

# RALPH HARDELOT'S MEDIATION

BY WILLIAM MINTO.

## CHAPTER XXIV—Continued.

Inside the council chamber was a much more pitiable spectacle than the disgraced and heart broken gentleman—a body of rulers corporately demoralized and individually demoralized by panic, gabbling at one another like a flock of geese. If some Asmodeus could have transported them to Blackheath, taken the roof off the Green Man and shown them the leaders of the commons in that humble tavern in quiet and earnest deliberation, it would have put them to shame. But the king's council was for a moment without a head.

Fear had broken the bonds of custom, and the instinct of self-preservation ran riot above all the restraints of conventional ceremony. Every man was eager to give voice to his own panic-stricken comments and suggestions, and as they could not all gain the general ear at once, each man turned to his neighbor, trying desperately to be heard above the din. A confused gabble and babble of voices, strained to make themselves audible, filled the room.

The question was, what answer should be sent to the request of the commons, but there was no authority in the chamber equal to keeping this or any other single question before the minds of the council. The members gesticulated and roared out expressions of impotent wrath. Sir John Newton was a coward; he should never have yielded Rochester castle; it was strong enough to have held out till doomsday against such a rabble. Sir John Newton should be beheaded at once as a traitor, and his head sent to the insolent catiffs with a warning that if they did not disperse at once the same fate was in store for them. This should be the answer, this or no answer at all, but a hundred or two of men-at-arms, with Sir Robert Knolles at their head, to ride into their camp and scatter them like a herd of swine. Those who, in their hearts, were in favor of a milder policy were not less loud in declaring what ought to have been done sooner, before the insurgents had gained such a head.

The chancellor, Sudbury, ready with a proposal in the midst of all this clamor, calm, pale, with a contemptuous smile on his lips, raised his hand in vain for order. He looked reproachful, he looked indignant, but nobody heeded him. The babble continued, and a confused roar and hiss echoed from the walls and roof in the ears of the powerless statesman.

Then the young king rose, with all the composed majesty of a Plantagenet in his boyish face. He raised his voice, and the penetrating, clear and strong, made itself heard above the din, and brought back the unruly council to a sense of the impropriety of its behavior.

He beckoned to the chancellor to take advantage of the lull. The chancellor's tones were hard and severe; the disrespect of the council had made him acrimonious.

What was the meaning, he asked, of this ignoble panic before a herd of slaves? If they wished to confer with the king about their grievances, let them choose spokesmen of their own number and petition to be heard by the king in the presence of his council, and the king and his council would then determine to hear them or not. For himself he set no store by the opinion of the ignorant in matters of state; but as his own conduct was called in question, and he was branded by these men as an evil counsellor, he would not presume to gainsay any who deemed their opinion of higher worth, and wished to learn of their wisdom how to govern the kingdom. But as for this demand that the king should go to them, it was outrageous and insolent, and not for a moment to be listened to. Let this be their plain answer, and let them give the foolish and misguided men to understand that it was final.

There were murmurs of approval at this, and each man looked at his neighbor for encouragement. But their minds were really too agitated to rest firmly in any conclusion, and the next speaker, the Earl of Salisbury, among them round to a more cautious policy. He professed himself of entire accord with the archbishop, and echoed his strong language about the insolence of the rebellious villains. But had they duly weighed the danger of inflaming the rebels further? There was another host assembled to the north of London; were they satisfied of their power to withstand such numbers if they were made desperate by a rough answer? It behooved them to proceed warily in this matter and not take more in hand than they could execute, for not only their own lives but the lives of their heirs and the very existence of nobility in England were at stake, and if they could appease the rabble in the meantime with fair words, they might deliberate at their ease and take such measures as seemed to them best for the defense of themselves and their heritage. Such riotous assemblages were like loose, frothy scum which had no body or substance, and would dissolve as quickly as it had arisen if it were gently blown upon.

