heaven on four admirable pilasters.” Here Owen, who had fought on with a splintered lance in his hand and the plume of a flamingo in his helmet at Berwick-on-Tweed, lived among his orchards and vineyards. Fish swam in his pond; deer grazed in his parks; the great gate of his hall was never locked.

Owen Glendower had been with King Richard II in Ireland, on the fateful expedition which had kept him among the rough, rug-headed kerns, while the contrary winds had blown the usurper, Henry Bolingbroke, back to England. Owen had stood by Richard’s side, a squire of the body, at last, in the ruined Chapel of Conway, when Earl Percy of Alnwick Castle in Northumberland and Harry “Hotspur”, his son, swore on the Holy Sacrament that they intended no treachery to Richard but had only come to lead him from Conway to Flint Castle, there to make peace once more with his cousin, Henry.

Owen Glendower had seen his royal master’s pride shattered at Conway Castle when, surrounded by a screaming rabble of sixty thousand Londoners, the ruined King had walked from the Great Hall, between the towers of the barbican, over the drawbridge and then down the flight of steps that led into the town of Conway.

At the foot of this stairway Richard had turned to Owen and said, “Friend, what difference do you see between myself and your own kinsman, Llewelyn ap Gruffydd?”

But Owen would not answer this question, for to speak then on such a matter could only cause pain to one or the other. Richard, the King, observed his Welshman’s silence and then said, with a sad little smile, “There is this difference, Glendower—your kinsman’s head was carried *up* these steps by common soldiers; but my head is being carried *down* them—by a King!”

Then Richard rode on a sorry hack to Flint, to be humiliated there by his sneering cousin, who bowed his iron knee to him but never looked him in the eye. And so to the deposition in Westminster Hall, when Earl Percy's temper got the better of him as, red-faced, he pushed the scroll containing a list of Richard's "crimes" towards the King, asking him, and then at last commanding him, to read and sign them. Owen had watched all this. He had watched King Richard's pale, determined face when the barons had committed him to the Tower and then to Pontefract Castle "for his own safety".

But Owen did not go with his King to either place. Instead, he went back to his manor at Sycherth, and there he told his wife: "There will come a time in the future when I shall avenge Richard of Bordeaux, whose squire I was. It is my desire to set the heads of Bolingbroke and Percy upon the battlements of Conway, to grin at each other through history like the fools they are, for murdering a true king."

Owen's wife filled his cup with metheglyn, which she was expert in making from corn grain and honey, but she did not drink a toast of vengeance with him.

To her women embroidering in the bower she said, "The name of Richard of Bordeaux is not to be mentioned from this time in our house. It is my lord's true business, and his duty to his family, to think of other things."

The women bowed their heads, and after a while Owen Glendower rode to London and placed his hands within the cold hands of Henry IV, swearing to follow him in all his battles and to think of him as his only true and rightful King. This he did, only because his wife had nagged at him for so long.

Later, as Owen sat in his lodging near Aldgate, a man came from the new King with his cloak held about his face, and said, "Glendower, the King has spoken well of you today. It is in his mind to make you Lord of Conway, if all goes well. Does that not please you?"

Owen Glendower bowed to his visitor and said, "Sir, I would sooner be a pig with an apple in his mouth and a paper frill about his neck, than to be Lord of Conway. If ever I go to that place it will be with a sword in my right hand and not with a letter from Bolingbroke to say that I may sit under the king-post until another slave replaces me."

When Henry Bolingbroke heard these words, he broke the handle of his wine-cup and then drew his dagger and plunged it three times into the oak

board at which he sat.

Lord Grey of Ruthin, whose castle lay beside the house of Glendower, was sitting at that same board when this happened. He did not speak, but when the King's eye met his own he smiled and bowed his head. The new King went back to his meat and drink, but that night he sent his dagger to the apartment of Lord Grey by a serving-man, who said that there was no message but that Lord Grey would well understand the meaning of this gift.

Lord Grey understood it well enough, just as Piers of Exton had understood before he rode to Pontefract to murder Richard of Bordeaux.

Lord Grey cantered smiling into Wales three days later, to the upper Vale of Clwyd, where his family had been Lords of the March since 1284.

Between Grey's country and the estate of Owen lay a strip of moorland called Croesau which, in Richard's time, was regarded by the courts as belonging to Owen. Now Lord Grey rode into Croesau and planted his men-at-arms there in some force.

When Owen saw their pennons waving, he sent to the King's Council asking that Lord Grey should be ordered to withdraw. This just request was urged by the Bishop of St. Asaph, who stood well with King Henry and had a close knowledge of Welsh affairs.

But King Henry IV said with contempt, "What care we for the barefoots?"

When Owen heard this reply he called for his captain and said, "God knows, this was not my will, but if the King will not help me, then I must help myself. Blow on the horn, my friend, for there is hunting to be done before morning!"

By dawn the few Englishmen left alive were hammering on the gates of Ruthin to be let in. Lord Grey heard how Owen had hunted them across the moorland of Croesau, with his baying hounds running at his horses' heels, and when the soldiers had gone he smiled and said to a lord who stood by, "The game goes better than I had hoped. This Owen shall learn what it is to take the law into his hands, and the time will not be far distant, I assure you!"

This was the year 1400, the first year of the usurping King's reign. All along the Scots Border the clans were massing, despite the Percy garrisons at Warkworth and Alnwick. King Henry sent out word, summoning all the barons of England and Wales to join his standard and ride against the Scots.

Lord Grey of Ruthin was entrusted with the message which should have gone to Owen at his manor-house of Sycherth, but this was too good an opportunity to miss: the King's command was never delivered.

Then Henry, beside himself with fury, sent special powers to Lord Grey to act against this Welsh rebel. Grey and Earl Talbot of Chirk rode with a strong force at dusk, on the gentle house of Sycherth on the Cynllaeth. The unlocked gates were burst wide, the hall set on fire; and Owen, fighting like a madman, was barely able to cut his way through the surrounding army and gain shelter in his own woods.

For that night's work both Grey and King Henry were to pay most dearly; it was the bitterest bargain of their lives, had they but known it.

In mid-September of 1400, on the eve of the fair of St. Matthew, Owen Glendower, with the lords of Clwyd and Powysland and the commons of north Wales, marched on the town of Ruthin, burned it to the ground, and ravaged all English settlements in the neighbourhood for three days and nights.

This was the signal Wales had awaited. After ninety years of oppression, they raised the red dragon of revolt once more. King Henry, hard pressed on the Scottish Border, heard from the Chamberlain of Caernarvon how the Welsh farmers were selling their cattle to buy swords and horses; how the labourers in the fields had left the crops and were sharpening axes in the churchyards; how even the scholars at Oxford had cast aside their books and gowns, to march home to Wales and offer themselves to Owen Glendower, terrifying the villages on their way by their wild chanting of the old battle-songs.

And while Owen burned and killed, right to the walls of Shrewsbury, the Welsh bowmen in Europe slipped away by night to spend their earnings among the shipmen, on a passage back to Wales.

King Henry, realising too late that this Glendower was no mere barefoot tribal chief, turned southwards with his army and called out the levies of ten counties to assemble at Shrewsbury and help him crush Glendower.

But Owen was not to be trapped so easily into a pitched battle; his forces slid away like water, into the hills, while the unwieldy English army marched through Wales, as far as Anglesey, as through a desert where the silence was broken only by the sound of streams, of half-wild sheep upon the high slopes, and harsh crying of eagles in the air.

Within a month King Henry could stand this ghostly campaign no longer. He retired to Worcester and placed the government of Wales in the hands of his fourteen-year-old son, Prince Henry, to be assisted by Henry Percy, or “Hotspur”, of Alnwick, who had had years of training along the Scottish Border.

But when the King had gone, Owen appeared again, like some vengeful spirit. In the following year, on the morning of Good Friday, the whole garrison of Conway Castle was at church—the constable, fifteen men-at-arms and upwards of sixty archers. While they prayed upon their knees, forty Welshmen scaled the ramparts and took the fortress which had seen the tragedies both of Llewelyn and of poor King Richard.

An attack on Harlech itself was only averted by the despatch of one hundred men-at-arms and four hundred archers from Chester. (It is remarkable to learn that, at this time, the standing garrison of Harlech Castle was no more than ten men-at-arms and thirty archers, the cost of whose upkeep for a year came to £389 6s. 8d.!)

But in the twinkling of an eye, Glendower struck again, this time from the heights of Plynllymmon, scattering the English host that had come to quell him.

King Henry, growing old before his time because of these constant attacks, was given a letter from Owen, written in Latin, in which he no longer used the title of “Prince of Wales”—but swore to liberate the Welsh people *completely* from their bondage to England. This meant only one thing—that Owen Glendower intended to become a king. . . .

Now Henry’s rage could not contain itself. He rode through Cardiganshire, killing any luckless peasant in his way, just as the Mongol hordes did as they carried Genghis Khan to his last resting-place. He stabled his horses in Welsh churches, but still Glendower laughed at him. One night, as Henry walked between the tents, a spear came at him out of the darkness, and would have killed him had he not been wearing chain-mail beneath his tunic. The next morning he woke from a troubled sleep to learn that his son, Henry, had been contemptuously relieved of his sword, his horses—and his tent! Owen was everywhere.

Once more the King withdrew, no longer able to fight against this ghostly opponent, whose own people now declared him to be more than a natural human man.

In the following year Owen made an alliance with France; then, in a surprise ambush, captured Lord Grey of Ruthin and carried him in fetters into the mountains.

“For the love of God,” said Lord Grey, “what do you want with me, Glendower? I have no wish to fight you any further.”

Owen smiled down upon him grimly, as Grey lay bound upon a bed of straw, and said quietly, “I want my revenge upon you, Ruthin, and the revenge of all my people. I want your estates, your revenues, and even your life. . . . No, do not quake so, I am no butcher. But send word to your people that this is your ransom.”

He showed Lord Grey a piece of paper on which was written what the captive had to pay for his freedom.

“Good God!” said Lord Grey. “I cannot pay so much, even if I sell the last yard of earth that I own.”

And Glendower answered, “I shall make you a present of enough earth to hold your corpse, Ruthin. That need not worry you.”

From that day Lord Grey of Ruthin was a broken man. His King, sitting in Westminster Hall, had become as grey as a badger with anxiety.

In June that year the English army came up with the men of Wales at Bryn Glas, a hill to the west of Pilleth village. At last, they told themselves, they would bring ruin down upon this saucy Welshman.

But the tide of Owen’s good fortune swept on, as though no man, no army could now prevent it.

At Pilleth that blue June day, Owen Glendower sat laughing in the saddle under his great banner of the Red Dragon. As the formidable English host advanced, he raised his right hand with a confident smile. Immediately, all the Welsh companies of bowmen in the English host turned their bows upon their masters. Footmen fell on all sides, horses reared and screamed, throwing down their heavily armoured riders. Within a few moments the English force was in confusion; within a few minutes Glendower’s cavalry had beset them on either flank before they could form into any semblance of military order.

So hideous was the slaughter at Pilleth that the corpses of Englishmen lay in their thousands, in heaps all along the hill; so savage were the victorious Welshmen that for many days no one dared approach to bury the

staring dead, who had been finished off as they lay by Welsh women with their daggers.

But, best of all, at Pilleth Glendower captured Edmund Mortimer, uncle of the Earl of March, the rightful heir to the throne, and, converting him to his cause, married him to his daughter. Now Glendower, beside being virtually a king in Wales, had closely related himself to a possible future king of England.

King Henry heard this news in Berkhamsted.

“By the God of Sorrows!” he swore. “But will this Welshman, this barefoot dog, leave me no peace at all! I had rather three Richards to deal with than one Owen. He will bring me to my grave before my time!”

Wearily he climbed into the saddle once more, hoping to avenge the defeat of Pilleth, but as he camped in a fair valley on the Eve of the Nativity, rain poured down upon his three shivering divisions and put out their fires. Then snow blew across the hills and beat down their tents with its force and weight.

No one could campaign in weather like that, and in a deserted countryside. Men began to whisper that Owen had power over the very elements themselves. Defeated without even meeting the enemy, King Henry turned back into England, and, if we may take Shakespeare’s word for it, Owen Glendower proclaimed:

*Three times hath Henry Bolingbroke made head
Against my power. Thrice from the banks of Wye,
And sandy-bottomed Severn, have I sent
Him bootless home, and weatherbeaten back . . .*

Lord Grey was now beggared for life; King Henry was sadly humbled and began to speak more of his death than of his future.

Nevertheless, Owen was not without his own troubles, for certain members of his clan, as was typical among Celts, did not approve of his continued rebellion. Among them was his cousin, Howel Selé, Lord of Nannau near the mountain of Cader Idris, the most ancient manor in Wales.

This Howel Selé invited Owen to visit Nannau and to go walking with him in the park below the house. Suddenly, pretending to aim at a fine buck grazing within shot, Howel bent his bow, then, turning without warning, let fly his arrow at his cousin from point-blank range.

But Owen had long been aware of Howel's dislike for him and that day had put on a strong shirt of mail beneath his gay tunic. The arrow fell harmlessly to the ground.

Then Owen Glendower drew his sword and, walking towards his now terrified cousin, hacked him to death. When this was done he went up the hill and burned Nannau to the ground, as his own manor had been burned years before.

It was forty years afterwards when Howel's body was found—bundled into the hollow of an ancient oak tree.

This tree, like that of Herne the Hunter, was said to be haunted from that time onward. Twenty-seven feet in circumference, it survived until July 13th, 1813, when it collapsed one night during a storm.

As for Owen, he pressed on and on, helped now by an army of French and Bretons, and though he was beaten back from Caernarvon Castle, whose garrison had been enormously increased, he was able to take the castle of Harlech.

Here the twelve-foot-thick walls were held by no more than five English and sixteen Welsh soldiers. Its constable lay in the dungeon, suspected of treason; other men were raving with fever, after its long siege.

