

RALPH HARDELOT'S MEDIATION

BY WILLIAM MINTO

CHAPTER I.

The State of England in 1380.

It was the reign of Richard II., one of the most disturbed reigns in English history.

The times were dark, and were growing darker, clouds gathering and lowering on every hand, and worse than that, ominous tremors beginning to make themselves felt in the very floor and foundation of society itself. The darkness was all the more appalling that it had been preceded by a period of unparalleled triumph and splendor. Under Edward III., in the middle of his long reign, England had been the first nation in Europe, and the king's court had been on a corresponding scale of magnificence. He had realized the kingdom of the fabulous Arthur. The kings of Scotland and France were prisoners together in his capital; his dominion stretched literally from the Orkneys to the Pyrenees; the chivalry of Europe gathered to his feasts and tournaments, and Christian potentates in the East looked to him, as the first prince in Christendom, for aid against the Saracens. But a few short years, though they witnessed no falling off in the magnificence of the court and the nobles, had seen a woeful decline in political power. The expansion had gone too far; the English rule had been spread over a wider surface than its essential strength warranted, into a firm so thin that the parts could not maintain their cohesion. In reaching over into Spain, the Black Prince had loosened his hold on Aquitaine, and fortress after fortress, here a little and there a little, Edward's inheritances and conquests in France had been lost. When the great contending parties paused for a short breathing space during the last three years of Edward's reign, there was left to the English crown, of all its Continental possessions, only a few strong towns on the northern and western coasts. The war was renewed, but the record was still of disappointment and disaster. Ill-luck combined with bad management against the success of the English arms. The great captains of the prosperous time were gone; John of Gaunt—an inveterate bungler in matters of war—was a sorry substitute for the Black Prince; and Knolles, Calverley, Marlstone and Trivet, though valiant men of their hands, did not, taken altogether, make up for the loss of Sir John Chandos, the greatest general of the age, the real hero of Poitiers and Auray and Najarra, who had been slain in a miserable skirmish. Luck generally goes against men when they play badly, and it seemed as if the very wind and waves had entered into the conspiracy to bring England as low in her humiliation as she had lately been high in her glory. Relieving expeditions, calculated to arrive in the nick of time without a day to spare, were shipwrecked by storms, or detained in port, or beaten back by contrary winds. Indignities that twenty years before were never in the dreams of the gloomiest prophets of evil had become hard matters of fact, stern and urgent. Scotch cruisers chased the smacks of Fife and Scarborough from their fishing grounds, and French fleets ravaged the southern coasts, menaced the mouth of the Thames, and actually, in the autumn of 1380, the time when our story opens, had the audacity to sail up the great river, and burn and plundered as far as Gravesend. The defense of London itself had become a subject of serious consideration—a deplorable reverse from the time when the most pressing concern for the English government was the maintenance of the border fortresses of Gascony.

Meantime, as in all periods of great national reverse, discontent with the management of affairs was loud throughout the kingdom. Charges of incapacity, extravagance, dishonesty, were freely made. That larger sums should be necessary for the exchequer than had ever been heard of in Edward's most prosperous days, and that yet there should be nothing to show but fresh miscarriages and disasters, was monstrous and bitterly unintelligible. It went hard with the great officers of state and the minor collectors of revenue. They were accused of intercepting for their own use the money that had been raised for the defense of the realm. Frequent changes were tried, while affairs still went from bad to worse. The knights and burgesses, summoned to Parliament again and again to hear the same tale of urgent dangers followed by requests for larger and larger supplies, grew restive, and, with all the care that could be used in their selection, could not be kept from open complaint and remonstrance against "the outrageous cost of wars that the country could in no manner sustain."

And beneath the grumbling middle classes, far down among the lower strata of society, a fiercer and more dangerous dissatisfaction and unrest began to spread and take hold. Grievous a new kind of impost, a poll-tax, a new kind of standing tax, even the outrageous cost and the outrageous failure of the wars with France began to be more acutely felt as the pressure above increased the pinch on the masses below. The exasperation was especially keen among that large class of peasant population which still remained in various forms and degrees of serfdom, subject to indefinite exactions from their lords and masters. The hard-hips and irritations of their position, which for a generation had, under various influ-

ences, grown more and more intolerable, were aggravated by the general distress, and their discontent now became so intense that it was ready, at the slightest disturbing touch, to burst into destructive tempest.

