

RALPH HARDELLOT'S MEDIATION

BY WILLIAM MINTO.

CHAPTER V—CONTINUED.

Deleantur ex vivitium. Just as the merchant pronounced these words his henchman Lawrence galloped up from behind the wagon, his right arm pointing ahead. They had toiled up from the valley and were now on the high ground opposite Carford Green. The spire of Haverhill Church was visible ahead of them in the distance. They proposed to rest and eat at Haverhill, and the merchant at first supposed that Lawrence's gestures were meant as a humorous expression of delight at the nearness of the end of that stage of their journey.

"Yes, I know," he said. "We can see Haverhill from here. Two miles more and we are at rest in our inn."

Lawrence waved his arm impatiently. "See! Look! There!" he cried. "Behind that hedge!" He pointed to a hedge at right angles to the road some little distance in front.

The travelers looked, and saw some glittering spear-points and helmets bobbing above the hedge evidently surrounding a troop of horsemen riding towards the road.

CHAPTER VI.

The wagoners had seen Lawrence's gesture and the cause of it, and were making haste to drag some weapons from a secret repository under the wagon. The apprentices rode up to help. The wagoners had pulled out two crossbows, and the apprentices had possessed themselves of two simple looking maces, when the mounted men swept round the corner onto the road, about a hundred yards in front of them, showing their full strength. There was a knight armed cap-a-pie, and about a dozen men at arms in mixed armor of plate and mail.

"Resistance is useless, if they mean robbery!" cried Simon to his men. "Put the weapons away. You will only give them an excuse for picking a quarrel."

"Nevertheless," said Ralph, "it is safer to have some means of defence if one is put to it and with your leave I will borrow one of those maces."

Ralph glanced into the cart as he took the mace from the apprentice, who was obediently restoring it to its place, and saw a large heap of them in the locker underneath. They were of simple make—a ball of lead some seven or eight pounds in weight, with an ash shaft about two feet long. "One could deal a fair blow with this, if necessary," he thought to himself as he felt the weight of the weapon and disposed of it under his cloak.

There being no time for remonstrance, the merchant could only smile at this contempt of his orders. "Harry Hurst was right in saying you had mistaken your trade," he muttered; and directed the wagoner to draw to one side, and leave the party of horsemen full room to pass.

They came alongside at an easy pace, without any sign of hostility.

"Give you good day, master," cried the knight.

Ralph at once recognized the voice of his old enemy, Sir Richard Rainham.

As the knight stopped to speak, some of his men passed on and halted beyond the wagon, outflanking the merchant and his company on both sides.

"Bound for Stourbridge Fair?" the knight continued, when this maneuver had been completed. "Methinks your load is too heavy. Your poor horses are steaming like furnaces. It were a charity to the poor brutes to relieve them of part of their burden. Our English hills are too steep for such loads."

"Thanks for your kind consideration, Sir Knight," returned the merchant. "We can make shift to drag along. Pray do not burden yourself on our account."

"Nay, nay," laughed the knight; "I could not permit it. Think of the horses. I warrant there is some good broadcloth in those bales. Here, you knaves!" he shouted to the apprentices; "dismount and show us your wares."

The apprentices looked doubtful, but Simon signed to them to comply with the knight's good humor, which seemed from the broad grins of his retinue to be much appreciated by them.

The apprentices began to fumble with the knots on one of the packages. The knight called to some of his men. "Come, help, you lazy rascals! Why do you stand gaping there? Lay to your hand and your knives, and help the honest lads."

"They are not so neat handed as your trained apprentices," the knight remarked; "but they work with a will, and you must grant they do their work with expedition."

"Come, you rogues," the knight shouted at last, "you have enough to keep you warm next winter! And now, Master Merchant, name your own price and call for it the next time you pass. I will uphold you against all penalties for overstealing the market, and your horses will travel to the fair more easily."

The merchant made no answer to this rillery. He had watched the proceeding with impassive composure, and once or twice had checked the more impetuous Ralph, and counselled him to silence. He only said, "You are content to let us pass?"

The knight made an exaggerated gesture of acquiescence. "Do not forget to call for the price next time you pass," he said.

"I never forget my engagements," said the merchant.