On January 8th, 1404, two English yeomen, Jack Mercer and Harry Baker, crept from the Castle to arrange terms of surrender with Owen. His reply was to clap them in irons and to march into the fortress without more ado.

Harlech Castle was Owen's home from that time until 1408, when Royalist forces under Gilbert and John Talbot with over a thousand men and many siege-engines retook it. The sort of siege-weapon used by that date must not be scoffed at. Cannon had come into use with the Battle of Crécy in 1346; by 1408 these instruments of attack and defence were enormously powerful. Owen Glendower possessed a cannon, which he called the "King's Daughter" and which fired a stone ball of twenty-two inches in diameter!

Unfortunately, this great bombard burst during the siege, and in a way it was a symbol of Owen's suddenly declining power.

His son-in-law, Sir Edmund Mortimer, died as the result of starvation during the siege; Owen's wife, Margaret Hanmer, and his daughter and her four children were led away into captivity.

Yet it should not be assumed that Owen Glendower had sunk into complete oblivion after he had taken Harlech in 1404. On the contrary, he announced himself once more, “Owen, by the Grace of God, Prince of Wales”, and was widely recognised as the ruler of that country. He summoned his parliaments at Harlech, Dolgelley and Machynlleth, and made plans for a northern and a southern university to be founded in Wales.

In 1405 his ambassadors were received with honour at the French court, and no fewer than ten thousand French soldiers, landed at Milford in one hundred and forty ships, marched with him under the command of Jean de Rieux, Marshal of France, in all splendour. Many of the great Norman castles fell into his hands, and for a time it seemed that Owen might indeed found a Welsh dynasty to sit on the throne in London. The Percy family of Alnwick were not slow to see the possibilities of an alliance with this furious Welshman. At this point the turbulent Northumbrian family came closer to the throne than ever before—for it was proposed that they, Owen Glendower and Edmund Mortimer, should share England equally!

But the dream faded; the Percys were routed at Shrewsbury; Mortimer died when Harlech was recaptured by the Talbots; and Owen, deserted by his French troops, took to the mountains once more, now no longer a young man, no longer able to spend day after day in the saddle with only bread to eat and water from the streams to drink.

King Henry, utterly worn out by this prolonged Welsh war, died a disappointed man. Young Prince Henry, the official “Prince of Wales”, became Henry V.

Once he was firmly established on the throne he did his best to make peace with Owen, and in 1415 even offered him a free pardon and the restitution of his original estates.

But Glendower was too old a fighter, too proud a chieftain, too demoralised by many years of war, to listen any longer to words of peace. He refused Henry’s offer and, leading a sadly reduced force of tribesmen, laid waste and killed wherever he could, year after weary year, until at last even the people of Wales lost something of their love for him. The small country had been brought near to ruin in the fifteen years during which English, Welsh and French soldiers had slaughtered, burned down villages and churches, destroyed the standing corn, butchered the sheep and cattle.

King Henry IV had died, a ruined man, in the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster Hall, babbling of Wales; Lord Grey of Ruthin, emaciated by his long imprisonment, sometimes in the stout castle of Dolbadarn, under

Snowdon, sometimes in the old house of Carchady Owen at Llansaintffraid, was a pauper for life. As for Owen Glendower himself, he faded from history like a tired spirit of malevolence.

Some say that, in the end, he came by night to his daughter's house at Monnington for refuge, and that his bones lie beneath the turf in the Herefordshire churchyard. Others say that he made his way back to the charred ruins of his manor at Glyn Dyfrdwy. But no one knows.

His old bard, Iolo Goch, wrote:

*And when thy evening sun is set,
May grateful Cambria ne'er forget
Thy noontide blaze, but on thy tomb
May never-fading laurels bloom.*

Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . it is hard to tell. Like "King" Arthur, a chieftain of Celtic blood, too, it is difficult for us to decide whether Owen was a saint or a madman. Like "King" Arthur, Owen seems now more the dark spirit of vengeance and ruin than a real living creature. Would his grave be honoured now, even if it could be found?

Chapter 9

Queen Katherine, a Prophecy and a Welsh Squire—Fifteenth Century

KATH: Je te prie, m’enseignez. Il faut que j’apprenne à parler.
Comment appelez-vous la main en Anglais?

ALICE: La main? Elle est appelée “de hand”.

KATH: “De hand”. Et les doigts?

ALICE: Les doigts? Ma foi, j’oublie les doigts; mais je me souviendrai.
Les doigts? Je pense qu’ils sont appelés “de fingres”; oui, “de fingres”.

KATH: La main, “de hand”; les doigts, “de fingres”. Je pense que je suis le bon écolier; j’ai gagné deux mots d’Anglais vite ment.

(Henry V)

IN this manner, by learning the names of the parts of the body, did Princess Katherine of France hope to prepare herself for conversation with the man she was to marry by her father’s orders, Henry V, who had once ridden against Owen Glendower with a lance and later with a pardon, and who was now the brusque young victor of Agincourt.

In May 1420, Henry clattered into Notre Dame de Troyes, accoutred for his wedding as befitted a warrior—in full armour and wearing the brush of a fox in his great helmet, as though to point out to mad Charles VI of France, his scheming Queen Isabelle and his simpering son, the Dauphin, that he was every bit as crafty as they.

And so gay young Princess Katherine de Valois, with her few useless words of English, married her warrior husband. She was just nineteen, a beautiful dark-haired girl with “a most engaging manner”, and an immense love for this haughty young soldier king in his early thirties, who strode about the place, scattering papers and prelates, joking in a loud voice with his band of companions, and seeming, in all ways, so different from the scented fops of her father’s court, who spoke in lispings whispers and who affected to be disgusted at the sight of a drawn sword.

When Henry placed upon her finger the great ring worn by all the English kings at their coronation, Katherine almost swooned with joy. Even her few words of English were forgotten now, and she could scarce find the voice to whisper the responses in her native French!

The voyage to England was like a dream to the young girl, so was her crowning at Westminster, and then the royal progress through the northern shires—at Henry’s command, for he wished to show the proud Percys of Warkworth and Alnwick Castle the sort of bride he could find for himself; to make them feel, in their cold northern castles, envious of the beauty and culture which he had brought back with him from France.

The Percys entertained their new French Queen and bowed their heads as she stumbled through the few phrases her husband had taught her, hiding their smiles.

Then the royal party returned to Windsor Castle, which Henry did not greatly care for but which Henry Percy, the second Earl of Northumberland, would have loved to own, for it was here that he had spent many of his boyhood years, as a hostage.

However, this Henry Percy soon had other things to occupy him: the Scots were again becoming restive, just as the Welsh had been under Glendower. Percy was created General Warden of the Marches by King Henry, and soon he was to see his town of Alnwick burned to the ground by the foraging Scots. And later he was to be met and defeated by the Black Douglas at Piperden in the famous “Chevy Chase”.

Not for him, then, the life of gentility and culture at rambling Windsor Castle—and not for King Henry, either.

Just before the birth of his son, who was to become Henry VI, at Windsor in 1421, King Henry was called, by a sudden rising, to his army in France, having spent so short a time with the beautiful Katherine.

He was riding round the walls of Meaux, in a bitter siege, when word was brought to him that his son had been born at Windsor Castle. The news cast a shadow over him, for he had requested Katherine to move to another place for the child’s coming, since Windsor was reputed to bring ill-luck to anyone born within its walls.

The warrior King turned away from the messenger and spoke to his chamberlain:

“My lord,” he said grimly, “I, Henry, born at Monmouth, shall short time reign and get much. But Henry, born at Windsor, shall long reign and lose

all!”

It was as though the spirit of prophecy was upon the King when he spoke those words: true enough, the new child reigned at Windsor until 1484, when he was buried there, but by that time Richard Crookback had usurped the throne.

As for Henry V, he was dead within a few months of his strange prophecy, and all his victories in France went for nothing, as town after town reverted to French rule.

Poor Katherine was only twenty-one when she returned to her own country, not to stay, but to fetch back to England the body of the man who had so delighted her, as he clanked into Notre Dame de Troyes, with the fox’s brush bobbing so arrogantly in his great helmet. . . .

But if the great barons, headed by the royal Duke of Gloucester, thought that gay little Katherine would mope for ever at Windsor while they controlled the kingdom in the name of the infant King, Henry VI, they were gravely mistaken; for suddenly the widowed Queen—a foreigner in the country whose crown she wore—met another “foreigner”, a Welshman, Owen Tudor.

This Owen Tudor, who came from quite humble stock in Anglesey, was a notoriously brave man. Indeed, he had fought alongside King Henry himself at Agincourt and was made a member of the royal bodyguard for his reckless ferocity at the Battle of Alençon.

There comes an ironic twist to the story when we learn that, in France, Owen Tudor had fought in a company commanded by Dafydd One-eye, the brother-in-law of Glendower himself!

Anyway, at this time the English army depended on its Welsh archers, and in the English court many a Welshman walked proudly, the equal of anyone, even though, like Owen Tudor, they did not possess the necessary income of £40 a year which would qualify them for a knighthood.

Lonely Queen Katherine was soon attracted by the tall and handsome Welshman, Owen, and, according to legend, came upon him one evening as he paced the battlements of Windsor on guard-duty and asked him, teasingly, if he could dance. The gallant Welshman is reputed to have given such a great leap, to show off his prowess, that he overbalanced and almost fell into the Queen’s lap!

The severe and, one imagines, rather elderly ladies-in-waiting reproved Katherine for allowing such behaviour.

“Madam,” one of them dared to say, “you lower yourself by paying attention to a person who, though possessing certain personal accomplishments and advantages, has no princely, nor even gentle, alliances, but belongs to a barbarous clan of savages, considered to be inferior to the lowest English yeoman!”

Queen Katherine, by this time becoming tired of the constant restrictions placed upon her by the envious nobility, who felt that she, as a Frenchwoman, had no right to authority in the English court, is said to have replied quite sharply that she had never been informed “that there was any difference of races in the British island!”

Be that as it may, the fact is that Owen Tudor, who at this time was thirty-seven years old, had made a great success with the young royal widow. So much so that she began to ask him certain personal questions about his family origins. Owen Tudor, with a typical show of Celtic bravado, told the Queen that he was descended from a race of princes!

“Very well,” said the young Queen, who had spent years of her life listening to her own brother boasting of his horse or his armour, “*bring* some of your princely relatives to Windsor, so that I may see them!”

So it was that John ap Meredith and Howell ap Llewellyn, two big fellows who spoke no language but their own native tongue, were brought before the Queen in her Presence Room at Windsor.

“These are my near-cousins, Your Majesty,” said Owen Tudor, pushing them forward. “They are of the old royal blood of my country, without a doubt.”

The Queen, whose own English was uncertain, made an attempt at conversation with these “princes”, but seeing that they could not understand a word she was saying, lapsed into French, at which they shook their heads and laughed, telling each other in Welsh that she was indeed beautiful but had little skill in languages!

At last Katherine gave up the battle and laughed too.

“Tell these princes,” she said to Owen Tudor, “that they are the goodliest dumb creatures I have ever seen!”

No doubt Owen Tudor sighed with some relief when he had got John and Howell safely out of the Queen’s presence at Windsor and on to the road back to Wales!

And no doubt the Queen was impressed by the princely appearance of these “goodly dumb creatures”, because she soon appointed Owen Tudor as Clerk of the Wardrobe—which brought him into close contact with her, since it was the duty of such a clerk to guard Her Majesty’s belongings and to arrange the purchase of materials which she selected for her robes.

This appointment must have caused great concern among the lords, because shortly afterwards a law was passed, in the name of little Henry VI, threatening death to anyone who dared to marry “*a queen-dowager . . . without the consent of the King and his council*”.

Since, at this time, the King was too young to understand what a “queen-dowager” was, we can have little doubt that these words were framed by the council, led by the now fuming Duke of Gloucester, who could already envisage a foreign consort joining a foreign Queen at Windsor, and having too large a part in governing the country.

But, fortunately, or unfortunately according to one’s point of view, the law was passed just too late! For Queen Katherine and Owen Tudor had already been married in secret; and, also in secret, they began to raise their own family, for they had three boys—Edmund, Jasper and Owen.

This must surely be one of the most secretive marriage affairs in the whole of English history; for, in spite of Gloucester’s very efficient spy system within the court, here was a new royal dynasty being founded, that of the Tudors!

However, most secrets come out sooner or later, and this one did, in the summer of 1436, when Katherine was a mature woman of thirty-five.

The circumstances of the exposure are rather sad, for Queen Katherine had just lost her new and only baby daughter, Margaret, and seems to have given away her secret while she was crying out with hysteria at her loss.

The upshot of the matter was that the Duke of Gloucester, at last certain of his suspicions, sent Katherine under guard to the Abbey of Bermondsey, where she lay dangerously ill. In this he showed himself to be every bit as vicious as that earlier Duke of Gloucester, the uncle of Richard II, that Gloucester who died so suddenly and mysteriously at Calais when, at last, the young King could tolerate his dictatorial ways no longer.

But, alas, now there was no King to put him in his place; only a boy, Henry, who was afraid to say “boo!” to a goose.

While Katherine de la Pole, the Abbess of Barking, took away the sick Queen’s three sons into her own care, Owen Tudor was clapped without

ceremony into Newgate gaol, there to be treated like the commonest thief or ruffian.

In the following February poor Katherine of France died, worn out by the anxieties of her life in a land which had always been foreign to her. As for Owen, with a typical energy that we have seen in Llewelyn and Glendower before him, he escaped from gaol and took refuge in Daventry.

Directed by Gloucester, young King Henry sent him a message to say that “he wished that Owen Tudor, who had dwelled with his mother, Katherine, should come into his presence”. Such a command carried death with it.

But Owen was too crafty a campaigner to put his head into that noose! Instead, he made his way secretly back to Westminster, and there went into sanctuary in the Abbey built by Edward the Confessor.