Our story concerns the fortunes of a heroic spirit, who, like many others, saw the mischief that was brewing, but, unlike most, felt called upon to labor with all his might to avert the impending strife. The particulars of his strange devotion and dauntless endeavor to reconcile domestic enemies we have gathered from old and neglected chronicles, and here present to the reader in the hope that they may seem to him as they have seemed to us—not unworthy of preservation.

The most heavily-burdened man in the kingdom—very much over-burdened as the event proved—was Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord High Chancellor. He was head of the Church and at the same time head of the secular administration; and both branches of constituted authority were objects of bitter hatred and clamorous criticism.

As primate he had his troubles—recalcitrant monks to be browbeaten, a pestilent heresy to suppress, difficulties between the pope and the clergy to adjust, difficulties between the pope and the government, jealousies between the higher clergy and the baronage; but, grave as some of these troubles were, they were light compared with the desperate cares of the chancellorship, at that time the highest of the great offices of state, as measured by the weight and number of its responsibilities.

There was not in those days the same subdivision of duties that exists now among the king's ministers, and the responsibility of ways and means to replenish the empty treasury fell upon the lord high chancellor. This base necessity was the problem of problems for the government.

To find employment for the restless English chivalry, and to give the youngest of the king's uncles, Thomas of Woodstock, Earl of Buckingham, a taste of the glorious game of war, a splendid expedition had been sent across into France early in the summer. But the glorious game is costly; the expenses were not yet paid, nor was there any money in the treasury wherewithal to pay them. The crown jewels were in pawn.

Further, Buckingham's expedition did not promise to be a success. The French would not fight, at least in pitched battle. This was the pusillanimous policy of Charles the Sage, which had rendered so many grand and gallant expeditions abortive—to keep within walled towns and fortresses, to remove to safe shelters all that could conveniently be removed, to leave the rest to the mercy of the invaders, and to keep the track of devastation as narrow as possible by hanging on their flanks and cutting off adventurous excursion parties of plunder. No barbarity of fire and sword perpetrated on the defenseless country had availed as yet to tempt the Sage King out of this cold-blooded policy of endurance. Nothing had been achieved by the expedition to tempt Parliament in better humor to pay the outrageous cost of the war.

Other debts were urgent, notably the wages of the few English garrisons remaining in France—Calais and Cherbourg, and Brest and Bayonne—which were a year and a quarter in arrear. They were so hemmed in that they could not, as in happier times, make up for the want of pay by pillaging the country.

The noble institution of national credit, whereby such bills might have been left to posterity, was as yet undeveloped. The ministers of Richard II. had no such resource. The pawning of the crown jewels shows how very rudimentary were their methods of finance. The government had no choice but to go once more to Parliament. Their last reception had not been encouraging, but there was no alternative. And the money had to be raised at once by taxation from a people who had protested last time that they really could pay no more.

It was a desperate case, but the chancellor, trained in the exchequer of the pope, experienced in diplomacy, patient, cautious, and conciliatory, though near his wit's end, did not absolutely despair.

One of his predecessors, three years before, had conceived, or at least proposed a tax of so much a head on every person in the kingdom over the age of fourteen years. It had been complained of, but it had been fairly well paid—better than any form of subsidy that had been tried since.

The chancellor would try another poll-tax, and modify the obnoxious features of the first. The first had been uniform, fourpence a head from poor and rich alike, and the poor had naturally complained of such equality. He would avoid this grievance; the rich should aid the poor; an average of three groats should be raised, but the poorest should be asked for no more than one groat, while the richest paid as much as sixty. Besides, the age should be raised to fifteen.

What could be more reasonable? It was the duty of everybody in such a national crisis to contribute to the national defense.

The plan was to cost the unfortunate chancellor his head; but no mere man could have thought of anything that looked fairer or more promising.

Besides, he was to give Parliament a

choice between this and one of the older imposts. Further, he put off the evil day of submitting his budget, and waited for a supremely favorable moment when he might summon the Commons and launch it prosperously.

