

RALPH HARDELLOT'S MEDIATION

BY WILLIAM MINTO.

CHAPTER IV—CONTINUED.

"My lady hated Clara as much as the girl hated her, and sought to spite her in the matter of marriage. There lived in Sir John's neighborhood in his strong castle at Sturmer a certain middle-aged knight of prowess and renown who had set his eyes and his heart on the mettlesome Clara and liked the lass none the less for her intractable spirit.

"His name was Richard Rainham. He was not of gentle birth by the mother's side at least, but he had joined a band of free companions in Aquitaine and had prospered in the French wars and received knighthood from the Black Prince on the field of Poitiers. There have been many complaints against him by neighbors and travelers, but he is too sturdy and valuable a knight to be lightly called in question and it is his boast to have grown so fat under the curses of the church that he can hardly turn in his saddle. He has indeed the look and strength of a bull, such a neck and back, such a brawny shoulder and dewlap.

"My pretty Clara loathed the match and the maker of it, but what could the poor damsel do? She was all alone; she had no councillor; she had kept Ralph at a distance and made him fear to speak to her, she was too proud to speak to him. She knew her adversary to be spiteful and unrelenting as only a spiteful woman can be; and seeing that escape was hopeless, she did not wait to be reduced to submission by bread and water, imprisonment and stripes. Pride counselled her not to endure the indignity of a contest with my Lady Cavendish. 'Let the brute marry me at his peril,' she said to herself; and fortified by this resolution, to the admiration of all, and not the least of my lady, she agreed sweetly without a murmur.

"But if Sir Richard had seen how her eyes flashed and every limb quivered when she was alone, or if he had heard the oath she took on her breviary and her dagger, even his headstrong folly might have hesitated to take such a viper to his bosom. But not a soul at Cavendish Hall was in her confidence, not a sign betrayed her deadly hatred and secret resolution.

"The wedding day drew near, and Sir John spared no cost, for his ward had riches in abundance. He feasted the bridegroom for three days before the ceremony. The cooks had sweetered in the kitchen for weeks before, and the tables were a rare sight, such trees and castles, birds and beasts of sweet stuff, such flagons of wine, such lines of pages and yeomen bearing dishes fit for an emperor, the minstrels blowing all the time from the gallery—it was like—"

The canon's recollections were too much for him. He buried his head in the three-hooped pot.

"There was a hawking party in the morning, and sports in the tilting-yard at midday after dinner, and juggling and dancing in the hall after supper by vagabonds who had gathered from far and near, and had no reason to repent their coming.

"What happened in the tilting-yard did not improve Sir Richard's temper. Either his horse swerved as he ran at the quintain, or he hit the board clumsily, or something went wrong that I cannot explain to you; anyhow, the bag of sandswung round before he was clear, and caught him such a whack on the back that he was almost thrown from the saddle. Ralph Hardelet, when it came to his turn, was more fortunate or more skillful.

"Whether by good fortune or by skill, this Ralph struck the board to shivers, and rode lightly and safely on. Sir Richard would fain have had a wrestling bout, but Sir John, seeing the temper he was in, forbade it.

"At supper my wifful minx Clara smiled so openly on her young favorite that the bridegroom was beside himself with fury; but he tried to swallow his rage and swallowed much liquor, and laughed loudly, and bragged of his exploits, and, withal, made a brave show as one who knew how to be master when the time came. But to have seen her cool, provoking face, you would have said the knight had never undertaken a more perilous adventure.

"Wine and anger seemed to have bereft Sir Richard of his wits, and he did his diligence to make himself despicable and ridiculous. After supper the hall was cleared for the antics of jugglers and hired dancers. A tumbling wench, with large, shapely limbs and a hideous face, so charmed the good knight's fancy that, to the deep disgust of the ladies, he leered at her, and held villainous language to her, calling her up to him to drink her health and give her largesse. Lady Cavendish alone looked on with patience, and she even smiled at his outrageous behavior; whereupon, to please her more, he would even have a turn on the floor himself to show his agility, and on the floor it was, for there, after a few elephantine capers, he presently lay, sprawling with the utmost good humor.