Time after time, Gloucester’s spies, pretending to be friendly towards the Welshman, tried to persuade him to leave his religious cell and “disport himself in the tavern at Westminster Gate”.

But Owen, made cautious by years of intrigue, knew that to set foot outside Westminster was to seal his doom. He was well aware that the tavern at Westminster Gate was swarming with Gloucester’s men, who would slip a dagger into him and pitch him into the Thames the moment they caught him off-guard. He ignored all messages of pretended good-will, therefore, and went on living what amounted to the life of a prisoner among the monks.

At last, however, the young King himself sent word that he now gave his permission for the Welshman to return to Anglesey, without let or hindrance; and Owen, trusting the son of the woman he had dearly loved, set forth on his journey.

At the border, he was ambushed by Gloucester’s men-at-arms and brutally carried back to London, to be flung once again into Newgate gaol; this time together with the priest who had married him to Katherine secretly.

Yet the story does not end here, for Owen, now distracted by the loss of his dear wife and the brutality of those about him, ran berserk one night, struck down his mocking gaoler, much as Richard II did at Pontefract, and escaped from Newgate—dragging the terrified priest with him.

And this time, spurring his stolen horse like a demon, he reached the safety of his own country, to live once more among those “goodly dumb creatures” who had once so impressed Katherine by their good looks and bearing.

For years he lived quietly, dreaming no doubt of those strangely happy years with the French Queen, until at last, to his great surprise, he was informed that a free pardon and £40 a year had been granted him, together with the office of “Park keeper of our parks in Denbigh, Wales”.

This direct message from King Henry VI, who was now old enough to rule without a council of vicious barons, brought joy to Owen Tudor.

But when he learned that his own sons, previously despised, had been accepted into the ranks of the nobility, Owen’s pride knew no limits. He, who had made himself out to be the descendant of Celtic princes, had fathered the Earl of Richmond and the Earl of Pembroke!

It was unbelievable! Two *Earls*—half French, half Welsh! If Owen Tudor had known what was soon to follow, he would have been even more incredulous; for his son, Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond, in his turn had a son, Henry Tudor, and this Henry it was whose henchman picked up the crown from under the horses’ hooves at Bosworth Field and set it on the Earl’s head, so that he became Henry VII, the first of the Tudor line, and the grandfather of great Queen Elizabeth!

But Owen Tudor was not to know all this; he died, as he had always lived, fighting.

A hardened old warrior of seventy-six, he led a Royalist army against the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses and, with a typical turn of bad luck, lost both the battle and his head.

Cut off by the headsman in Hereford market-place, his white head, which had once appeared so handsome to young Katherine de Valois, was set on the steps of Hereford Cathedral for all to see, and to mock.

But there was a curious honour still to come to the old veteran: the common soldiers who should have dutifully despised this grim trophy, set lighted candles about it instead, as though it were a holy relic on an altar.

It was, after all, the head of a true Queen’s consort and the founder of a robust line of monarchs, one of whom was later to defy and defeat the great Armada of Philip of Spain.

Chapter 10

Two Little Princes, Ludlow Castle and the Tower of London—Fifteenth Century

THE story of that man who was, one day, to pick up the English crown from beneath the hawthorn bush on Bosworth Field, and so to found a new line of kings, is worth telling again, though men have already told it many times, in their different ways.

It is a story which began on a spring morning outside the gates of the tall castle at Ludlow, when two young boys set forth for London with a bodyguard of two hundred armed men. Their part of the story ended by night, when their limp bodies were pushed, like bundles of rags, into a hole in a stone staircase at the Tower of London. Ludlow and the Tower—these two fortresses come again and again into our history, until their names begin to sound like the tolling of a mournful bell.

But we must go back a bit, to see who were the characters in this strange tragedy.

King Henry VI, who had once appointed Owen Tudor “Park keeper of our parks in Denbigh, Wales”, and had given him the £40 a year necessary for a gentleman of that time, came to a sorry end. In 1461, the English people chose Edward of York as their King, in preference to Henry, the leader of the Red Rose party of Lancaster. At Towton, in Yorkshire, on a bleak March day, the river ran red with blood as the rival factions hacked at each other, in the bloodiest battle fought on English soil since Hastings. And, in the end, poor Henry, gentle by nature, was captured and led into London by Warwick, the Kingmaker, as a prisoner, his feet lashed together under the belly of his horse, like any common malefactor.

For a while he lay in the Tower, driven almost mad by the brutality of his keepers. Then, for a brief interval, while Warwick quarrelled with Edward of York, Henry was allowed out of his gaol and seated on his throne again, to bow and nod and mumble as Warwick bade him, like some ghastly puppet with no power over his own actions.

On Easter Day in 1471, at Barnet, Edward of York left the proud Kingmaker dead, and once again assumed the crown, as Edward IV. The

House of York was in the ascendant now, and when the young Prince Edward, son of Henry, was brought before the new monarch, the King asked roughly, “How dare you stir my people to rebellion?”

Prince Edward answered, “It is not your kingdom, but my father’s. If right were done upon this earth, you would be standing where I stand now, and I should be accusing you of treason!”

The new King Edward rose from his chair and stalked down the steps of the dais. With his mailed fist, he struck the young boy hard across the face. As Prince Edward reeled backwards with the force of that blow, the Dukes of Clarence and Gloucester, brothers to the Yorkist King, dragged him from the royal presence and stabbed him to death in a corridor.

A few days later, poor demented King Henry died suddenly in the Tower. So the Red Rose party sank into disgrace, and it was said that even the greatest of Lancastrian noblemen, bereft of their lands, wandered about the streets, in ragged shifts and barefooted, begging their bread from door to door.

It was a time of terror for more than the followers of the Red Rose. That Duke of Clarence, who had helped to butcher the young Prince, was himself imprisoned in the Tower of London, by order of his royal brother, Edward IV—and simply because his name was George, and because an old sorcerer had foretold that the House of York would be overthrown by one whose name began with “G”.

The one whose name began with “G” was the Duke of Gloucester, brother both to Clarence and to King Edward IV. Gloucester, who was called “Crookback” because of his twisted spine, a man whose ambitions soared like a falcon, whose heart was as ruthless as an eagle’s.

The Duke of Clarence is said to have been drowned in a barrel of wine, by order of his brother, Richard of Gloucester. It requires little effort of the imagination to picture the fiendish scene, in which hired ruffians smothered the choking cries of the unfortunate Clarence as they tipped him up and clapped down the heavy barrel lid upon him.

Yet this same Duke of Gloucester, Richard “Crookback”, had publicly encouraged the arts, and had given aid to Caxton in setting up his printing-press. Moreover, he was known to be against illegal taxation, the seizure of goods before conviction of a felony, and the existence of bondmen upon the Royal domain. In these respects, one would have said that Richard of

Gloucester was an enlightened man, yet underlying his modernity of opinion was a harshness as inhuman as that of the Roman Emperor Nero.

In 1483, Edward IV died, leaving behind him two sons—the Prince of Wales, Edward, a lad of thirteen, and his ten-year-old brother, Richard. These two boys had been brought up in the old Mortimer home at Ludlow Castle; for their father, an heir to the Mortimer tradition, knew well enough that to be really powerful in England, a king must have control of the Welsh Border and of those proud lords who lived in the many castles along the Marches.

So, when Edward IV died in 1483, the young Prince of Wales was willingly acknowledged by the English people as their new monarch. His uncle, Richard “Crookback”, lost no time in taking upon himself the office of Protector of the Realm, which, in effect, gave him supreme power in the country’s government. Then he rode northwards to greet the two young princes, as they came from Ludlow towards London, surrounded by a jingling cavalcade of horsemen, each one proud of his task that day in guarding the laughing boy who was to be crowned in the summer.

Riding with the two boys was their uncle, Lord Rivers, a fine gentleman who had taken care of the young princes since their early years. As they cantered along the road, Lord Rivers said gravely, “Edward, it ill becomes me to speak against any man who is not here to answer for himself, but I should be failing in my trust if I did not warn you against Richard of Gloucester. He is a savagely proud fellow, and one who will let nothing stand between him and his desires.”

The young prince rode closer to his guardian and said softly, “My lord, you are not the first to tell me that. Yet, by the grace of God, and with you beside me, I hope to have the better of him.”

Lord Rivers shook his head gently and replied, “While I have a right arm that will swing a sword, Edward, you may count upon me; but it would be wiser to place your trust in God. Not even Gloucester can prevail against Him.”

Just then, little Prince Richard rode beside them and called out, “By my faith, but this is a rare procession! From your faces, we might be following a hearse, not riding to claim a crown! Let us ride with a song, gentlemen, so that all who see us shall remember how gaily we passed along the road!”

Richard began to sing a ditty which one of the waiting-women at Ludlow had taught him, but he had scarcely finished the first stave when

Lord Rivers held up his hand for silence.

“My lord,” he said to the Prince of Wales, “what I have feared seems like to happen. At yonder cross-roads, beneath the trees, a full company of horsemen are waiting, and, unless my eyes sadly deceive me, they wear the livery of Gloucester.”

Prince Edward shuddered. “Can we not turn about and give them a run for their money, Uncle?” he asked.

Lord Rivers shook his head.

“My lord,” he said, “I have never run from another man in my life, and I will not run from Richard of Gloucester now. What is to happen will happen, so let us ride forward like good Christian men, and not like cowards.”

At the cross-roads, a man moved into the road before them and held up his hand for them to halt. He sat hunched in the saddle, like a Hun of ancient times; one of his hands hung limply by his side, withered and almost useless. The heavy black cloak which he wore up about his mouth flapped in the spring winds, until it seemed like the wings of a raven. His dark face was lit by a strange smile; his piercing eyes never left the young Prince Edward.

“God save the King!” he said, pressing his horse forward until he could touch the boy with his withered hand, as though in affection and homage.

Prince Edward shrank back at this touch. The hunched man on the cob smiled sardonically and said, “My lord Rivers, your royal charge is suffering from a chill, from the way he shivers. That is no way for a king to come to London. We must see that he is well looked after in the future. Indeed, there are many things that must be changed.”

He came up beside Prince Edward until their legs touched in the stirrups, smiling all the while. With an imperious wave, he signalled Lord Rivers and his men-at-arms to ride behind. His own horsemen now surrounded the boy King.

“It shall never be said that your Uncle Gloucester did not guard you safely,” he said, twisting round, hunched in the high saddle.

Lord Rivers observed with a chill in his heart that Richard “Crookback’s” men had hemmed him in, so that he could not come to the prince, however much he tried.

It was no surprise to him, therefore, that as the cavalcade neared London, Richard of Gloucester suddenly turned and said over his shoulder, “My lord, you may consider your duty to the King finished now. Henceforth his person

will be in my charge. That would seem to be the best course, in these troubled times.”

Lord Rivers did not answer. He was tightly surrounded by men wearing Gloucester’s livery, one of whom even laid his hand upon the good man’s sword-arm. The troop of horse which had ridden out of Ludlow with the two princes were now a hundred yards down the road, muttering to each other. They knew well enough what was happening and, now that they had reached the suburbs of the city, realised that any resistance would be useless.

In London, Richard “Crookback” said with a twisted smile, “My lord, there is a lodging arranged for you, where you will be safe and secure. I beg you, accept my hospitality with a good grace, for that will be the wise thing to do in these circumstances.”

Six men-at-arms clustered about Lord Rivers, their hands on their swords. One of them took the bridle of his horse and began to lead it away.

“Where are you taking my uncle?” asked Prince Edward, the tears starting from his eyes.

Richard “Crookback” said, “Sir, he will go where the walls are thick and the doors let in no draughts. You need concern yourself no longer about him; he will be carefully guarded, I do assure you.”

Then the boy King began to weep, for in his heart he knew well enough that Lord Rivers was now a prisoner.

A few days later, the Queen, Elizabeth, was able to escape with her younger son, Richard of York, who was only ten at the time. She found sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, just as Owen Tudor had done not many years before.

It was not long, however, before Richard of Gloucester sent for the boy, choosing a bishop as his messenger so as to leave no suspicion in the Queen’s mind.

But Queen Elizabeth knew Gloucester only too well.

“My son, Richard, has been ill,” she said. “He is not well enough to leave his mother yet.”

The bishop put on a sorrowful look and answered, “Lady, you are not acting kindly towards the King to keep his little brother here. They are of an age when they should be playing together.”

Queen Elizabeth answered as bravely as she could, “Is there no other little boy who will play with my son? Even kings do not ask that their playmates should be princes.”

The bishop knelt before her. “Before God, Madam,” he said, “I mean no harm to your son, Richard. I swear to you that I will guard his life as I would my own. Is that not good enough for you?”

Outside the Abbey, the Queen could see many men, wearing Gloucester’s livery, mingling with the crowds, as though they were on holiday. Then she knew that all resistance would be useless.

She put her arms about the little boy, who clung to her, terrified by the look which he saw on his mother’s face.

“Let me kiss you before you go,” she said, “for God alone knows when we shall be together again.”

The bishop put his arms about the weeping boy and almost dragged him from his mother’s arms.

“Have no fear,” he said with a smile, “your son shall not be separated from his brother, who has asked for him almost every day since they have been parted.”

When Richard “Crookback” saw the little prince, he was most satisfied, and ordered that fine suits and harness should be made for the two brothers, so that they could ride through London together, and let the citizens see how well they looked.

This procession caused great joy in the hearts of the people, especially the women, who swore that they had never set eyes on a more handsome pair of brothers. Many men were delighted, too, and vowed that they had misjudged Richard of Gloucester and that he had turned out to be a good and true man after all.

Gloucester’s agents went among the crowds and gave silver coins to all who shouted for their master, telling the folk to drink his health, for better times had come at last.

The route of this triumphal progress ended at the Tower of London. Richard of Gloucester welcomed the two boys to their new home and placed them in a room to the south side of the White Tower.

