...p, disclosed a round sinewy ...ddy and corded like the bark ...ir. Thick muscular arms, cov- with a reddish down, protruded the wide sleeves of his habit, ... his white shirt, looped up upon ...side, gave a glimpse of a huge ...y leg, scarred and torn with the scratches of brambles. With a bow to the Abbot, which had in it perhaps more pleasantry than reverence, the novice strode across to the carved prie-dieu which had been set apart for him, and stood silent and erect, with his hand upon the gold bell which was used in the private prisons of the Abbot's own household. His dark eyes glanced rapidly over the assembly, and finally settled with a grim and menacing twinkle upon the face of his accuser.

The chamberlain rose, and having slowly unrolled the parchment-scroll, proceeded to read it out in a thick and pompous voice, while a subdued rustle and movement among the brothers bespoke the interest with which they followed the proceedings.

"Charges brought upon the second Thursday after the feast of the Assumption, in the year of our Lord thirteen hundred and sixty-six, against Brother John, formerly known as Hordle John, or John of Hordle, but now a novice in the holy monastic order of the Cistercians. Read upon the same day at the Abbey of Beaulieu in the presence of the most reverend Abbot Berghersh and of the assembled order.

"The charges against the said Brother John are the following, namely, to wit:

"First, that on the above-mentioned feast of the Assumption, small beer having been served to the novices in the proportion of one quart to each four, the said Brother John did drain the pot at one draught, to the detriment of Brother Paul, Brother Porphyry, and Brother Ambrose, who could scarce eat their none-meat of salted stock-fish, on account of their exceeding dryness."

At this solemn indictment the novice raised his hand and twitched his lip, while even the placid senior brothers glanced across at each other and coughed to cover their amusement. The Abbot alone sat gray and immutable, with a drawn face and a brooding eye.

"Item, that having been told by the master of the novices that he should restrict his food for two days to a single three-pound loaf of bran and beans, for the greater honoring and glorifying of St. Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, he was heard by brother Ambrose and others to say that he wished twenty thousand devils would fly away with the said Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, or any other saint who came between a man and his meat. Item, that upon Brother Ambrose reproving him for his blasphemous wish, he did hold the said brother face downward over the piscatorium or fish-pond for a space during which the said brother was able to repeat a Pater and four Aves for the better fortifying of his soul against impending death."

There was a buzz and murmur among the white-frocked brethren at this grave charge; but the Abbot held up his long quivering hand. "What then?" said he.

"Item, that between Nones and Vespers on the feast of James the Less the said Brother John was observed upon the Brokenhurst road, near the spot which is known as Hatchett's Pond, in converse with a person of the other sex, being a maiden of the name of Mary Sowley, the daughter of the king's verderer. Item, that after sundry japes and jokes the said Brother John did lift up the said Mary Sowley and did take, carry, and convey her across a stream, to the infinite relish of the devil and the exceeding detriment of his own soul, which scandalous and wilful falling away was witnessed by three members of our order."

A dead silence throughout the room, with a rolling of heads and upturning of eyes, bespoke the pious horror of the community. The Abbot drew his gray brows low over his fiercely questioning eyes.

"Who can vouch for this thing?" he asked.

"That can I," answered the accuser. "So too can Brother Porphyry, who was with me, and Brother Mark of the Spicarium, who hath been so much stirred and inwardly troubled by the sight that he now lies in a fever through it."

"And the woman?" asked the Abbot. "Did she not break into lamentation and woe that a brother should so demean himself?"

"Nay, she smiled sweetly upon him and thanked him. I can vouch it, and so can Brother Porphyry."

"Canst thou?" cried the Abbot, in a high, tempestuous tone. "Canst thou so? Hast forgotten that the five-and-thirtieth rule of the order is that in the presence of a woman the face should be ever averted and the eyes cast down? Hast forgot it, I say? If your eyes were upon your sandals, how came ye to see this smile of which ye prate? A week in your cells, false brethren, a week of rye bread and lentils, with double Lauds and double Matins, may help ye to a remembrance of the laws under which ye live."

At this sudden outflame of wrath the two witnesses sank their faces on their chests, and sat as men crushed. The Abbot turned his angry eyes away from them and bent them upon the accused, who met his searching gaze with a firm and composed face.

"What hast thou to say, Brother John, upon these weighty things which are urged against thee?"

"Little enough, good father, little enough!" said the novice. "For the matter of the ale, I had come in hot from the fields and had scarce got the taste of the thing before mine eye lit upon the bottom of the pot. It may be, too, that I spoke somewhat shortly concerning the bran and the beans, the same being poor provender and unfitted for a man of my inches. It is true also that I did lay my hands upon this jack-fool of a Brother Ambrose, though, as you can see, I did him little scath. As regards the maid, too, it is true that I did heft her over the stream, she having on her hosen and shoon, whilst I had but my wooden sandals, which could take no hurt from the water. I should have thought shame upon my manhood, as well as my monkhood, if I had held back my hand from her." He glanced around as he spoke, with the half-amused look which he had worn during the whole proceedings.