This was the substance of Salisbury's speech. His persuasive mildness had its effect. The approving murmurs were louder than before. The timid members of the council were emboldened to speak out in the same vein. The advocates of stronger measures were overborne by the majority, and in the end it was resolved as a compromise that the king should be rowed down next morning in his barge to Rochester, a safe distance from the

Tower, and that the rebels should be invited to meet him there and state their grievances. Against those who urged that their desire to speak with the king in person was a palpable trick to get him into their power, it was pointed out that he need not land, but only hear them and speak with them from his barge.

This was agreed to. But there was one dissentient—the lord high chancellor. Sudbury listened in contemptuous silence to their consultation, and when they had done, desired in dignified and sarcastic language to be relieved of the great seal. He had striven, he said, to do his duty as a humble servant of the king, but if it were desired to pacify the rebellious people, nothing could be more pleasing to them than the removal of the hated chancellor at whose door they laid all their wrongs.

In the end the chancellor was taken at his word, and the great seal was resumed by the king himself, and remained in his keeping during the next two days. It is possible that nobody about the king was hardy enough to take the responsibility of the clavis regni. The next use to which it was to be put is one of the most singular in its history.

## CHAPTER XXV.

As soon as the council rose the king hastened to his mother's apartments in high delight at the prospect of exercising some part of his sovereignty. No sense of the gravity of the situation damped his boyish spirits. He was as excited as at the anticipation of a tournament or a hawking party, where the sport might be expected to be particularly good. It must be remembered that he was only in his fifteenth year.

The princess was not elaborate in her instructions to Ralph Hardebot. He was to be the bearer of a message of general sympathy and good will; her keen woman's judgment, sharpened by the urgent danger, taught her that the precise terms of a formal commission would be out of place. "You have seen," she said, "that my son is of a gentle disposition; that nature hath made him to be a kind and gracious lord to his people, a lover of justice, a hater of oppression; that it is not in his heart to see the poor and weak wronged and pillaged by the rich and strong, but that they may trust him to hear and redress their reasonable complaints, as God and conscience constrain him. You have seen this, and I trust you to make it known."

Ralph loyally and reverently accepted the commission. He believed in his heart that the mother had rightly read her son's character.

When Ralph had gone the princess embraced her son. "Courage, my fair son," she said; "your kingdom will yet be saved in spite of treachery."

In the evening Ralph was rowed down from the Tower to Greenwich. At the suggestion of the princess he had resumed the distinctive dress of a Wycliffian priest; it might serve as a passport. The long day was closing as he climbed the hill towards Blackheath and looked back on the gleaming river and the distant towers and spires.

A few light words from his brother that afternoon had haunted him and filled his thoughts more than all the public tumult, which seemed so distant and dream-like now in the peaceful evening light with the cool, silent river winding through the scene past the dim city.

Clara Roos was free once more. The intervention of the princess had been successful; a dispensation had come at last from the hateful union. The princess had said nothing of this; the mother's heart was full of nearer and greater anxieties, and if any thought of it crossed her mind the terrors of the situation banished her benevolent designs in this slight affair till a more fitting occasion. There would be a time to make lovers happy when her son's kingdom was saved. And Ralph had not exchanged a word with Clara. But he had seen her; their eyes had met, and from that moment, though his sense of public duty was not abated, but on the contrary immeasurably elevated and hallowed, his whole being had been under an irresistible spell. Love, which he had held at bay so long, had taken him as if at unawares, had rushed in upon him, sweeping away every barrier, and established itself in full mastery.

At peace with himself at last, and yet the peace that filled his soul was near akin to sadness. The world was fairer to him, and yet he was not insensible of its miseries. Only something in his inner being there seemed to have been opened a deep fountain of hope that the miseries would pass, and that through them a better time would be reached. The sense of pain was not poignant enough to disturb the great calm that had descended on him like the peace of the stars after a storm.

He was not so sanguine as he had been of his own immediate aims. He had not abandoned them; he was ready to adventure his life for them calmly and without fear; but his faith in his own individual strength was sobered by what he had felt of the mighty forces against which he had measured it. Masses of men bound together by custom, unable to see above custom, to tell evil from good within the bonds of it, savagely resentful of interference, what could the weak voice of persuasion prevail against this?