“Here you will be together, gentlemen,” he said, “and no one will be able to say that I disturbed your games.”

The walls were fifteen feet thick at ground level, and the few windows were set high in the room. Little light penetrated the gloom, and a deathly chill hung about the dreary place. The two boys began once more to cry, saying that they wanted to go back to their mother and to good Lord Rivers.

“Tush! Tush!” answered Richard of Gloucester. “Big boys like you should not be speaking in that manner. There are hundreds of lads in London today who envy your fine clothes and your horses, I do assure you.”

King Edward said tearfully, “Ay, and we envy their rags, my lord. At least they can run about the streets as they will, with no one to lock them up and tell them what they must do.”

Richard “Crookback” stumped out of the room in a rage. That night he sent word to the prison where Lord Rivers lay, commanding that he should be executed without delay, since he was a dangerous man who had too much influence upon the boys and might, one day, persuade them to act unwisely.

A little later he called a Council, to arrange for the coronation of King Edward V, the little prince in the White Tower. But it was not a full Council; only a handful of lords were invited to it, and those men who were known to support Gloucester in all he did, with the exception of one—Lord Hastings—a man very much after the manner of Lord Rivers. As it turned out, Hastings had been asked there for a special reason, though he did not know it at the time.

After keeping the Council waiting for a long while, Gloucester came into the chamber, frowning and looking greatly disturbed.

“My lords,” he said, “things are not as they should be. What, in your opinion, should be done to anyone who tried to murder me?”

Good, simple Lord Hastings rose and said, “There is only one answer to such a question, my lord. Any man who has attempted your life should be punished, according to the laws of this land.”

Gloucester turned towards him, his dark eyes lit by a strange, almost mad light.

“I beg you, my lord, to look at my arm,” he said, suddenly ripping up his sleeve so that the white and shrivelled limb could be seen.

He waited for a while, as the lords of the Council gazed at him, wondering what he might say next. Then he went on, with something like a vengeful triumph in his voice, “This arm, my lord, has been withered by the spells put on it by the Queen.”

Lord Hastings, who knew the Queen to be an honest woman and no witch, smiled, as though to say that everyone present in that room had long been aware of Richard's withered arm, for he had been born with it.

But that smile sealed Hastings's death. Gloucester flew into a sudden violent anger and began to scream out that the man was a traitor and was in league with the Queen in this wicked affair.

"My lord," cried Hastings, "I do assure you, I am no traitor!"

The Duke of Gloucester was beside himself with rage now, and leaned over the oaken table, his thin lips flecked with spittle.

"By God," he shouted, "I will not dine this night until they have brought me your head, for you are a traitor!"

Soldiers ran into the room, almost as though they had been rehearsed for this grim act, and dragged the still-protesting Lord Hastings into a passageway. There, while the councillors waited speechless and afraid, these men forced Hastings to his knees and hacked off his head upon a rough block of wood which lay on the floor.

From that moment onward, Richard of Gloucester seemed to become a ravaging wild beast, accusing all who did not praise him publicly as being traitors, fit only for death. Now the prisons became full and in this brief reign of terror the men-at-arms who wore Gloucester's livery seemed like the agents of doom. When they knocked upon a door by night, silence fell upon the house; husbands kissed their wives good-bye, and mothers their sons, for seldom did they return, once Richard "Crookback" had sent for them.

Richard's next act of devilry was to persuade a priest, named Shaw, to preach to a vast gathering of people, saying that the little princes were not the true sons of Edward IV, and therefore had no right to the throne of England.

"Our rightful king is Richard of Gloucester," called out the priest, waiting for the assembled multitude to greet his announcement with cheers. But there was only a sullen and resentful silence.

One citizen even dared to say, "We be determined rather to adventure and to commit us to the peril of our lives and the jeopardy of death, than to live in such thralldom and bondage as we have lived long time heretofore!"

When Richard learned of the reception which Shaw's words had had, he called once more for the people to gather, and this time he made his brother,

the Duke of Buckingham, address them, saying what the priest had already said. When, once again, the people were silent, a number of Buckingham's servants and soldiers began a great shouting, as though they were citizens. "King Richard! King Richard!" they yelled out. "Long live King Richard!"

At this, Gloucester came forward, smiling sadly, and, with a great show of reluctance, finally agreed to accept the crown of England.

When young Prince Edward, in the White Tower, was told of his uncle's accession to the throne, he said in tears, "Now that he has taken my crown, there is little left for him to take but my life. Yet, by God's grace, I hope that he will not do that, for I wish to live even though I shall never be a king now."

From this time onward, the two young boys were kept shut up in a single stone-walled room in the Tower. Their own servants were dismissed, and only one man came to them, a rogue whom they called Black Bill, because of his swarthy complexion and dark beard.

Black Bill was a notorious ruffian, but after a while even he began to feel pity for these friendless lads, and brought them what few comforts he could lay his hands on, though when Gloucester's servants were within earshot he pretended to speak roughly to the two princes.

Richard of Gloucester was supreme in power now, but always at the back of his dark and tormented mind lurked the fear that one day some avenger would drag him from the throne and set up one of the little princes in his place. He had come to the stage of distrusting all the men who surrounded him, for even though they smiled at him, anxious to gain his favour, he suspected that they were plotting to murder him. His sleep was now filled with horrible nightmares, in which he saw Clarence choking in the butt of wine, or Hastings being dragged down to the chopping-block.

By daytime, Richard feared that someone would poison him, and always two tasters stood by his table, to try the food which was offered him before he would dare place it in his mouth.

At last it came to him that if only the two princes were out of the way, there would then be no motive for anyone to murder him, since there was no other immediate claimant to the throne.

This seemed the answer to Richard's self-torments. Straightway he sent to the Governor of the Tower, commanding him to kill the two princes without delay and to send for him later, so that he might identify their bodies. But the Governor, though a harsh man, was a just one, and the

thought of such a deed appalled him. He refused to carry out the King's command, saying that he would have no hope of Heaven should he be a party to the murder of such poor innocents.

King Richard smiled wickedly when he heard these words; then he sent word to the Governor that it was not his wish to deprive any of his subjects of Heaven, and that, indeed, he would rather help them to find Heaven, if that was what they wished for.

He commanded the Governor this time to surrender all his keys for one night, which the good fellow did unwillingly, for he had some inkling now of the King's purpose.

That night, as the two brothers slept together in one broad bed, murderers hired by Richard crept up to them and stifled them, pressing down thick feather pillows over their faces so that they could neither breathe nor shout out for help.

The boys were not very robust and the frightful deed did not occupy the murderers long. As soon as they had made sure that the princes were indeed dead, the men carried the bodies to a hole under the stone staircase, and there covered them over and walled them in before making their escape from the White Tower.

But if King Richard thought that this deed of blood would bring peace to his mind, he was much mistaken. His nightmares increased in frequency and horror. He walked about the court with staring eyes and the movements of an old man. His courtiers no longer smiled at him, but looked down at the ground when he approached them. When the King rode out into London, the citizens stared at him rebelliously and even spat in his direction, as though they held him in great contempt, in spite of the new laws which he had passed, hoping to bring the people round to his side.

One man at this time said, "There have been Kings of England who resembled lions, wolves, and even fat hogs; but this is the first time we have one who rode his horse like a monkey at a village fair."

These words were passed to the King, and the man was secretly followed and held in custody, in case Richard wished to put him to the torture for his insults.

But, strangely, Richard "Crookback" shook his head and told his officers to release the fellow and put five crowns in his pocket.

"At least I know what that man thinks of me," he said, with his sour-faced smile. "But I do not know what you, who profess to serve me, would

do if a more powerful man than I were to arise in England.”

One of the officers said, “My liege, we should fight to the death for you.”

The King turned away from him and said, “You are a lying dog! It is such as you who would be the first to drag me down and put your dagger into me. Do not deceive yourself—I am no fool.”

It was almost as though Richard “Crookback”, he who had such an insight into treachery because of his own grim experience, could foresee his own inevitable end . . . that one day the men who had sworn to serve him would turn against him in his moment of need. For that is exactly what was to happen.

In a final act of villainy, Richard “Crookback” quarrelled with his own brother, that Duke of Buckingham who had once proclaimed him King of England, and like a man driven to the edge of madness and revenge, cut off Buckingham’s head.

Richard had reigned just over two years when Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and an old supporter of the Red Rose of Lancaster, landed at Milford Haven after his exile in Brittany.

As he rode through Wales, the peasants left their fields to follow him, for they remembered that he was descended from the Welshman, Owen Tudor of Anglesey, and the young French princess, Katherine, who had come to England after Agincourt. This man with Welsh blood in his veins had some of that same glamour about him which their ancestors had seen in Llewelyn ap Gruffydd, or in Owen Glendower.

In the year 1485, Henry Tudor’s army met that of Richard “Crookback”, at Bosworth Field in Leicestershire. The night before the battle, Richard lay sleepless upon his narrow bed, his tottering mind now swarming with visions of those he had done to death in his short reign of blood.

On the morrow, when the battle began, “Crookback” soon saw that his own premonitions had been correct; many of his forces, under Lord Stanley, swung away from the conflict and rode to join Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. And, while Richard hacked about him, in the thick of the fighting, cursing all who betrayed him, the Earl of Northumberland followed Stanley’s example and galloped across to Henry’s side.

Now, deserted by the best of his fighting-men, the King realised at last that his own end was near. Though a few friends still remained with him, and did their best to draw him away from the field, he shook them off, and

shouted out for all to hear, “Treason! Treason! But, by God, I will die like a king!”

Though small in stature and deformed, he spurred on and on, until his horse was killed under him. Then, struggling somehow to his feet, he slashed his way forwards, more like a maniacal demon than a man.

Still shouting curses, he reached the Lancastrian standard and flung it to the ground. It was not until he came within a yard or two of Henry Tudor that a great force of men dragged him down, by sheer weight of numbers, and chopped and chopped at his writhing body until there was no life left in it.

His crown fell from about his helmet and rolled away under a hawthorn bush in the struggle. Lord Stanley found it there and with his own hands set it upon the head of Henry Tudor.

And with this act was avenged the brutal murder of the two little princes, who had ridden out so happily that spring morning, from the great castle of Ludlow, to be smothered in their lonely bed in the White Tower.

Bosworth Field was the last of the Wars of the Roses.

Chapter 11

The Percys and Alnwick Castle— Fourteenth to Seventeenth Century

THE lords of Alnwick were not royal personages, but the power they have wielded in the past might make many a monarch envious. The lords of Alnwick have been proud, brave, impetuous, ruthless—as befitted men who lived always on the edge of the chasm of death, from English lance or Scottish arrow—for they spoke their mind to the English King without fear and trembling; and they ruled the Scottish Border with a warrior-arrogance that not even the Romans in their pride could excel. For many centuries, few of the lords of Alnwick died in their beds. Not for them the slow coming-on of age and disease; theirs was the quicker end, of axe, or lance, or pistol shot. Theirs was the death of fighting-men, the death which the early roaring Vikings would have wished for and applauded; and which later men, of more gentle times, can only sigh over, almost in pity, that such a gallant brood should so often have destroyed itself.

In the whole history of England, there can be few families who have embraced life so lustily as the Percys—and few, a very few, who have faced death so frequently.

Yet this story does not begin with the Percy family. The first castle to have its keep and grey stone towers reflected in the winding river Aln was set up by Gilbert Tyson, the standard-bearer of William of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings.

Domesday Book did not reach as far north as Alnwick, so we do not know whether the Saxons had a fortress there—as they had at Tamworth or Nottingham—before Gilbert Tyson came.

But already, by Gilbert Tyson's time, the curse of sudden death seemed to hang over Alnwick. In 1093, not far away from the castle, the King of Scotland, Malcolm Canmore, or Greathead, was ambushed and murdered, with his son and all his company, at the order of Robert Mowbray, the last of his family to carry the proud title of Earl of Northumberland. (How often the Mowbrays, like the Mortimers, figure in our history!)

In a little plantation, not far from the road, stands a cross on three steps. The masks of four bearded men stare out from the stone at the top of the shaft. This is the place where Malcolm, the Prince whose goodness Shakespeare outlined in *Macbeth*, fell to the assassin's sword, as he returned peacefully from visiting William Rufus at Gloucester.

The inscription on this cross says simply:

King Malcolm's Cross, decayed by time, was restored by his descendant, Elizabeth, Duchess of Northumberland,

1774.

The simple dignity of those words reaches across the centuries to us. Here is the pathos of violent death; here is the link between Northumberland and Scotland—a link that has never been broken, though often it has been sealed in blood.

In 1095, Tyson of Alnwick set the pattern of much which was to follow; he joined Mowbray in rebelling against the English King—and so, defeated, lost his castle and his lands.

The new lord of Alnwick was the Norman, Yvo de Vescy, whose pride caused him to extend the castle to the size we see today, and whose equally proud son-in-law, to whom the fortress passed, was killed in a foray against the Welsh, after having joined forces with King David of Scotland against the English King.

Again and again, in the history of Alnwick, such things are to happen—almost as though this great fortress exercised a malignant influence on the men who possessed it.

In 1172, the King of Scotland, William the Lion, besieged Alnwick, and was successfully beaten off. Two years later, he tried again, harrying the countryside and putting to the sword three hundred men and women who had sheltered in a church—only to be captured himself at daybreak, to the immense delight of the English King, Henry II, who at the time was allowing himself to be flogged as an act of penitence for the murder of Thomas Beckett. The capture of this troublesome Scot seemed, somehow, to be the answer that the King had awaited—that Saint Thomas had forgiven him. . . .

But by 1212 the tables had turned, and the de Vescy who held Alnwick then was only too pleased to gallop into Scotland for shelter from the wrath of King John, against whom he had rebelled, leaving the furious King to

order that the castle of Alnwick should be torn down, stone from stone! This order was never obeyed, however. And the lord of Alnwick was soon to get his revenge against the petulant monarch.