"There is no need to go further," said the Abbot. "He has confessed to all. It only remains for me to portion out the punishment which is due to his evil conduct."

He rose and the two long lines of brothers followed his example, looking sideways with scared faces at the angry prelate.

"John of Hordle," he thundered, "you have shown yourself during the two months of your novitiate to be a recreant monk, and one who is unworthy to wear the white garb which is the outer symbol of the spotless spirit. That dress shall therefore be stripped from thee, and thou shalt be cast into the outer world without benefit of clerkship, and without lot or part in the graces and blessings of those who dwell under the care of the blessed Benedict. Thou shalt come back neither to Beaulieu nor to any of the granges of Beaulieu, and thy name shall be struck off the scrolls of the order."

The sentence appeared a terrible one to the older monks, who had become so used to the safe and regular life of the Abbey that they would have been as helpless as children in the outer world. From their pious oasis they looked dreamily out at the desert of life—a place full of stormings and strivings, comfortless, restless, and insurrection so sudden, so short, and so successful. Yet the Abbot Berghersh was a man of too firm a grain to allow one bold outbreak to imperil the settled order of his great household. In a few hot and bitter words he compared their false brother's exit to the expulsion of our first parents from the garden, and more than hinted that unless a reformation occurred some others of the community might find themselves in the same evil and perilous case. Having thus pointed the moral and reduced his flock to a fitting state of docility, he dismissed them once more to their labors and withdrew himself to his own private chamber, there to seek spiritual aid in the discharge of the duties of his high office.

The Abbot was still on his knees, when a gentle tapping at the door of his cell broke in upon his orisons. Rising in no very good humor at the interruption, he gave the word to enter; but his look of impatience softened down into a pleasant and paternal smile as his eyes fell upon his visitor.

He was a thin-faced, yellow-haired youth, rather above the middle size, comely and well shapen, with straight lithe figure and eager boyish features. His clear, pensive gray eye, and quick, delicate expression, spoke of a nature which had unfolded far from the boisterous joys and sorrows of the world. Yet there was a set of the mouth and a prominence of the chin which relieved him of any trace of effeminacy. Impulsive he might be, enthusiastic, sensitive, with something sympathetic and adaptive in his disposition; but an observer of nature's tokens would have confidently pledged himself that there was native firmness and strength underlying his gentle, monk-bred ways.

The youth was not clad in monastic garb, but in lay attire, though his jerkin, cloak and hose were all of a sombre hue, as befitted one who dwelt in sacred precincts. A broad leather strap hanging from his shoulder supported a scrip or satchel such as travellers were wont to carry. In one hand he grasped a thick staff pointed and shod with metal, while in the other he held his coif or bonnet, which bore in its front a broad pewter medal stamped with the image of Our Lady of Rocamadour.

"Art ready, then, fair son?" said the Abbot. "This is indeed a day of comings and goings. It is strange that in one twelve hours the Abbey should have cast off its foulest weed, and should now lose what we are fain to look upon as our choicest blossom."

"You speak too kindly, father," the youth answered. "If I had my will I should never go forth, but should end my days here in Beaulieu. It hath been my home as far back as my mind can carry me, and it is a sore thing for me to have to leave it."

"Life brings many a cross," said the Abbot gently. "Who is without them? Your going forth is a grief to us as well as yourself. But there is no help. I had given my foreword and sacred promise to your father Edric the Franklin, that at the age of twenty you should be sent out into the world to see for yourself how you liked the savor of it. Seat thee upon the settle, Alleyne, for you may need rest ere long."

The youth sat down as directed, but reluctantly and with diffidence. The Abbot stood by the narrow window, and his long, black shadow fell slantwise across the rushstrewn floor.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "your father, the Franklin of Minstead, died, leaving to the Abbey three hides of rich land in the hundred of Malwood, and leaving to us also his infant son on condition that we should rear him until he came to man's estate. This he did partly because your mother was dead, and partly because your elder brother, now Socman of Minstead, had already given signs of that fierce and rude nature which would make him no fit companion for you. It was his desire and request, however, that you should not remain in the cloisters, but should at a ripe age return into the world. Whither will you first turn

"To my brother's at Minstead. If he be indeed an ungodly and violent man there is the more need that I should seek him out and see whether I cannot turn him to better ways."

The Abbot shook his head. The Socman of Minstead hath earned an said. "If you must go to him, see at evil name over the country-side," he least that he doth not turn you from the narrow path upon which you have learned to tread. But you are in God's keeping and Godward should you ever look in danger and in trouble. Above all, shun the snares of women, for they are ever set for the foolish feet of the young. Kneel, my child, and take an old man's blessing."