The favorable moment for which he waited was the death of the King of France, Charles the Sage, to whose crafty policy the deplorable reverses of recent years were attributed, had suffered long from a mysterious illness. Like the illness of the Black Prince, it was suspected to be the effect of poison, and one of the incidents of it was an issue in the arm, through which it was believed the venom of the poison discharged itself. George of Prague, the physician whose skill had partially cured him and kept him alive, had warned the king that when the issue dried up, he had only fifteen days left in which to arrange his affairs and provide for the welfare of his soul.

Sudbury had taken measures to get the earliest possible information of the appearance of the fatal symptom. He knew well, from the temper shown by the Commons when last they were asked for a subsidy, that there was little chance of getting anything from them unless something occurred to brighten the prospects of the English cause in France. It was the policy of Charles that had undone them; his death would give them new hopes, and could hardly fail to put the Commons in a generous mood.

At last the fatal favorable moment arrived. In the autumn of 1380, early in September, just after the insult offered by a French fleet to the Thames, the joyful news reached him that the fatal symptom had appeared, and that the King of France was on his death bed.

CHAPTER II.

The bearer of the good tidings presented himself to Lambeth, where the archbishop lay, more than an hour before midday. He had ridden post over night from Dover to Gravesend, and thence sailed up the river with a favorable tide; his luck and speed had been such that, traveling day and night, he had reached London on the second morning from his start.

They kept early hours in those times; the archbishop, after a close morning's work, had already dined and was preparing to proceed to the chancery at Westminster. It was his custom to sit there at eleven.

The messenger was not held long in waiting for an audience. As soon as the archbishop-chancellor was informed of his arrival from Paris, he dismissed his secretaries, ordered him to be shown up, and received him most graciously.

"Good-morrow, good fellow," he said, in a stately fashion, raising him with the hand which the messenger had knelt to kiss; "what news from Paris? You have made good speed from there, I doubt not?"

The messenger answered the second question first, and then hesitated, glancing meaningfully at the usher who had shown him into the chancellor's presence and who remained by the door.

"You may speak," said the chancellor. "Master Hardelet, my young cousin, is of my council."

Thus authorized, he delivered his message. "I am charged, sir," he said, "to deliver to you this ring, and to say that that has happened which you wot of."

The chancellor's face did not betray the joy he felt at hearing what he had waited so long. He asked no further questions. "You have done the king an excellent service," he said in a voice of well-pleased greatness. "It will be my care to see that you are fitly recompensed. You must be fatigued, Reginald, cause the cooks to provide at once some meat for this gentleman, and see that a well-lighted chamber is made ready for him. Come to me when you have rested and we will talk further of what you have heard and seen in Paris."

The messenger protested with all humility and respect and thanks for his grace's comfortable words about present refreshment and prospective reward, that he was ready at once to answer to the best of his power; but the chancellor, who had heard as much as he wanted, insisted on his taking needful repose after his long and trying journey.

(To be continued.)

Rapid Transit.
"Folks had got to rise up in de middle ob de night to get ahead of my Pomp," announced Mrs. Johnson to an interested friend, as the two women hung out their clothes on neighboring lines one Monday morning. "Is you heard de way he fixed dat trifling mule ob ours yesterday, so we could drive to de sanctuary in peace and quietness?"

"Laws no, I ain't heard nuffin!" said the other woman, eagerly. "My ole man and me, we nebber got home from spending de day wid Susannah till most midnight."

"Is dat so?" said Mrs. Johnson, who had been alive to this state of affairs, but wished to appear ignorant. "Well, now, you know how dat mule ob ours has most destructed de dashboard ob de cart every time we tried to ride to de sanctuary?"

The neighbor nodded, with two clothes-pins between her lips.

"My Pomp," said Mrs. Johnson, proudly, "has got de contribution ob Mr. Edison or any ob dose inventing passions, and he just turned de seat facing round backward, and put dat trifling mule in backward, and set a basket ob oats just behind de dashboard, right in plain sight ob dat mule, and he done push us along to de sanctuary faster dan Pomp and me ebber 'spected to ride in all our days!"

Secretive Yaqui Indians.
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