Two years later, de Vescy was one of the twenty-five barons who stood about King John, their hands upon their swords, their faces grim, watching the defeated King sign his name to Magna Carta.

And so it was always to run—that the lords of Alnwick should defy their Kings, should one day fight the Scots and the next day ride to them for protection. And though the de Vescy family lost Alnwick when a treacherous Bishop of Durham violated his trust and sold the castle over the head of its young owner, the new lords of Alnwick, the Percys, immediately became involved in the pattern which had grown up about the place.

In 1314 the last de Vescy died on the field of Bannockburn. The first Lord Percy of Alnwick was captured that day by the Scots, and though he was later ransomed, died of a broken heart, it is said, for the shame which had come to England by that defeat at Scottish hands.

It was this Percy who revolted against Edward II, and who was chiefly concerned in the capture and the execution of Edward's favourite, Piers Gaveston, the Knight of Gascony.

Yet the next Henry Percy—a name which echoes down through history—gave all his support to Edward III, in his continuous forays against the Scots, and commanded the right wing of the English army which crushed the army of King David, son of Bruce, at Neville's Cross, in the same year that the Black Prince won his spurs at Crécy, fighting against the French; the year 1346.

Ten years later, the third Lord Percy of Alnwick Castle, another Henry, ravaged as far north as Edinburgh, laying waste the countryside around him.

Sir John Froissart, who lived through these times, writes humanly and vividly of the Scots:

They are a bold, hardy race, and much inured to war. When they invaded England, they were all usually on horseback, except the camp-followers; they brought no carriages, neither did they encumber themselves with any provision. Under the flap of his saddle each man had a broad plate of metal; and behind his saddle a little bag of oatmeal, so that when occasion needed, cakes were made of the oatmeal, and baked upon the plates; for the most part,

however, they ate the half-soddened flesh of the cattle they captured, and drank water.

Here we get a picture of a warrior-folk accustomed to hardship and meagre living. Froissart's other comment on Scotland hints, in its dry way, at a wasteland that had been fought over for so many centuries that hardly anything of worth remained:

Scotland is a very poor country, and the people generally envious of the good fortunes of others, and suspicious of losing anything themselves. Whenever the English make inroads into Scotland, which they frequently do, they order their provisions to follow them close at their backs, if they wish to live, for nothing is to be had in that country without the greatest difficulty. There is neither iron to shoe horses, nor leather to make harness. . . .

This was the land, harried and burned for year after year by the Percys of Alnwick Castle, the family whose Household Book a little later on shows a domestic expenditure of £1,500 a year (at least £15,000 in our money today). We are told that for breakfast the Earl and Countess ate a loaf of bread, two *manchets* (cakes of fine white flour), half a chine of mutton or beef, and drank a quart of beer and a quart of wine. During Lent, when meat was forbidden, the noble Percy and his wife ate two pieces of potted fish, six "baconned" herrings and a dish of sprats.

Their attendants at these meals were a chaplain, a pantler (an officer in charge of the larder), two cupbearers, a carver, a server, a gentleman waiter, a groom of the chambers and five yeomen ushers.

For two children, still in the nursery, the retinue and food were no less liberal. They consumed a manchet, a quart of beer, and three mutton bones boiled, for their breakfast, and had six retainers to wait on them!

No oatcakes for the Percys, when they could avoid them!

In 1377, the current Henry Percy was created the first Earl of Northumberland and, as befitted such a powerful nobleman, officiated as Marshal of England at the coronation of Richard II. And, ironically enough, it was this same Percy who, immortalised as Northumberland by Shakespeare in *Richard II*, was largely responsible for deposing that wretched King and for placing Henry Bolingbroke on the throne in his place as Henry IV.

It was at this time that the best-known of all the Percy family, “Hotspur”, made his mark both on English history and English verse.

The old ballad records the occasion in this manner:

*It fell about the Lammas ride,
When the muir men win their hay,
The doughty Douglas bound him to ride
Into England, to drive a prey.*

*And he has burn'd the dales of Tyne,
And part of Bambrough shire;
And three good towns of Reidswire fells,
He left them all on fire.*

*And he march'd up to Newcastle,
And rode it round about;
“O wha's the lord of this castle,
Or wha's the lady o't?”*

*But up spake proud Lord Percy, then,
And O but he spake hie!
“I am the lord of this castle,
My wife's the lady gay.”*

*“If thou'rt the lord of this castle,
Sae well it pleases me!
For, ere I cross the Border fells,
The tane of us shall die.”*

*He took a long spear in his hand,
Shod with the metal free,
And for to meet the Douglas there,
He rode right furiouslie.*

*But O how pale his lady look'd,
Frae off the castle wa',
When down before the Scottish spear
She saw proud Percy fa'.*

*“Had we twa been upon the green,
And never an eye to see,*

*I wad hae had you, flesh and fell;
But your lance sall gae with me!"*

*"O gae ye up to Otterburne,
And wait there dayis three;
And, if I come not ere three dayis end,
A fause knight ca' ye me."*

Here speaks the pride of the Percys, in fury at being bested by a Douglas. Not only had the foraging Scots burned to the ground every place of any note along the Border, their leader had tipped Hotspur from his saddle and had then made off with his pennon!

As he bore away his prize, Douglas called back contemptuously over his shoulder, "I will carry this token of your prowess with me into Scotland, and place it on the tower of my own castle at Dalkeith!"

"By God," roared Hotspur, "you shall not even bear it out of Northumberland! You shall never have my pennon to brag of!"

So the Scots moved away to the north, driving their stolen cattle before them, until they reached Otterburn, where they camped, making themselves huts of trees and bracken, almost in derision of Henry Percy.

Hotspur was almost unable to contain himself for fury, and as soon as he could collect six hundred knights about him, and his army of eight thousand footmen, he took the road north in pursuit.

For Henry Percy the "eight short leagues" between Newcastle and Otterburn must have seemed an eternity as he thrashed his charger along the road, furious at his loss of honour, the downfall of his pride.

Yet at last the two armies clashed, the English bringing superior numbers to the battle, and the ballad tells us:

*When Percy wi' the Douglas met,
I wat he was fu' fain!
They swakked their swords, till sair they swat,
And the blood ran down like rain.*

*But Percy with his good broad sword,
That could so sharply wound,
Has wounded Douglas on the brow,
Till he fell to the ground.*

But another account of that time tells a different story:

The Earl of Douglas, seeing his men repulsed, seized a battleaxe with both his hands; and, in order to rally his forces, dashed into the midst of his enemies, and gave such blows to all around him, that no one could withstand them, but all made way for him on every side. Thus he advanced like another Hector, thinking to conquer the field by his own prowess, until he was met by three spears that were pointed at him. One struck him on the shoulder, another on the stomach, and a third entered his thigh. As he could not disengage himself from these spears, he was borne to the ground, still fighting desperately. From that moment, he never rose again.

The chronicler adds the strange little comment, so reminiscent of the death of poor Llewelyn in the wood at Builth:

The three English lances knew they had struck down some person of considerable rank, but they never supposed it was Earl Douglas.

In this story we are given some measure of the fearful “Black” Douglas, who rode through the north like an avenging fury while he lived; it took three spearmen to finish him, and he still fought desperately at that!

It is a strange sidelight on the chivalry of those grim times to learn that Sir Ralph Percy, Hotspur’s brother, who was also in that battle, was so sorely wounded that “his drawers and greaves were full of blood”, and that the Earl of Moray, to whom he was brought as a prisoner, immediately ordered his men to take all care of him and to bind up his wounds gently.

The English, though greater in numbers, now began to feel the effects of those “eight short leagues” of forced marching and riding, and fell back exhausted.

They were driven back and back, until at last they straggled for five miles along the road southwards, in utter flight.

Hotspur, who had fought himself to a standstill, stood, like a man of blood, leaning upon his sword, when the Scottish knight, Sir Hugh Montgomery approached him.

*As soon as he knew it was Montgomery,
He struck his sword's point in the gronde;
And Montgomery was a courteous knight,
And quickly took him by the honde.*

*This deed was done at Otterburne
About the breaking of the day;
Earl Douglas was buried at the broken bush,
And Percy led captive away.*

Nor was Hotspur the only captive in that unsuccessful attack; Sir John Froissart reports, "I was told that at the battle of Otterburne, which was fought on the 19th day of August, 1388, there were taken or left dead on the field, on the side of the English, 1,040 men of all descriptions; in the pursuit 840, and more than 1,000 wounded."

He adds the wry comment that "had the Scots been in sufficient numbers, *none* of the English would have escaped death or captivity."

And all for the sake of a captured pennon, and the pride of a young fire-eater!

Hotspur was ransomed from the Scots soon after this terrible defeat, only to die at the Battle of Shrewsbury, in 1403, when with his father, the Earl, he led the Rising of the Percys against the English King they had both helped to put on the throne, Henry IV; he who was already harassed to death by Glendower.

Hotspur's father, the Earl, lived on for six more years of rebellion and bloodshed, sometimes taking refuge in Scotland, sometimes conspiring with Owen Glendower of Wales.

In 1409, this Earl led an army of Northumbrians and Scots against King Henry. At Bramham Moor in Yorkshire he was killed.

The new lord of Alnwick was the son of Hotspur, another Henry Percy. He was seventeen when his fire-eating grandfather fell dead on the field of Bramham, and he could hardly remember his hard-riding father who had died in a forlorn cause, fighting alongside the Welsh at Shrewsbury.

Yet, all the same, the poignant Percy tradition repeated itself. This young boy, like his family before him, started on the English side, for, as a lad of twelve, he had set out for France, together with James, the young son of the Scottish King, to be educated in France. Off Flamborough Head, his ship

had been met by a pirate vessel and the two young boys had been captured and sent to Windsor as valuable prizes!

There the young Percy had struck up a firm friendship with another Henry, the Prince of Wales who was to become Henry V of England. And because of this childhood alliance, in 1436 the Earl of Northumberland rode up the Breamish river towards Scotland, to be ambushed and defeated by a descendant of the Douglas his father had killed at Otterburn.

The Earl fought himself free this time, but his cousin, Sir Richard Percy, was left dead on the field of Chevy Chase.

Once more a ballad celebrates this sad affair; once more the Percys ride by night into Alnwick Castle, exhausted and bleeding, the great gates of the barbican clanging shut behind them to keep out the angry Scots.

As we read the angry history of this warrior family, we are driven to ask ourselves where else in Europe could there have been such a clan, so doomed by its courage and its pride, so involved in the great affairs of state which made a man either a king or a corpse.

In 1483 Richard “Crookback”, the usurper, became King Richard III. The fourth Earl of Northumberland followed him to the Battle of Bosworth, and, when Henry Tudor, grandson of that Owen Tudor who had so captivated Katherine, Princess of France, overcame “Crookback”, was thrown into prison, though he had deserted Richard.

In a slightly later time, the sixth Earl of Northumberland, once more a Henry Percy, fell in love with Anne Boleyn, before another Henry Tudor marked her for his own. This Henry Percy was not only forced to renounce the lady, but years later, when she had fallen out of favour with the King of England, was ordered to sit as a member of the Commission which tried her and sent her to the block, on Tower Green, where later young Lady Jane Grey was to meet her end.

This Henry Percy, who had loved Anne so dearly, showed the typical courage of his family. He *refused* to sit in judgment on the lady of his heart, even though the tyrant commanded it. When Anne Boleyn was tried, Henry Percy took to his bed, and sent a message to the King that he was not well and could not appear at the trial.

He died only a year after Anne was beheaded, in great poverty and broken-hearted at the ruin of his family, many of whom had been executed by Henry VIII for their rebellious independence.

Even when the line of Percys was temporarily extinguished, and the Earl of Warwick became Duke of Northumberland, the same sort of tragedy persisted, almost as though the lords of Alnwick Castle must accept doom at the hands of kings together with that rambling grey stone fortress. Take the one, and you must accept the other!

For it was that Duke of Northumberland who married his son, Lord Guildford Dudley, to young Lady Jane Grey, and so brought himself, his son, and his pretty daughter-in-law to that same block near the Tower of London, set just south of the Chapel, where the ravens love to stroll.

By the time of Elizabeth, Alnwick Castle, from which the Percys had ridden so many times against the Scots, was unable to resist any further military attack. The moat was filled in, and many of the walls were in ruin. The proud family's sun had set at last.

Yet the pattern died hard, like the Percys themselves. In 1584, Henry, the eighth Earl of Northumberland, was arrested on a trumped-up charge of being in league with Mary, Queen of Scots. A year later, he was found shot through the heart in the Tower of London. The government of Queen Elizabeth went out of their way to prove that he had killed himself. But in those tortuous days, when Elizabeth had the best spy-system in the whole of Europe, sudden death was something which often had a political rather than a personal significance. The Earl was a pleasant enough man—but he was dangerous to the new Tudor line.

In 1605, Thomas Percy, the Constable of Alnwick Castle, conspired against his new King, James the First, a Scot, and, after the Gunpowder plot had been discovered, was hunted across England, to be shot down like a dog at Holbeach, in Staffordshire. The current Earl, yet another Henry Percy, was suspected of being involved, and was imprisoned for fifteen years in the Tower of London. All through history, the route from Alnwick to the Tower had been well trodden by the Percys.

Near Wooperton, in a small tree-enclosed spot, just off the main road to Newcastle, there is a cross, and two lichen-covered stones set nine yards apart from each other.

Here, on April 25th, 1464, was fought the Battle of Hedgeley Moor, between Lord Montagu for the Yorkists, and Sir Ralph Percy leading the Lancastrians.

The two stones are called "Percy's Leap", for, as he received his death-thrust on that day, he is said to have sprung in agony from one to the other.

The Percys' gargantuan acts and appetites are as well illustrated by that legend as by any other, perhaps.