"In this motley world, anger and strife often follow fast on the heels of mirth. While her bridegroom was thus playing the buffoon, Clara had disappeared. But Lady Cavendish, who had been narrowly observing her, had noted where she had withdrawn herself and with whom. She had marked looks of tender sympathy exchanged between Clara and Ralph, and had seen them side off together into a window recess protected by a curtain. She gave the

two lovers a little time, and then passed the word through the tittering throng, directed all eyes on the recess, and sent one of her maids to suddenly pull aside the curtain, and show the picture. A pretty picture it was, the two figures standing very close together against the light, his left arm grasping a chair behind her, while with his right hand he tenderly and respectfully guided her forefinger in tracing letters on the moistened pane. I conjecture that he had written something there which she professed herself unable to copy. So absorbed were they in their occupation that they were not aware of the tittering crowd of onlookers till the loud oaths of Sir Richard made them turn their astonished faces.

"Sir Richard was the only man of the company that did not laugh. To speak the truth of the young offenders, they bore themselves with easy and seemingly self-possession. Ralph's color heightened a little, but he came forward from the recess with a deftly assumed look of surprise and inquiry as to the meaning of the laughter, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that he should be found giving the young demoiselle a lesson in primitive handwriting. What he would have said by way of explanation I cannot tell you, for before he could utter a word the injured knight rushed on him, shouting, 'Miserable scrivener! I will write on the walls with your brains!'

"There was a great outcry and commotion. Sir John Cavendish cried 'Peace! Ho! For shame!' but his voice could hardly be heard above the hubbub. The ladies screamed, and several knights ran to drag Sir Richard away. Ralph at first made no attempt at retaliation, but merely laid hold of his assailant's arms to steady himself and keep his feet, and avoid being dashed against the wall or through the window. But when Sir Richard did not desist, but held on by his throat and twisted and dragged him about, the youth also lost his temper and put forth his strength, laying Sir Richard on the polished floor, flat on his back.

"Ralph was at once hurried off by Sir John Cavendish before Sir Richard recovered his footing. The enraged knight would have hustled after him, but the ladies threw themselves in his way and he dared not thrust them aside. Then he turned to his bride, and shook his great fist at her. She, who had stood all the time in the recess, with pale face and a soft, velvety gleam in her eyes, answered with a disdainful smile.

"I will tame your proud spirit yet, minx," he gasped. She returned his look without quailing, the light in her eyes becoming darker with resolute scorn. 'Marry me, if you dare,' she said, in a quiet voice.

"The foolish man did dare: he married her, and carried her to his castle. But their wedded bliss was not of long duration. On the morning after the marriage the bride rose long before prime and walked out to taste the morning air. When it was near midday and she had not returned, and her lord had never stirred from his chamber, they went in and found him lying in a heavy sleep, from which they had much ado in rousing him. The crafty wench had drugged his evening cup, and made her escape in the morning. Sir Richard broke the porter's ribs and flung him into the moat, but that did not recover the fugitive, who was traced at the last to the priory at Dartford, where she had taken shelter, and from which, as far as I know, her husband has not yet succeeded in dragging her. If he ever should lay hands on her he will tame her proud spirit I make no doubt."

"God grant he never do," said the host.

"Amen," said Simon d'Ypres, who had listened with courteous interest to the canon's long-winded tale. "And what became of Ralph Hardelet?"

The canon yawned. "I have heard little of him," he said, "till he reappeared here in the fool's dress of a Wycliffite."

"And you know not what led him to this?"

"The instigation of the fiend, I doubt not," answered the canon, yawning again. "Prithce, pardon me, I am drowsy, which is a sign that nature will have a little rest before vesper."

And, without more ceremony, he stretched himself at length upon the settle.

CHAPTER V.

Reginald Hardelet found his brother in the place to which the host had directed him, St. Gregory's churchyard, talking with the gaunt and dishevelled old hermit who had built himself a rough shelter among the graves. They parted with anger on the one side, and deep sorrow and agitation but no change of purpose on the other.

Later in the day, when the sun had gone down, and the mists were rising from the valley of the Stour, and the still water gleamed softly in the dim light, as Ralph was walking in the priory's meadow with the soothing charm of the scene and hour upon him, he was accosted by Simon d'Ypres. The merchant spoke to him as a traveling stranger; and looking round on the quiet meadow with the priory on one side, encircled by its high garden wall, its roofs overhung and half hidden by shadowy masses of foliage, hardly distinguishable in the twilight, he remarked on the repose of the life of the cloister, and thus led the young man

on to contrast with it the life of action, and to speak out his own burning thoughts, disclosing, with the fearless frankness of an enthusiast, his immediate aims and plans. When it appeared that one of those plans was to visit the great fair of Stourbridge, where men would be gathered together from all parts, the merchant proposed that Ralph should ride with his party to Cambridge on the following day.

