RALPH HARDELOT'S MEDIATION

BY WILLIAM MINTO

CHAPTER XX-Continued.

The first half of the Fourteenth century, putting it broadly, was a crucial stage in the history of villeinage in England, the natural tendencies to ex press for virtual emancipation being helped by the intervention of the ministers religion, who urged upon masters that the manumission of slaves was a pious and a meritorious act before God and man. Then came a variety of causes telling unfavorably upon all who had either themselves been, or whose ancestors had been, in a state of serfdom, and who could not produce documentary evidence of their freedom. First, there was the terrible calamity of the Balck Plague, which enormously increased the value of labor. Masters were thereby tempted not only to exact the utmost possible from such serfs as remained to them, but also to reclaim remained to them, but also to reclaim without danger, as Kirby well knew. many who had been using the privile But Ralph was of the stuff of which ileges of freemen. Foreign wars and martyrs are made. There was no court splendor increased the number of reason why he should be denied his absentee lords; a general rise in the destiny. At any rate, somebody must scale of living augmented their demands upon their estates, and stimu. at hand. lated the sharpness of unscrupious bailiffs- The substitution of leasehold farms for demesne farms told in the same direction of aggravating the condition of the bondmen. Their services were often part of the lease, and were ilarly with estates that were sold to less justified the means. commercial investors eager to make the most out of the soil. Many causes thus combined to exas-

perate the agrarian population. In every parish the machinery of the law was in action under the plea of techthe base servitude from which they had his character. gradually freed themselves. Thousands who had tasted the sweets of freedom terview with Lawrence, Kirby's ne-found themselves in danger. They had phew, a little bit of stick planed on found themselves in danger. They had no chance in the courts of law against superiors who claimed rights of service over them. Apart from chicanery and corruption the law naturally laid stress on formal documents, and the value of these was only now becoming apparent to the poor and ignorant. Some vill-eins who had purchased their freedom met to carouse over the happy event. The carousal was prolonged into the night; their lights failed them; and they used the wax seals of their deeds of manumission for candles. Their lord, hearing of this, reclaimed them, and the law sustained his claim. In another case, a wealthy farmer, of servile origin, was called upon to pay an exorbitant rent. He refused. The abbot, who was his superior lord, sent a force of men to his house, who broke it open, beat him and his servants, and carried off as much of his stock as they car side of the rich. This was how "the an opportunity of clearing himself. eraft of clerks" became hateful to the peasantry, so that among the more ignorant, ability to read and write was

that he was like a big brother, who must put our trust in the pope. himself, or when he chanced to be in a favored by fortune than our armies generous mood. The day comes when in France?" the big brother wants to bave them back, and he finds to his anger that a But the back, and he finds to his anger that a But the princess, seeing Clara's new right of property has been estab-blank dismay, good-naturedly came to lished, and that they are no longer re- the rescue. garded as his. If he tries to reclaim them, bickerings and heart-burnings arise. With children of a larger growth the resentment on both sides is proportionately fierce.

To such outrageous lengths were technical rights, real or spurious, royal grace.' pushed by the lords of the soil, and such pitiless cruelty was used in enforcing them, that the champions of the enraged peasantry saw no hope of that he had fied. And he would not reilef except in the total abolition of take freedom when it was offered to serfdom by the issue of wholesale him, lest flight should look like guilt charters of manumission direct from in your eyes." the king. They still had a touching This was more fully explained to faith in him as the foundation of justille king. But stille he hesitated and

faith in him as the foundation of justice, the supreme source of law and order. To him they still looked for protection against pillage and extortion, if only his ear could be disabused of the false persuasions of evil counsellors.

The leaders whom we have seen at work organizing combination among the discontented peasants knew the value of a definite demand, the justice of which was widely felt, in binding scattered units together. A novel and unpopular tax to which every adult was liable gave them additional lever-age.

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The reel kept singing the sweetest music in the world to a fisherman. At length the line was all run out, and much to the senator's surprise the rod much to the senator's the looked of the heat was pointed straight up in the air, instead of toward the water.