There was more meaning in the tone than the knight altogether liked. "If

you are to be so punctual," he cried, "we may as well make the bill a little larger. I saw your men busy behind the cart. See what there is in the locker, my good Nicholas, he called to the man who rode next to him, and seemed to be second in command. "Our knaves are not yet overburdened. We should hate to deal scurvily with so brisk a merchant."

At this Ralph Hardehot lost patience. "Sir Richard Rainham," he burst out, addressing the knight by his name, "do you think it becometh your knight-hood to play the common thief and robber? Is this how you fulfill your duty to your lord the king? Plundering where you are vowed to give protection, and trying to cover your shame with ribald buffoonery?"

"Ha! Sir Priest, are you there?" replied the unabashed lawbreaker. "I marvelled that you forebore so long to give us a taste of your rhetoric."

"My rhetoric cannot hope to pierce your shame-proof hide. But you will answer some day to a heavier indictment."

"In the meantime, since the spirit of prophecy is on you, you had better forecast what is to happen to yourself. You have put off your gown since yesterday—"

"What do you know about my gown?"

"Ah, my young Jeremiah," laughed the knight, "we are not so remiss about our duties as you are pleased to imagine. We have heard of your doings, though it is but yesterday. The king shall not find us wanting in vigilance towards troublemakers of the realm. You must come with me." He made a signal to his men, saying at the same time, "Take him, but do not hurt the tender youth. I have other purposes for him."

The men made a move to capture Ralph, but as the nearest converged upon him they thrust their horses in each other's way, and gave him a moment's free play. Of this he took advantage with great alertness. Seizing the mace that he had hidden under his cloak, he shook his right arm free, and urging his pony forward, struck full at Sir Richard's helmet. The knight was too much taken by surprise to be able to parry the blow, and as he sat loosely in his saddle, never expecting any shock of the kind, it brought him clattering to the ground. It was perhaps as well for Ralph that his pony, hurtling against the heavy horse of the knight, lost his footing, and fell with Ralph under him; if the youth had been free to offer further resistance, the men would probably not have respected their leader's injunction to take him alive. As it was, his hands were secured before he could disentangle himself.

The blow administered to the knight was not a light one. The modern reader is apt to be incredulous of the stories told about mediaeval knights and their power to endure, unharmed, blows that would smash the skull of the sturdiest ox of our own times. But two circumstances may be mentioned in mitigation of modern incredulity: first, they were accustomed to rough usage; second, and chiefly, their helmets were padded.

Sir Richard Rainham did lie stunned for a minute or two. But by the time his myrmidons had bound his assailant securely hand and foot with cords taken from the merchant's packages, he was on his legs again, apparently little the worse for his overthrow.

Only his temper seemed to have been spoiled. He was no longer jocular in his manner of address. "Curse the hellcat priest!" he said, in a surly tone. "You would have paid for it if he had slipped through your hands. Make him safe and bring him along." Then he muttered to himself, "This is the second time; we shall cry quits before long," and rode off by himself in surly solitude.

The myrmidons made their prisoner safe and portable by binding him on one of the four horses of the wagon, which they seized for the purpose. The freckled giant Nicholas, a coarser copy of his master, of whose humor he was a bold imitator, superintended this operation. The prisoner's legs were tied not too gently under the horse's belly, and his body also was bound firmly down. As they moved off, Nicholas fung back a jest at the despoiled merchant. "You may come to us for the horse," he said, "when you come for the price. We must keep our chaplain. We cannot part with him so lightly. We want a chaplain."

Simon d'Ypres made no audible answer to this and other rough remarks with which he was taunted by his spoilers. He had watched the wreckage of his goods with quiet composure, as a traveler might stand looking out on a storm and waiting for it to pass. Only once had he shown some concern, and that was when a package some 18 inches square by a foot in depth was drawn from the locker under the cart.

"You may as well leave that, my friend," he had said; "it is of no value for you." But he saw at once that it was vain to remonstrate, and that his words served only to give the grinning robber a higher opinion of the value of his prize.

He said not another word till the band was out of sight. Then he turned to his henchman Lawrence, and said in a melancholy tone: "This will teach our young preacher the folly of seeking to convert such wolves with fair words. Now we must try to show him what the people can do for themselves under wise guidance."

After a few minutes' conference, Lawrence and one of the apprentices rode back towards Yeldam, while Simon and the others, rebinding their looted packages as well as they could, moved forward to Haverhill.