In his lonely days in prison he had meditated much. The weeks he had spent there had been like years in

maturing his experience. Was it only by violent convulsions that evil customs could be uprooted? Could right and justice be reached only through strife and confusion? He saw the poor robbed by their natural protectors, beaten when they asked for justice. Would nothing but armed resistance and retaliation open the eyes of their lords to this iniquity? Why did righteous lords, whom conscience made just and merciful, remain blind to the brutalities of their fellows? He saw foul greed fluttering like a harpy over the fair world of England, clutching at the livelihood of poor men and devouring it, sometimes merely wasting it in ugly malevolence. Would nothing but the clamor of insurrection scare this monster from its prey?

"Who goes there?" Ralph was interrupted in his sad reflections.

He started and looked round; for a moment nobody was visible. Then from behind a clump of furze a man sprang up, and the next instant there appeared behind him half a dozen men in leather jackets with bows in their hands.

He had reached the outposts of the insurgents.

He advanced toward them, and, doffing his hat, asked to be guided to the captain of the commons. "I bear a message to him," he said.

"From whom?"

"From the king."

"The king does not send such as you on his errands."

"I am known to your captain," said Ralph.

"You are known to me also," said the man. "You are a spy. I saw you at Stourbridge Fair."

"At least take me to your captain. What I have to say to him deeply concerns the cause of the commons."

The men demurred, and talked of short shrift for suspicious prowlers.

"Bind me and blindfold me, if you please," said Ralph, extending his hands.

This was agreed to after consultation, and the bandage was not removed from his eyes till he found himself in the presence of the leaders.

It was a council of four, or rather a captain with a counsel of three, and in one of the number Ralph recognized his friend Simon d'Ypres, alias John Trueman, alias John Kirby. Kirby held the threads of the organization; John Trueman's fellows were the men selected months before throughout the counties to rise when the word of command should come. The captain was Wat Tyler, whom we have met before. He brought military capacity and a genius for command to the combination; one of the most singular things about the insurrection is its complete collapse after his assassination, and nothing could more clearly testify to the power that carried it so far. John Ball, the heretic priest, was also there, the orator and chaplain of the movement. Of all the leaders he was personally the most widely known and popular; the letters summoning the peasants to rise were written in his name and in his hand.

When Ralph was brought in by Lawrence Kirby, he received a friendly but distant greeting from his acquaintances. From their grave looks of inquiry it was evident that the message was of more interest to them than the messenger; and the captain, speaking with the manner of a man who has no time to waste in ceremony, at once told him to declare what he was commissioned to say.

They heard him in grave silence, without comment, sitting under the rude cross candlestick hung from the ceiling, the gravity of their faces heightened by the strong light and shade. The assurance that the young king was personally favorable to them was welcome, but the absence of specific promise or proposal, coupled with the half-concession reported by Sir John Newton, was suspicious. When it was apparent that Ralph bore no definite plan of co-operation, Ball became impatient and began to question him, and to ask whether there were any others at court as favorable as the king professed himself to the emancipation of the bondmen.

Ralph could only mention the princess.

(To be continued.)

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Story of Secretary Moody and Naughty Boston Woman.

They are telling a story in Washington about the new secretary of the navy. Mr. Moody was riding on one of the Boston surface cars, and was standing on the platform on the side next the gate that protected passengers from cars coming on the other track. A lady—a Boston lady—came to the door of the car, and, as it stopped, started to move toward the gate, which was hidden from her by the man standing before it.

"Other side, please, lady," said the conductor. He was ignored as only a born and bred Bostonian can ignore a man. The lady took another step toward the gate.

"You must get off the other side," said the conductor.

"I wish to get off on this side," came the answer, in tones that congealed the official into momentary silence. Before he could either explain or expostulate, Mr. Moody came to his assistance.

"Stand to one side, gentlemen," he remarked quietly. "The lady wants to climb over the gate."—*New York Times.*

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