Next morning, accordingly, Ralph Hardelet joined the merchants' party as they rode out of Sudbury. He was waiting for them on the wayside beyond the bridge, no longer in the russet garb of the poor priest, but in the dress of a sober clerk of Oxford. It was a warm September day, with a fine drying wind, an ideal husbandman's day for the threshing out and winnowing of corn. The blithesome beat of flails, and the hum and laughter of busy workmen, came from a threshing floor a few fields off; and near at hand a plowman, with loose rein flowing in the wind, was shouting with joyful vigor to his horses.

It was a day and a scene to inspire a young prophet, however deep his sense of evils to be overcome, with a certain delight in active existence, in movement for movement's sake; and Ralph cantered up to meet the company of merchants as soon as they came in sight. Simon and his trusty lieutenant Lawrence rode first, in high peaked hats of soft felt, and gowns and mantles of good broadcloth, all of a brownish hue; Simon's fur trimmings and the ornaments on the pouch at his girdle marking him out as the superior in rank. Behind them rumbled the cumbersome four-horsed wagon, piled high with bales bearing the name of the owner and the mark of the custom house. The wagoner seated aloft cracked his long whip, and his two assistants, who had dismounted to lead the horses across the bridge, were clambering up behind, to journey at their ease on the top of the cargo. In the rear rode two young men in long hose and doublets, and round loaf shaped hats, their cloaks strapped before them on their horses. They laughed and talked together in the manner of jolly apprentices out for a holiday.

A more peaceful scene could not have been conceived. It was a vision of happy and prosperous industry—nature smiling on the labors of man and backing up his efforts with genial aid—Production and Exchange vocal in the beat of the flail and the rumble of the wagon, all sounding musical in the soft, warm air. And yet that mysterious, impalpable atmosphere, the common thought of men, was charged with dangerous electricity. A mighty storm was gathering that would shake every timber in the framework of society. The agents of revolution were abroad.

Among these agents must be reckoned the disciples of Wycliffe, of whom Ralph Hardelet was one of the most ardent and enterprising. Not that Wycliffe was a revolutionary in the sense that he counselled the poor to rise in armed rebellion against the rich. He had no quarrel with the feudal system except that lords and knights did not live up to the strict conception of their duty in the commonwealth, which was to prevent wrongdoing and protect laboring men in the exercise of their industry, guarding them against fraud and robbery, against the subtleties of knaves and the oppression of strong handed enemies, foreign and domestic. His aims were not directly political. It was a religious reformation that he labored after, with an ultimate view to the banishment of dissension and disorder and corruption from the realm, and the establishment of a reign of universal peace and charity, contented labor of each in his appointed station, an brotherly love among all. As a means to this end he desired first of all the purification of the Church and the religious orders by a return to the simplicity of apostolic doctrine, and the purity and poverty of apostolic life as set forth in the New Testament.

(To be continued)

Elderly Twins Much Alike.

Daniel and William Hutchins, twin brothers of Scipio, Ind., are so much alike that only their wives and children know them apart. A few years ago Daniel sought admission into the Masonic order, but the members, for what they regarded as prudential reasons, insisted that William should also join, and the twins were put through together. In their courtship days—they are now 53 years old—they used to spark each other's sweethearts and the girls did not know the difference.—Exchange.

The Blind of Philadelphia.

The police of Philadelphia have ascertained that there are 352 blind persons in that city. The inquiry was made at the request of the Home Teaching Society and Free Circulating Library for the Blind, a society whose objects are to find out where the blind reside, to send its teacher to instruct them in reading at their homes, and afterward to supply them with a regular exchange of embossed books from its library.

Steel Is Now King.

Charles M. Schwab, president of the United States Steel corporation, is authority for the statement that steel has supplanted cotton in industrial king ship; that it exceeded the cotton industry in 1900 by more than \$100,000,000, and for 1901 will exceed it by more than \$250,000,000.

Body Preserved by Copper.

The discovery in a Chilean copper mine of the body of an Indian workman, who had died there many years ago, and who had been preserved from decay by the antiseptic action of copper, is reported in an American mining journal.

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