Alleyne Edrickson bent his head while the Abbot poured out his heartfelt supplication that Heaven would watch over this young soul, now going forth into the darkness and danger of the world. It was no mere form for either of them. To them the outside life of mankind did indeed seem to be one of violence and sin, beset with physical and still more with spiritual danger. Heaven, too, was very near to them in those days. God's direct agency was to be seen in the thunder and the rainbow, the whirlwind and the lightning. To the believer, clouds of angels, confessors and martyrs, armies of the sainted and saved, were ever stooping over their struggling brethren upon earth, raising, encouraging, and supporting them. It was, then, with a lighter heart and a stouter courage that the young man turned from the Abbot's room, while the latter, following him to the stair-head, finally commended him to the protection of the holy Julian, patron of travellers.

Underneath, in the porch of the Abbey, the monks had gathered to give him a last God-speed. Many had brought some parting token by which he should remember them. There was Brother Bartholomew with a crucifix of rare carved ivory, and Brother Luke with a white-backed psalter adorned with golden bees, and Brother Francis with the "Slaying of the Innocents" most daintily set forth upon vellum. All these were duly packed away deep in the traveller's scrip, and above them old pippin-faced Brother Athanasius had placed a parcel of simnel bread and rammel cheese, with a small flask of the famous blue-sealed Abbey wine. So, amid handshakings and laughings and blessings, Alleyne Edricson turned his back upon Beaulieu.

At the turn of the road he stopped and gazed back. There was the wide-spread building which he knew so well, the Abbot's house, the long church, the cloisters with their line of arches, all bathed and mellowed in the evening sun. There too was the broad sweep of the river Exe, the old stone well, the canopied niche of the Virgin, and in the centre of all, the cluster of white-robed figures who waved their hands to him. A sudden mist swam up before the young man's eyes, and he turned away upon his journey with a heavy heart and a choking throat.

It is not, however, in the nature of things that a lad of twenty, with young life glowing in his veins and all the wide world before him, should spend his first hours of freedom in mourning of what he had left. Long ere Alleyne was out of sound of the Beaulieu bells he was striding sturdily along, swinging his staff and whistling as merrily as the birds in the thicket.

The road along which he travelled was scarce as populous as most other roads in the kingdom, and far less so than those which lie between the larger towns. Yet from time to time the boy met other wayfarers, and more than once was overtaken by strings of pack-mules and horsemen journeying in the same direction as himself.

The night had already fallen, and the moon was shining between the rifts of ragged, drifting clouds, before Alleyne Edricson, footsore and weary from the unwonted exercise found himself in front of the forest inn, which stood upon the outskirts of Lyndhurst. The building was long and low, standing back a little from the road, with two flambeaux blazing on either side of the door as a welcome to the traveller. From one window there thrust forth a long pole with a bunch of greenery tied to the end of it—a sign that liquor was to be sold within. As Alleyne walked up to it he perceived that it was rudely fashioned out of beams of wood, with twinklings of light all over where the glow from within shone through the chinks. The roof was poor and thatched; but in strange contrast to it there ran all along under the eaves a line of wooden shields, most gorgeously painted with chevron, bend, and saltire and every heraldic device. By the door a horse stood tethered, the ruddy glow beating strongly upon his brown head and patient eyes, while his body stood back in the shadow.

Alleyne stood still in the roadway for a few minutes, reflecting upon what he should do. It was, he knew, only a few miles further to Minstead, where his brother dwelt. On the other hand, he had never seen this brother since childhood, and the reports which had come to his ears concerning him were seldom to his advantage. By all accounts he was a hard and a bitter man. It might be an evil start to come to his door so late and claim the shelter of his roof. Better to sleep here at this inn, and then travel on to Minstead in the morning. If his brother would take him in, well and good. He would bide with him for a time and do what he might to serve him. If, on the other hand, he should have hardened his heart against him, he could only go on his way and do the best he might by his skill as a craftsman and a scrivener. At the end of a year he would be free to return to the cloisters, for such had been his father's request. A monkish upbringing, one year in the world after the age of twenty, and then a free selection one way or the other—It was a strange course which had been marked out for him. Such as it was, however, he had no choice but to follow it, and if he were to begin by making a friend of his brother, he had best wait until morning before he knocked at his dwelling.

The rude plank door of the inn was ajar, but as Alleyne approached it there came from within such a gust of rough laughter and clatter of tongues that he stood irresolute upon the threshold. Summoning courage, however, and reflecting that it was a public dwelling, in which he had as much right as any other man, he pushed it open and stepped into the common room.

(To be Continued Next Week.)

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