"The old boatman nearly fell in a fit in the bottom of the boat with laughter, for there, up in the sky, soared a wild duck, with the senator's minnow.

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"Pull up,' said the senator's minnow.

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"Pull up,' said the senator, in dispersion of the porch with uncle Joe Cannon and Dave Henderson for the rest of this

age.

The time was now ripe for formulating their demands and supporting them by what is known in international politics as a "moral demonstartion;" the demonstration being made in this case demonstration being made in this case not with ironclads, but by a great rising of the poor commons with arms in ous dignity. "Are you not," he said, ney of their own.

their hands. It was hoped that the mere show of strength would suffice. That their professions on this head were sincere was abundantly proved by their subsequent conduct.

personally they were to demand eman- in your clemency." cipation, and of whom they had more hope than of older men hardened in their iniquities—must be clearly informed as to the control of the c formed as to their objects and assured am I to believe?" midsummer, when the days were long and the nights were warm, and there be prepared for their demands.

And for this mission, John Kirby, who passed under the name of Simon d'Ypres and other aliases, thought of Ralph Hardelot. It was a mission not

His liberation from Cambridge Castle was easy enough. It was a simple matter of bribery. With an inconsis-tency of which perhaps he was not conscious, Kirby did not hestitate to make use of the corruption that it was his aim to uproot. If it did cross more sharply seen to than they had his mind that there was any harm in been under the customary lord. Sim- bribing Ralph's jailers, the end doubt-

the idea that escape would look like guilt; but at last when all that Lawrence had learned was made known This was strictly true; for Simon to him, he was brought to see that in d'Ypres had so managed that Ralph nical rights to thrust them back into escape lay his only chance of clearing

About a fortnight after Clara's inone of its faces was put into her hands by a beggar as she came out of St. Paul's in the train of the princess. This rude tablet had written on it the

CHAPTER XXI.

February and March had passed, and the warm rains of April had begun before the princess was called upon to redeem her promise to procure an interview with the king. Lawrence Kirby more than once saw Clara, and brought her news of Ralph's welfare. The excuse he gave for the delay was that Ralph had suffered so much from his three months' im-prisonment in Cambridge Castle that it would take him some time to reexorbitant rent. He refused. The ab-bot, who was his superior lord, sent a force of men to his house, who broke it not informed. Simon d'Ypres was in

One day during the Portuguese am-bassador's stay at Westminister, the firm loyalty of his clients, to lay behis born serf, and no serf could sue his king called at the Wardrobe, where fore the king a statement of what owner in a court of law. There were the princess was lodged, and was told they considered necessary to the sathundreds of such cases. Old court that Ralph Hardelot was in waiting isfaction of discontent. rolls were produced with the names of to see him. The princess was most tenants or their ancestors in them as bondmen; if no formal deed could be produced on the other side, the case was at an end. Forgeries were freely supported with the advice of his appointed guardians and counsellors, but she held herself bound by her produced and still more freely supported. made, and still more freely suspected: mise to Clara, and thought no harm legal learning and skill were all on the could come of giving the young man

regarded as a criminal accomplishment. rally her on another subject. "Ah, Of course there was another side to Mistress Clara," he said, "I have tidthe quarrel between master and bondings for you about your doughty hus-man. The master could make out a band. He has come back with my ungood enough case to justify his con- cle of Buckingham, not a scratch the science in pressing for his legal rights. worse, and gone down to Sturmere to The seed had not fallen on barren It was he that was the ill-used man in his own eyes; the serf that was uncast away and perished on the voyage grateful and unreasonable. It was for homeward; pity he was not among the kindness and indulgace of himself them, but Satan is kind to his own. and his fathers that he was now made Well, well, if Father Neptune refuses to suffer. In effect, it came to this, to rid you of your encumbrance, we should allow the use of his toys to a trust, dear madam," he added, turnyo nger when he did not want them ing to his mother, "that Clara's suit

The boy had a boy's love of tessing.