Ralph Hardehot was not sufficiently imbued with the meek spirit which Wycliffe recommended for his poor priests, and he submitted to his fate in haughty silence, knowing that any efforts he could make to free himself would only be a cause of mirth for his captors.

That such a scene as that just described should have ever been possible in Merrie England; that a knight who had distinguished himself in the wars and held lands by royal gift as a reward for prowess, should ever have condescended or dared to play the common highway robber within 60 miles of the capital appears very strange now, but the chronicles of the time are full of such outrages.

The traveler who should look now for Sir Richard Rainham's castle in the valley of the Stour would lose his labor. It has completely disappeared; not a trace of it is now visible. It stood in the center of the mere, to the south of Carford Green, on a patch of firm ground; but the mere has gradually encroached since it became a ruin, and swallowed up even the foundations.

Yet it was a strong place in its time, and Ralph marked its strength as he was carried in, and entered with the calmness of a man who knows his fate and leaves all hope behind him.

"We have brought the priest safely," said Nicholas, entering the hall and respectfully saluting his master.

"Safely!" echoed the knight, who was not yet in the best of tempers. "Safely! One would think the starving clerk were a devil in disguise, a Bacon, or a Bungay. How could it be otherwise than safely, you freckled poltroon? You did not leave him a chance to escape!"

"Well, he is here," replied Nicholas, in a surly tone. "Bones of St. Peter," exclaimed the knight, "where else should he be?"

"On the road to Haverhill," thought Nicholas, "for all that you did to stop him." But he did not dare to give utterance to this thought. He only stared stolidly at his master.

"Why do you stand staring there?" shouted the knight. "Bring him in."

(To be continued)

Farm Implement Trade of Dallas.
The city of Dallas, Tex., is said to be the largest depot of farm implement supplies in the world. Every big wholesale house in the United States which engages in the business of manufacturing tools for the farmer has its branch at Dallas. There are 25 nine story buildings devoted to this trade. Dallas lies in the very heart of the choicest farming region of Texas. It is the trading point of the great black land belt of the northern and central counties, which contain two-thirds of the people and three-fourths of the wealth of the state.

Filipino Make Good Servants.
An army officer who recently returned from our Pacific possessions says: "The Filipinos, whatever may be their faults, make the best servants in the world, if you can cure them of petty thievery. Overcome that, and you have an ideal servant. At home here we are confronted everlastingly by the servant girl proposition. Bring the Filipino men here and the servant girl will be a dead issue. The men are small, active and not afraid of work. They could be trained to do general housework, just as the Chinese do out on the Pacific coast."

Heavy Snowstorms in Europe.
There have been heavy snow storms throughout Europe. The winter has been especially severe in Northern Africa. Recently, in Southern France, a large landowner was overtaken in a snowstorm while attempting to ride only five miles. His horse came home, but the man was frozen to death. In Algeria trains have been greatly delayed. One from Algiers to Laghouat was held up in the snow for six days.

Get a Tailor's Goose.
The point to remember when one wishes to dress well on a small income is that frequent pressings and spongings are the frequent of well kept clothes. An ordinary flatiron may be used, but it is nowhere near so efficacious as a tailor's goose. The goose is not expensive, and with it a coat, skirt or suit can be so well pressed as to seem like new. It is therefore a very desirable article of furniture.

France Carrying a Heavy Load.
With a national debt of \$6,000,000,000 and a population practically at a standstill, with a costly standing army and an expensive navy, France is staggering under a heavy load. Perhaps her shoulders are strong enough and broad enough to bear it, but the cash may come some day despite French confidence in the stability and financial resources of the republic.—Baltimore Sun.

Christians in India.
Christians in India are increasing in numbers rapidly, according to the recent census returns in South India, where the Christians now number over 1,000,000. The increase during the decade was 18 per cent, as compared with 7 per cent for the population, 6 per cent for the Hindus, and 9 per cent for the Mohammedans.

Millionaire Beautifies a Town.
Fairhaven, Mass., is proud of Henry H. Rogers, the oil magnate, who was born there and has spent millions of dollars and much of his time in improving and decorating the town as he might beautify his own home. He has already given to the town a library, waterworks, a drainage system, town hall, schools and a church.

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