And so is their fatal aptitude for allying themselves with lost causes. A month after Sir Ralph's violent end, the Lancastrians were finally crushed in the north when their standard fell at Hexham.

A romantic could brood overlong, perhaps, at Alnwick. How many Percys have ridden through the fourteenth-century barbican on the west, and then over the bridge that leads northwards to Scotland? And how many have been brought back, stiff in their cold armour, across that bridge, to the Chapel within the Outer Bailey?

The great towers loom upwards—the Abbot's Tower, the Constable's Tower, the Postern Tower, much as they always have done, untouched by the later hands which re-styled the castle and made it into a palace.

In the town of Alnwick itself, the grim Hotspur Tower, built by the son whose father fell at Shrewsbury, straddles the street called Bondgate, forcing all traffic to pass beneath it in single file. . . . Once, it was a prison; now, it is a monument to that hard pride which was determined to wring homage out of any man who could be forced to pay it. One thinks of the ships which passed between the legs of the proud Colossus of Rhodes, humbly to unload their cargoes; or of the words of Cassius about Caesar:

*Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world
Like a Colossus; and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves. . . .*

(Julius Caesar)

Such a spirit is usual only among great kings and emperors. Yet the proud Percys had it in full measure. It is perhaps only an accident of history that, at some point in their aggressive career, they did not become kings themselves, on one side or the other of the Border which they ruled for so long.

Chapter 12

Lady Jane Grey and the Tower of London —Sixteenth Century

THE young girl who lay on the narrow wooden bed in the corner of the room stirred a little, half-opened her eyes, then shut them again and drew the blankets higher up about her. She had been having such a wonderful dream, in which she was riding with her young husband, Guildford Dudley, on a white horse through the sunlight, cantering along the ridges of high hills, then suddenly plunging down into leafy valleys, laughing. There had been cottages, and smiling village-women who came to their doors and waved, and called out, “God bless you, Lady Jane! God bless you!”

But now the dream had ended, and the sunlight had drawn away with it. All was grey and cold. Out of the corner of her eye, the girl saw that snowflakes had gathered in a corner of the window. A strange, white, unearthly glow was coming into the room now; the sort of half-light that snow brings with it.

Then Lady Jane remembered that it was February; February, 1554. One could expect snow at that time of the year, she thought.

Her thoughts fluttered back. When she married Guildford Dudley last May, the birds had been singing and the leaves sprouting like mad on all the trees. It had been such a lovely time then, with the bells clanging and the people shouting and throwing their caps into the air. Guildford had clasped her arm as they sat in the coach and said, “Why so thoughtful, my dearling?” And she had said, half-jokingly, “Because now I shall have less time for my studies, husband! What would Master Aylmer, ay, and Master Ascham, say, at my so neglecting my Latin and Greek as to marry thee?”

Lord Guildford Dudley bent and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

“Why, thou goose!” he said. “A grown lass of sixteen worrying about Latin and Greek on her wedding-day! Master Ascham can go and shoot with his bow and arrows, for all I care! He’ll be teaching thee no more Latin and Greek—and no more Hebrew, either! Those days are gone; you have passed through the door into another life, my love!”

“Into another life,” thought the girl on the hard wooden bed. “Ay, that is true, and with a vengeance!”

She lay back and almost wept to think of it all—of that day in July last year when her father-in-law had stumped into her room, his heavy sword clattering against all the furniture, his armour clinking and his leather riding-boots creaking. . . . The great Duke of Northumberland, the father of dear Guildford, who had been so kind to her; the Protector of England. She had always been a little frightened of him, of his great voice and bristling whiskers—and so had her cousin, the young King Edward VI; he had told her so, when they were playing chess one day under the apple trees.

And that morning in July, she was more frightened than ever, for Northumberland’s face was so set, his eyes so staring, that Jane felt he might be ill, or mad.

“Put on thy best gown, Jane,” he had said. “There are fifteen lords of the Council, including Master Cranmer, and nine judges too, waiting to kiss thy hand in the ante-room!”

“To kiss my hand, my lord?” she recalled saying. “Why should so many great gentlemen wish to kiss my poor hand?”

Then the Duke of Northumberland had said, with a strange smile, “They want to proclaim thee Queen of England, dearest chuck! Young Edward has at last gone to Heaven, and has signed a paper, leaving thee his crown and his throne—ay, and his Protector!”

She remembered crying then, to think that Edward, her cousin, would never play with her any more, never tell her about his dreams of making England great again, never come to her with his Latin book to ask the meaning of this word or that.

In the ante-room, the great ones fell to their knees as she walked through the gilded door.

“God save your Majesty!” said Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and bent to kiss her hand.

She remembered them all shouting aloud, “Long live the Queen!” And then her knees gave and she found herself weeping, on the floor, with Northumberland bending over her, his red face half grim, half anxious.

“Courage, lass, courage!” he had whispered. “This is no way for a Queen to behave.”

And Jane had whispered, “I cannot be Queen, my lord. I cannot bear so great an honour. I am only an ordinary lass!”

The Protector helped her to the seat by the window, the seat where she always read her books because the light was so good there for that crabbed old Greek writing.

“Put on a brave show, girl,” he said in a low voice. “They are all watching thee, and will report what they see in London later. Besides, it is your duty, and you cannot set aside the duty which God gives you to perform. Have faith—you are a true Tudor, you are the great-granddaughter of Henry VII, himself. That sets you higher than Mary and Elizabeth, does it not? *They* are not recognised by the Council assembled here.”

“But Edward named Mary to be Queen when he was gone,” whispered Jane. “I know he did; he told me so, out there in the orchard.”

The Protector smiled grimly for a moment, then he said, “That was a long time ago, my dear. Poor Edward saw sense before God took him, and he remade his will in thy favour. There is no way of avoiding it, my love.”

Lady Jane had stood then and faced the many gentlemen with the worried faces.

“Very well, my lords,” she had made herself say. “Then if it must be so, God give me strength to bear this heavy burden.”

That had been in July, she thought. On July 10th they had brought her to the Tower and proclaimed her Queen. The citizens of London who gathered outside on Tower Hill were few in number—and silent. It was as though they did not want her to be their Queen, in spite of what her father-in-law, and all the other great gentlemen had said. . . .

Then the nightmare had started. Catholic Mary had raised an army, it was said, and Northumberland had gone with his soldiers to fight with her. Queen Jane, alone in the Tower, had heard strange rumours—that most of England stood for Mary, that Northumberland had torn off his cap, like any other good fellow and had shouted for all to hear, “God save the Queen!”

But they had taken him to Tower Hill and chopped off that proud, ambitious head, with its jutting nose and its bristling beard, and then set it on a pole for all the world to see.

And on July 19th the soldiers had come, wearing the livery of Mary Tudor, hard-faced, their hands upon their swords.

“Madam, make ready,” they had said. “Your reign is over!”

The girl in the wooden bed began to shudder then, as she called to mind that day—a silly, stupid day, with all the grown-ups acting as though she, Lady Jane, who had never wanted to wear a crown, or to do anything but read her books and play tennis with her young husband, was some wicked ogress! “Your reign is over!” the soldiers said . . . but she had *had* no reign! She tried to tell them that, but they would not listen. They shook their great fists in her face, and swore terrible oaths about what they would do to her if they had their chance; and all the while she was trying to tell them that they were making a mistake, that she didn’t care *who* was Queen, as long as it was a good woman who would rule justly.

But when they would not listen, she gave up trying to call above their noise, and remembered something Master Aylmer had taught her about the Greek Stoics—that they accepted their fate without protesting, because, if the Gods willed it, then there was nothing a man could do to change his pattern of life.

Mary Tudor was proclaimed Queen in the streets of London—pale-faced Mary, who wanted England to become Catholic again, and who had sworn that she would marry Catholic Philip of Spain, whatever anyone said.

And so Jane had left the King’s House, which Henry VIII had built in the Tower for his own use, and had gone to lodge with Partridge, the Gaoler, in this little grey stone room, where the snow built up on the window-ledges, and the draught blew under the thick oak door.

And Guildford, her young husband, had been put in the Beauchamp Tower, that overlooked Tower Green. Jane shivered as she thought of this place. Another Jane, the Viscountess Rochford, had been beheaded there, two years before, in February. And the year before that, the last of the Plantagenets, Margaret of Salisbury, had knelt on that little green square, too. So had poor luckless Anne Boleyn, who had been so gay and carefree, dancing before the old King, Henry, once upon a time.

Suddenly the oaken door opened. Jane did not turn to see who had entered, but she felt a cold air blow across her as she lay in that narrow bed.

A woman in sober grey scurried over the rush-strewn floor and blew for a moment or two on the white embers that lay in the hearth. Then she laid a small bundle of kindling-wood across the fire-dogs and coaxed the tongues of flame with her breath until they had caught.

Jane suddenly thought that this was a small fire to last through a wintry day—a very small fire. It would never see that day out.

She said gently, "It is Mistress Partridge, the Gaoler's wife, is it not? Good morning, Mistress Partridge."

The woman gave a little start and dropped her flint and steel into the hearth. It made a sound like an axe falling sharply.

"Oh, save us!" she said, "I did not think you would be awake, my lady!"

Jane smiled and said, "I have been awake for some time, Mistress Partridge. The wild beasts in the Lion Tower have been roaring and snarling so that I could not get off to sleep again, once I woke."

The woman stood up and said, almost as though to herself, "Poor dumb brutes, they always seem to know—though, in all faith no one has ever told them. . . ."

Lady Jane said, "You mean, about my father and my brother?"

Her voice was breaking, she felt; she dared not say more.

The Gaoler's wife came to the bedside and patted the girl gently on the thin shoulder.

"They made a good end, my lamb," she said. "There's no profit in worrying your sweet head about them, love. They are in God's bosom now."

She halted a while, and then added, "My good man was visiting the Beauchamp Tower last night, my lady. He says that your husband, Lord Guildford Dudley, has carved your name on the wall there, as well as scratching it with his diamond on the window-panes. A rare good job he made of it, too, said my man. But then, he can't write himself, as you know, my lady, and so he respects it all the more in them who can."

Jane turned her head away, and when she dared to speak again, said, "How is he—my husband, Mistress Partridge? It is so wicked that they will not let me see him now."

The woman in grey blew her nose, perhaps more loudly than she need have done, and bent over the fire again, rearranging the sticks here and there, though they seemed to be burning well enough.

"There's pease pudding for you to break your fast on, my lady," she said at last. "Ay, and a cup of mulled wine, with cinnamon and ginger in it, to keep the cold away, if you would care for it."

Outside in the cages, the lions had started up their roaring again. One of them, called Old Harry, because Henry VIII himself had put him there, seemed to be calling out above all the others. Jane had fed him once, back in

the summer, when she had first come to the Tower, as Queen, and the great beast had seemed to bow before her, like an old courtier bending his knee. The soldiers about her, Northumberland's men, had slapped their thighs and sworn great oaths at this, saying they'd never seen anything like it before. Now Old Harry was leading the grim chorus, as though his heart was bursting with some great grief, or some great anger, Jane did not know which it was.

To drive this sound away from her ears, she said, "I will eat nothing, thank you, Mistress Partridge; and as for drink, I would as soon have a glass of clear water from the castle well. My tastes are not extravagant ones, you know."

The woman in grey nodded her head and said, "Yes, I know, my lamb—my lady, I should say. I would to God they were; then I should feel that I was doing more for you."

"You have done all you could for me, in the weeks I have lodged with you," answered the girl. "Whatever happens to me, I am grateful to you, and bear you no ill will."

The woman went over to the oak door, as though suddenly she was anxious to be out of that little grey room.

"What *can* happen to you, love?" she said. "Why, in a week or two, maybe, Queen Mary will order your release—when all the trouble is over and the naughty rebels have gone back to their homes. Then you will ride back with your husband, into the country again, and carry on with your quiet, decent lives once more."

The young girl sat up in bed, her hands clasped and her face set. Her eyes looked very big, very wide and dark, Mistress Partridge thought, like some Saint's eyes she had seen somewhere, in one of the London churches.

"Mistress," said Lady Jane, "I am under no illusions. Last night, before the bells rang midnight, I heard him come—the man with the axe. I heard the lions roar when they smelled him, too. There was a lantern burning, and I saw him walk past this window, with two yeomen to guard him. They nodded their heads this way as they passed. I am not a child, Mistress Partridge. I understand what is going on, although no one tells me."

The woman in grey fingered the iron of the door-latch. It was as cold as ice that morning, as cold as death.

"No, my lady," she said, "I know that. Those in great places are not children for long in these times. But I think you may have little to fear. The

new Queen has said pleasant words about you, in public.”

“Queen Mary is a Catholic, Mistress Partridge,” said the girl, staring helplessly before her, seeing nothing.

The Gaoler’s wife loosed the cold door-latch and turned with a little smile. “But so am I, my lamb,” she said. “So are we all in London, *for the moment*, while this trouble’s on. But that means little enough, in all truth; Catholic or Protestant, they are just words, air, my sweeting! It is what one believes in one’s heart that matters, not what one calls oneself.”

The girl nodded. “That is what I told Feckenham, Mary’s own confessor, when she sent him here to convert me. I said, ‘I ground my faith upon God’s Word, and not upon the Church’.”

Outside, in the City, a bell began to toll. Its sound came clearly over the thin winter air. Mistress Partridge said, with a little shudder, “Come into the far room, my lady. It is warmer in there and the table is laid for you.”

But Jane still shook her head. “I would rather stay here,” she said quietly. “I can overlook the path to the main gate from this window.”

Mistress Partridge began to move towards her, then stopped suddenly. “Oh, my lamb, I do wish you would come,” she said, clasping her red hands, one within the other.

Lady Jane Grey looked down on her calmly and said, in her gentle voice, “I pray you, Mistress, allow me a little authority still. Do not forget that I was once your Queen—if only for a few days. I will stay here.”