"But you will not, my dear son. she said, "reject poor Clara's supplication that you will see her champlon?

The king turned to Clara. "It is not for my own sake," she faltered. "But he has been slandered to your

"Did he not flee from his accusers?" asked the king. "Not," said the princess, "it

"afraid to show your face in our pre-

"I have no cause, sire," answered Ralph. "I labored honestly to acquit myself of your majesty's gracious in-structions."

We have heard otherwise," said the king and was silent and thoughtful for a space. "But it may be" he resumed, "that the movers of the common people are slandered also. Did not the churls say that our proffer of inquiry ino their grievances was a trick?"

"Nay, sire," answered Ralph. "On the contrary, they were right joyful of it, and I was myself called for in their professions on this head the sincere was abundantly proved by heir subsequent conduct.

But first the young king—from whom

"You should question him further, of their loyalty to his person. No dear son," said the princess, meeting show of strength could be made till his looks of doubt and mistruct with a benign smile.

Richard shook his head and mutterwas little work to be done in the fields; ed inaudibly to himself. After a but meantime the king's mind might pause he asked: "You say they were content to have an inquiry?"

"They were content, sire," answered Ralph; "but I pray your grace to hold me excused if I say that this would not content them, now. It is of this principally that I am charged to speak to you, sire."

"Charged to speak to me," cried the king in surprise. "Do you come, then, as a commissary from them?" He furned to the princess excitely. "My gracious mother," he said, "is not this a trick that you have played on me? I understood that it was of himself that this gentleman desired to speak and now he addresses me as the mes-senger of discontented subjects whom inquiry will not content."

Before the princess, who was indeed as much surprised as the king himself, could frame a reply, Ralph threw himself on his knees.

"I pray you, sire, to pardon me if my devotion to your grace and my There was greater difficulty in permy devotion to your grace and my suading Ralph to take the liberty of zeal for the contentment of the realm fered him. He clung obstinately to carry me too far. I do not come as a commissary; I come of my own motive,

> had volunteered to speak to the king.
> "I know these men," Ralph continued; "I know what they feel and what they say among themselves; I know how loyal and true in their hearts they are to you, and how they look to you as they did before to your noble father for comfort and redress; and I beseech you of your grace to hear me."

The king was partly appeased, but still doubtful whether he ought not to terminate the interview. He looked doubtfully towards he princess, and said to her: "If this matter concerns the realm, I ought not to hear it except in the presence of my council." But it was evident from his manner that curiosity was tempting him

"You can inform your council afterwards," said the princess, softly. She also was interested in the ominous statement that mere inquiry would

no longer give satisfaction.
"I ought, sire to say," added Ralph,
"that the commons put little trust in
your present council."

It needed all the grace and temperance of speech that Ralph could command to obtain a patient hearing. For the facts were startling enough. It had come to this, that nothing short of the abolition of villeinage and other forms of bondage would suffice.

This was what Ralph had charged himself to make known to the king as best he could; and as he discoursed with respectful gravity of the high duties of rulers set by God over the people to shield the weak against the tyranny of the strong, he was warmed into unconscious eloquence by the answering glow in the eyes of the generous youth. ground; if disinterested youth could have had its way, much bloodshed might have been averted.

(To be continued.)

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here was a session of the Congressional Fishing Club in the coat rooms. "Did you ever hear," said Senator Blackburn, "of the time Senator Frye caught the duck? It was this way: His specialty is fly fishing, and casting from a moving canoe. Well, one day in the fall we were fishing up above, anchored under the lee of a projecting point of land.

'Just watch me cast a minnow,' said the senator, as he sent the bait whizzing far out into the river. Hardly had the minnow struck the water until the line paid out and the reel began to sing.

"'It's a five pounder!' cried the oatman. 'Let him run, senator, let boatman. him run!"

"Well there was some excitement. The reel kept singing the sweetest mu-

Dave Henderson for the rest of this trip.

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