Mistress Partridge suddenly ran forward and fell upon her knees at the bedside.

“Oh, my poor, poor lamb,” she cried, holding the girl’s cold hand to her cheek.

Jane touched the woman on the shoulder and said, “Try not to weep, friend. Tears will mend no broken bones. Consider my poor young cousin; Edward accepted his infirmities with a smile; and, goodness knows, the poor lad could scarcely hobble after the ball when we played tennis! He even put up with the preaching of Archbishop Cranmer, at very close quarters—and that, I may tell you, was a considerable trial!”

But the woman still wept, and Jane drew her hand away gently in case she, too, should give way to her true feelings.

Then she said, "Hark at the lions! It seems most strange that they should scent the doom of a great-granddaughter of Henry, does it not?"

Mistress Partridge beat upon the bedside with her clenched fist now, her face all stained with tears.

"Oh, that wicked Northumberland!" she sobbed. "He should never have made you do it! All he wanted was the power in his own hands!"

Then she was amazed at the change which came over the face and bearing of the young girl sitting up in the bed; it was suddenly as though she wore a crown indeed, and bore a sceptre in her hand. Even her voice had changed when she spoke.

"This is neither the time nor the place to talk of the Duke, my father-in-law," she said. "Pray have the goodness to carry out my wishes, Mistress Partridge, and bring me a cup of clear water. That is all I shall drink this morning."

Even as the oak door closed on the still-weeping woman, a kettle-drum began to beat outside the Beauchamp Tower. Then the sound of marching feet came along the causeway that led to the main gate. The thin layer of snow could not disguise them; they were the footsteps of soldiers, heavy-booted soldiers, a half-company of them.

Lady Jane slowly knelt up on her bed, so as to see through the lower panes of the window. There were some yeomen, with halberds, and a number of men with bright morions and carrying swords. Among them was the chaplain, and a sturdy man who wore a black mask and carried something wrapped up in sacking on his shoulder, as though it was rather heavy.

Between the foremost soldiers walked Lord Guildford Dudley, her young husband, his fine head held high, his throat bare, though the February wind blew shrewdly along the causeway, between the walls. The early cold sunlight glinted on his hair as he looked up towards the window where the girl waited, her lips bitten tight together, her hands spread out on the cold leads of the panes.

She saw that he was wearing the red velvet doublet she had given him, with the gold lace at wrist and shoulder which she had stitched on, herself, as a sign of wifely obedience to her lord. She saw that the lace was already tarnished, though it had been so bright when her fingers had played over it, not many months before. She could still sense the roughness that had come to her finger-tips, as she stitched it and bound it to the rich velvet.

Lord Guildford Dudley smiled at her gently, and seemed to say something to the soldiers beside him, but Jane could not hear what it was, for her window would not open and the glass was thick.

Then he had gone outside her vision, with the yeomen carrying their pikes at the ready, and that man in the mask bearing his dreadful burden, as though even he was ashamed of it.

Lady Jane sank back upon the bed, when the party had passed towards the Lion Tower. She wanted to weep, but no tears would come now—only a choking dryness of the throat that almost suffocated her.

Then Mistress Partridge was by her side again, holding the cup of water to her lips. But Jane suddenly shrank away from it, for somewhere, away behind the outer wall, a great shout had gone up, a shout that drowned even the roaring of the lions.

The girl gave a start and said, “The water! Take it away! Look, it is all bloody!”

“There, there,” said the Gaoler’s wife, wiping the girl’s chin with her apron, “ ’tis only a little rust, that came up with the dipper, my lady. ’Tis nothing at all!”

Then Jane began to laugh, but it was not the laughter of mirth. It was such laughter that even the soft-hearted Mistress Partridge could not bear to stay in that little room and listen to it.

And the girl was still laughing when the drum sounded again along the causeway, and the footsteps retraced their path through the snow, this time slower, because of the weight the soldiers were carrying.

The red velvet and the gold lace were still there, but now there was nothing beyond them, above them—nothing. And the chaplain was blowing on his hands as though he was glad to be coming back, out of the cold.

Lady Jane Grey stopped hitting her hand against the cold stone wall at last, and, in a dazed dream, climbed down from the window and made her way towards the little fire. Already kindling-wood was more than half burned through. There came hardly any heat from the fire at all.

Mistress Partridge came in some time afterwards and said, “Come along, my chicken! Let us have your best dress on, and your lovely hair done up.”

Lady Jane said in a dry whisper, “Done up? Out of the way, do you mean?”

And when Mistress Partridge began to shake her head, Lady Jane said, tonelessly, “Do not put yourself out to lie to me, Mistress. I can hear them hammering on Tower Green. I know what it is they are erecting.”

It was the same chaplain, and he was still blowing upon his red hands, as though he could not get rid of the cold.

“Have you broken your fast, Madam?” he asked gently.

The girl was standing still, letting the Gaoler’s wife fasten up her hair.

“It would be a waste of good food, would it not, sir?” she asked, without looking at him, tonelessly.

The man began to cough for a moment, as though to cover up the silence. Then he said, “A good meal helps to keep out the cold; to keep one from shivering, Madam.”

Lady Jane turned slowly to look at him. His reddened eyes fell away from her calm, wide gaze.

“Have no fear, sir,” she said. “I shall not embarrass you in any way. It is not my habit to shiver with fear.”

And when the hammering had stopped, they went outside, onto the snow-covered Green. The ravens were strutting about, black against dead white, like pompous little men.

Lady Jane looked at them for a moment, then smiled a pale smile.

“Set it down, you scholars in black gowns,” she said, “that I had no wish to be Queen, or to take what did not belong to me. Tell my cousin Mary that, when she walks the Green in the spring, will you?”

One of the ravens stopped and glanced up at the young girl with a most quizzical expression, as though he understood her.

Mistress Partridge, who followed in the wake of the group, suddenly began to cry so loudly that a yeoman took her by the arm and shook her into silence.

Then, as there came a sudden flurry of snow from across the Thames, turning the White Tower to a tower of whiteness, in all truth, the same axe fell again, and the ravens stopped strutting about, just as though they were appalled by what had happened.

And from the Lion Tower by the gate there rose such a great roaring, that it seemed the beasts behind their bars had some strange and awful message

to give to the world.

Now the chaplain had forgotten his cold hands, and stood weeping, like all the others, with the snow upon his shoulders.

Even the man in the black mask was weeping, but no one could see this, because of his mask.

At the great country house where Lady Jane was born, two gardeners began to chop the tops from the oak trees along the avenue, in memory of that hideous day.

One said to the other, “ ’Tis a mortal shame, Dickon! And after all that studying and book-learning! A mortal waste, I’d call it.”

The other wiped his brown face on his shirt-sleeve and said, “ ’Twas a waste of more than book-learning, mate. She was a pretty little lass in them days, when she used to run along this here avenue.”

“Ah, well,” said the first one, “great folk is great folk, and the likes of thee and me will never understand them. They live a different sort of life from us common folk.”

“Ay,” said Dickon, raising his axe again, “that they do, mate. But I’d not swap places with them for all their huntin’ and hawkin’ and Latin, and what not. No, not for a bag of gold as big as thy head! And that is big enough, in all conscience! Nay, I’m content to stay plain Dickon Plowright, and I don’t care who knows it!”

Chapter 13

Charles I and Carisbrooke Castle— Seventeenth Century

IT was a wretched November night when Charles Stuart escaped from Hampton Court, and rode south to the house of Lord Southampton at Titchfield, near the mouth of Southampton Water. It was the year of 1647.

He had not expected to get away so easily from the men who had sworn to humble him for belittling the power of Parliament, for exacting his own taxes, for bringing in the Scots to fight on English soil.

Charles Stuart recalled how other kings had been put away secretly—Edward II, Richard II—and marvelled that now he was riding, a free man again, along the King's Highway, his own highway.

Perhaps he thought of his family, for he loved them dearly; even stern Cromwell had admitted as much. "It was the tenderest sight my eyes ever beheld," he said, when he saw Charles fondling his three younger children in his captivity. Perhaps Charles thought of his Queen, Henrietta Maria, the French princess, so much younger than he was.

Now she was safe, in Paris, the woman who had received the Pope's agents at her court, and had arranged for courtiers to go to Mass in her Chapel. It had not been a popular match, as far as the ordinary people of England were concerned. It had seemed too much like a turning-back of the clock, to the days of Bloody Mary, to the burnings at Smithfield. For Henrietta Maria was a Catholic.

But perhaps Charles Stuart thought of other painful things. There was poor Strafford, who had once been his friend, but had been hated by Henrietta Maria. And when the time came, and Strafford had offended the Parliament, Charles had given in to the pleas of his wife on the one hand and the threats of Parliament on the other; and Strafford had gone to the block.

Then there was that other dear friend—proud Buckingham, who had been struck down like a dog at Portsmouth, by the hand of an assassin; there was Prince Rupert, his own hard-riding, devil-may-care nephew, the young man he had so harshly dismissed after the surrender of Bristol.

All his life, Charles had only known disappointments. There had been the time when the London trainbands, the part-time soldiers of the City, had marched out of London rather than follow him; there had been constant blows to his pride, from Parliament, the Puritans, the Scots, almost everyone with whom he had come into contact.

What was there pleasant to recall, as Charles Stuart rode by night to the house of Lord Southampton? His family, yes, that went without saying—his charming little foreign Queen and their six children, with whom he had played, like other less-noble fathers, on the green sward at Hever Castle, in Kent, where once Henry VIII had courted Anne Boleyn, and where Charles's little daughter Mary, who would one day become the Queen of William II of Orange, gave white bread to the swans. Or rowing up the Thames on a summer day, in the royal barge, in a happy family party, with servants and trumpeters, guards and courtiers, and little Princess Elizabeth, dangling her hand in the water. Little Princess Elizabeth who thought the world of him and did not live long after he died. . . .

There had been other good things to remember, too—the historical plays of Shakespeare, which he adored—the more biting satires of Ben Jonson, the many pictures he had collected, or had painted himself, for he had “a singular skill . . . in pictures, and was not unskilful in music”.

How he wished that he could have persuaded Don Juan de Espina to sell him his two volumes of the original drawings of Leonardo da Vinci!

He remembered what a poor weak little fellow he had been as a lad, how slow in learning to speak the King's English—his Scottish father's English: “Canna ye form your words no better than the son of a cowman, Charlie!” his strange father had said, in full court one day. . . . And he *had* learned to form them, as well as any gentleman in the land; and he *had* learned to grow strong—to dance, and tilt at the ring, and swim, and play tennis with the ablest of his gentlemen. Ay, and to ride. . . . No one could gainsay him that; he could ride, if not as well as his fire-eating nephew, Rupert of the Rhine, the lad he had had to disgrace after Bristol.

Why, there had been that time at Naseby when he had swung his great white horse about and had signalled the charge, meaning to lead it himself at the head of his excited guards—until the Earl of Carnwarth had taken his bridle and turned him back forcibly.

“Will you go upon your death?” the Earl had said, brusquely, in the heat of that action, forgetting how a subject should address his king.

Well, at least they had allowed him to ride after and kill his own stag in New Park, while they held him prisoner at Hampton Court! Just as Richard II had killed his own hart in Windsor Great Park. . . .

And then they clattered into the courtyard and Lord Southampton came out with a lantern to greet him and bow his head before him humbly, like the good loyal gentleman he was.

“All will yet be well, Your Majesty,” he said, looking away as he spoke.

But it wasn't as simple as all that. Southampton's plan was to get the King across to the Isle of Wight, which had once been Royalist to a man, but Sir John Oglander—whose folk had lived on the island since the Norman Conquest—had been severely chastised by dour Cromwell and, now that his wife had died, lived a very sober and withdrawn life at Nunwell. He would not be able to do much. Perhaps no more than the gallant Duchess of Portland, who had once held the island for the King, with twenty Cavaliers against four hundred Roundheads, until she was compelled to surrender.

And the man who held the island now? The recently appointed Governor, Colonel Hammond. In Lord Southampton's panelled room, Colonel Hammond came up for much discussion. For though he was a cousin by marriage of Oliver Cromwell, he was also the nephew of the King's chaplain at Hampton Court. Moreover, Hammond had been heard on more than one occasion to criticise the actions of the army against the King.

Aloof and silent, King Charles heard his two devoted followers, Sir John Berkeley and Sir John Ashburnham, decide that they must put their trust in Hammond, must go to Carisbrooke Castle and ask whether the Governor would agree to protect the King. By now, Charles was fatigued, and distressed in his mind; he felt that Hammond would not be the man to fall in with such a scheme.

And Charles was right, it seemed. Colonel Hammond had accepted the position of Governor to *avoid* trouble, not to seek it. When the two faithful Cavaliers approached him, he was horrified at being drawn once more into the conflict, though he put a good face on it and promised vaguely “to do what was expected of him”. There was danger in that promise, and Charles was the first to see it, though there was little he could do about it.

There was danger also in bringing Colonel Hammond to the house of Lord Southampton, to speak with the King. Now the hiding-place was discovered and there was no going back.

On the night of November 13th, King Charles crossed the Solent and landed at Cowes. And there good Sir John Oglander went on his knees before his King, swore loyalty to him and presented him with a purse of gold, a gift which the impoverished Cavalier could ill afford. In return, Charles gave Sir John a prayer-book.

That same night the King was permitted by Colonel Hammond to stay in Sir John's house, Nunwell; on the following day he was conducted to Carisbrooke Castle, where he was given the best rooms and allowed to move about the island without restriction.

Even poor Sir John Oglander declared that Hammond, though a Parliamentarian, was a gentleman; but Colonel Hammond knew that he could not go too far in kindness to the imprisoned King. There were too many spies upon the island, who would report back to Cromwell all that was done there.

Guards were posted at all the landing-places, and all the Royal servants were dismissed, except those of whom Hammond approved as being harmless. However, Sir John Oglander was still allowed to visit his King and to keep a diary of all that happened during Charles Stuart's year-long stay on the island.

Charles himself did certain writing at this time—during the intervals between playing bowls in the east bailey, which had been laid out as a green for his use. He wrote the *Eikon Basilike*, in which he explained how he had come to sacrifice his dear friend Strafford to the Parliament; he also signed a secret treaty, on December 26th, 1647, with the Scots, who swore to invade England and to set Charles once more upon the throne.

It was not long before this invasion started, together with an insurrection in Wales, and one in the south-east of England. Charles may have been a closely watched prisoner in Carisbrooke Castle, but he was still capable of inspiring loyalty, it seemed. Especially among the Celts.

But like everything else he did, these risings were a failure. They were crushed by the Roundheads, and Colonel Pride immediately ejected from the House of Commons all members who were not at one with the army. Now the scene was set for tragedy, though at this point comedy intervened!

Among the gaolers approved by Colonel Hammond was one Henry Firebrace, who had fallen under the spell of this austere and noble prisoner—for Charles Stuart, though he had never been a friendly man, had a strange ability to inspire loyalty in those who came near him. This Firebrace decided

to help the King escape from Carisbrooke, by providing him with a rope so that he could let himself down from the Great Chamber overlooking the courtyard, where he slept, into the yard below. There, Firebrace would help him over the castle wall, to the horses, provided by two Royalists, Mr. Worsley and Mr. Osborne, which would await him and carry him and his faithful gentlemen to a waiting ship that would transport them all to France.

That night, of March 20th, 1648, the guard was made drunk and Charles anxiously awaited the moment to slip through the window and slide down to safety.

But, at the last moment, he found that though he could get his head through the bars, his body was too thick to follow it. As he struggled, the hue and cry started up, and some of the waiting Cavaliers were captured. Captain Burley, who had arranged this attempt, was hanged, drawn and quartered, and now Charles was put under close arrest, being allowed only to walk the twelfth-century ramparts of the castle, or to roll his bowls in the bailey below.

Perhaps his one consolation at this time was that Henry Firebrace had not been revealed as a plotter; that and the fact that certain of the other gentlemen who had awaited him were able to fight free and to get aboard the ship that had lain off-shore to take him to France.

But this King was not a man to give in easily. Like his father, James, and his son, Charles, he had all the Stuart stubbornness. And once Henry Firebrace had set his mind on a problem, there was no stopping him! Accordingly, the good fellow sent to London for files and a bottle of nitric acid, in order to remove that troublesome window-bar in time for the King's next attempt at escape, on May 28th.

This would be more difficult than the last, for though Firebrace had great success with the window, Colonel Hammond, afraid now for his own skin, had moved Charles to a room above the kitchens, facing the Keep, and had had a platform erected outside the King's window, on which every night the guards patrolled.

Once more, Firebrace was equal to the occasion. The common, russet-coated soldiers accepted bribes, and all was set for the escape.

But when the time came, Charles looked down into the courtyard and saw that a crowd of men had gathered, as though they were expecting him to slither down the rope that night. As he stood, undecided, one of them called

up to him that if he attempted to move, he would be shot down without mercy.

Then, as Charles waited, irresolute, Colonel Hammond came into the room, his face lit by a sardonic smile. "I am come to take leave of your Majesty," he said, "for I hear you are going away!"

And that was the end of the King's stay at Carisbrooke, though he did not go away in the manner he had planned. He went first to the Old Grammar School, at Newport, where he refused to come to any sort of agreement with the Parliament; and then to Whitehall, to be tried before a high court, which he would not recognise, on a charge of treason. Surrounded by buff-jerkined pikemen, who spat in his face as he passed them, he was addressed not as King, but as "the man Charles Stuart", as though he were any common rogue or pickpocket.

His defence, like almost all he did, was a noble one, but he would not accept the authority of the court: "Let me know," he said, "by what authority I am called hither. I do stand more for the liberty of my people than any here that come to be my pretended judges, and therefore let me know by what lawful authority I am seated here and I will answer it; otherwise, I will not answer it."

He was sentenced to death, for there was nothing else the court could do with this difficult proud man who had never known what it was to surrender.

"If I cannot live as a King," he said, "I will die as a gentleman."

So on January 30th, 1649, he walked from St. James's, through the park, surrounded by a regiment of infantrymen, to Whitehall. It was a cold day and the snow lay thick upon the ground. Charles had put on extra shirts so that he did not appear to shiver with fear. He even commanded his escort to march at a faster pace lest they, too, felt the cold.

Vast crowds of Londoners had assembled at Whitehall, even those who had once deserted his cause—shocked that their King should be summoned to the block.

And they saw that his fine chestnut hair, painted so often in the portraits of Van Dyck, had turned white, and not with snow.

Two men in disguises and masks waited for him upon the scaffold, but Charles did not allow them to hurry him. He refused to dine, having taken the sacrament, but at midday drank a glass of claret and ate a piece of bread.

Then, accompanied by Dr. Juxon, the Bishop of London, and two colonels, he put on his nightcap and approached the headsman.

“Does my hair trouble you?” he asked the man curtly.

The masked man said that it would be better if the King’s hair was all placed within the cap, at which Charles, helped by the Bishop, carried out this wish.

But when the headsman bowed and asked for the customary pardon, Charles answered with a chilling dignity, “I forgive no subject of mine who comes deliberately to shed my blood.”

Then he stooped and laid his head upon the block, waited a moment, and gave the signal for his own end. He died immediately, amid gasps of horror and wailing from the people who had stood against him, but now pushed forward to dip their handkerchiefs in his blood, as though he were a martyr.

The post mortem showed that “no man had ever all his vital parts so perfect and unhurt, and that he seemed to be of so admirable a constitution that he would probably have lived as long as nature could subsist”.

He was, after all, only forty-eight when he died.

But the end of the sad story is not yet. Carisbrooke figures in it once again, perhaps even more pathetically now. The grim-hearted Parliament was not satisfied. Princess Elizabeth, now thirteen years old, the little girl who had once trailed her hand in the waters of the Thames when the family went on its outings, was imprisoned in Carisbrooke; though she had implored her captors not to send her to the place where her father had spent his last months.

But no one listened to her, and so, with her father dead and her mother in Holland, she had only her Bible as a consolation. Within a month she was dead—of grief, or a chill, what does it matter?

There is a strange postscript to the whole story. A short time after the execution of King Charles, a party of gentlemen visited the Tower of London to see the lions which were kept there in the cages. Among these beasts was one called Old Harry, for rumour said that King Henry VIII himself had put the royal beast there. And, as these gentlemen approached his cage, Old Harry began to roar and to tear at his bars so ferociously that the keeper ran up to see whether the gentlemen were tormenting the animal in any way.

Each man swore that he had not touched Old Harry; but when the puzzled keeper led them one by one before the cage, he found that the lion only roared when a certain gentleman stood before the bars.

Then the keeper asked this man if he had ever committed a great sin during his past life. The gentleman at first denied that he had ever done anything wrong; but suddenly he recalled that black-draped scaffold at Whitehall, and, feeling in his pocket, withdrew a handkerchief which he had dipped in the King's blood.

At this, Old Harry began to cry so piteously that the keeper flung the strip of stained rag into the cage. The lion took it in his paws and fell, growling softly, to the ground, resting his great head upon the piece of cloth.

For three days Old Harry did not move from that position, and when at last the keeper went into the cage to him, he found that the royal beast was dead.

Epilogue

Twenty-Six Men and a very tiny Castle— Seventeenth Century

BETWEEN LUDLOW and Clun, in one of the prettiest parts of Shropshire, where the wooded hills fall gently to the hedge-embowered, winding roads, there stands a little ruined castle, Hopton Castle. It is hardly more than a peel tower, set on a mound. One could pass it by easily, without a second glance, for its lichen-covered stones blend so quietly into the flowing countryside. With sheep and cattle grazing about it, there is scarcely anything to warn us that this is not a ruined barn or byre.

Yet this is a border fortress, built perhaps as long ago as the twelfth century by Walter de Clifford, the Norman magnate whose daughter, Fair Rosamond, was so beautiful that she caused Henry II to fall deeply in love with her. This was in the time of Fulk Fitzwarine.

Perhaps Fair Rosamond once trod the stone stairway to the parapet of Hopton Castle and looked anxiously towards Wales. Perhaps her royal lover, Henry, once stood beside her there and marvelled at the fresh beauty of the countryside that stretched about him, for there is little to equal it in the whole of England.

Hopton Castle by moonlight is a pleasant picture for the mind to dwell on; but five hundred years pass and the stonework begins to crumble a little, the dock and the cow-parsley and the willow-herb grow high about its walls.

By 1644, as the Civil War raged grimly throughout England, this little castle was owned by a certain Master Wallop, a dour, stout-hearted and unimaginative Puritan, who believed that he was serving God's cause by allowing Cromwell to establish a garrison of twenty-six russet-coated troopers in the small tower.

The Cavalier force at Ludlow, under Sir Michael Woodhouse, was not perturbed by this act, and allowed Master Wallop and his soldiers to stay there as long as they made no nuisance of themselves.

But the time came when the garrison of Hopton Castle began to think of themselves as important men in the Civil War. Royalist coaches were captured and gentlemen out riding were molested.

After sending a warning or two to Master Wallop, Sir Michael Woodhouse himself led a small siege party along the country road and, outside the tower gate, called upon the Roundheads to surrender. His tone seems to have been a comparatively jovial one, as he offered the garrison a short term of imprisonment in Ludlow Castle as their punishment.

But Sir Michael's smiles left his face abruptly when a musket-ball struck against his iron shoulder-plate.

"This is no way to greet a King's officer!" he shouted up at the soldier who had fired.

Master Wallop appeared on the parapet, his prayer-book in his hand.

"Go back to where you have come from, Woodhouse," he called, "and thank God upon your knees that He lets you go. As for the King, I acknowledge only one—the King of Heaven. If the impostor, Charles Stuart, were to stand where you are now, I would command my men to shoot him down like the dog he is, in the road."

Sir Michael Woodhouse went back to his captains.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this nest of hornets must be cleared. There is nothing for it now."

So a heavy guard was placed about Hopton Castle; no one was allowed to enter or leave the place, and whenever a head appeared on the parapet a dozen muskets cracked off from various positions among the trees.

After a week, Sir Michael stood once more before the castle gate, smoking a pipe of tobacco and with a wineglass in his hand.

"Master Wallop," he called, "you have hindered us long enough now, and it is time to call an end to this foolish play. I have other business on hand which demands my attention, so I must advise you regarding your position: in the rules of war, with which you may not be familiar, it is laid down that an untenable position must not be held. I have no desire to shed your blood, but I must inform you that if you hold out any longer you will forfeit the right to any mercy when I turn my cannon on your miserable barn. Come down, like a good fellow, and eat your dinner with us."

When Master Wallop answered, it was noticed by the listening Cavaliers that his voice was weaker than it had been, though its message was still defiant.

"With God's help," he answered, "we shall come out of this with honour and not by your permission. Within a week, we shall be relieved by a force

far stronger than your own. I promise you, Woodhouse, that you shall hang from the highest tree I can find between this place and Ludlow.”

Sir Michael raised his glass towards the tower in a toast of mockery.

“I can disabuse your mind of any such ideas, my friend,” he said. “There is no force capable of relieving this siege nearer than a hundred miles. I give you good evening and I hope that your merry lads will enjoy their supper of stewed horse-hide as well as I intend to enjoy the good roast lamb that is being prepared for me.”

At the end of the second week, Sir Michael’s captain repeated the terms of surrender. In reply, his legs were broken by a volley of musket fire from the upper windows, although he carried a white handkerchief to signify that his intentions were not warlike in approaching the gate.

When Sir Michael Woodhouse heard this news at Ludlow, he said, glowering, “They shall not be asked a third time. We will give them another three weeks in their dog-kennel, and when we see the carrion crow coming down to perch on their walls, we will go in and remind Master Wallop that there is still a King in this country.”

For three weeks the sun shone brightly and the Royalist forces trained their guns on the stream above the castle, where fresh water flowed.

The only water that the besieged Roundheads drank during that ghastly time was drawn up by leather buckets at the end of ropes from the brackish moat.

During the warmth of the summer nights, the Royalist guards put fingers in their ears against the groans and hysterical curses that came from the dreadful little tower. In the heat of the daytime, the gentlemen who sat about the castle had their chairs moved from time to time as the wind changed, for the stench was becoming unbearable, even at a distance of fifty yards.

At last, when there seemed no movement in the place at all, Sir Michael Woodhouse directed the fire of one cannon only upon the castle gate. It splintered to matchwood on the second shot and the Royalist soldiers went in, holding their noses in disgust, their swords and muskets forgotten for the moment.

And when they saw the lolling wrecks of men who lay about in that grim little tower, they sheathed their swords and stood their muskets against the stone walls, for such weapons were no longer needed.

A corporal of horse went to Sir Michael Woodhouse and saluted, but said nothing.

“Well, fellow,” said the Cavalier, “have you not ordered them to come out and surrender, as they should?”

The corporal answered, “They are beyond listening to orders, sir; and they are beyond coming out, without assistance.”

“Then you must carry them out, those who are still living,” said the Cavalier, smiling. “And see that you carry out this Master Wallop first of all, for he is their leader and we must give him his proper place.”

And so Hopton Castle “surrendered”. Those Roundheads who were still alive were tied back to back with rope and, as the kettle-drums rolled, were flung into the weed-covered pond which fed the castle moat.

But no one laughed or jested that evening, as the Royalist party rode back along the leafy lanes towards Ludlow, for they had seen something which was greater than the power of kings or of castles—they had seen human courage.

And they had cast it, like refuse, into a scummy pool, where the newts slithered among the weeds, and the green frogs watched unblinking by the water’s edge.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Book name and author have been added to the original book cover.
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[The end of *Castles and Kings* by Henry Treece]