

Allen Grant

Blood Royal: A Novel



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BLOOD ROYAL

CHAPTER I. PERADVENTURE

Chiddingwick High Street is one of the quaintest and most picturesque bits of old town architecture to be found in England. Narrow at either end, it broadens suddenly near the middle, by a sweeping curve outward, just opposite the White Horse, where the weekly cattle-market is held, and where the timbered gable-ends cluster thickest round the ancient stone cross, now reduced as usual to a mere stump or relic. In addition to its High Street, Chiddingwick also possesses a Mayor, a Corporation, a town pump, an Early English church, a Baptist chapel, and abundant opportunities for alcoholic refreshment. The White Horse itself may boast, indeed, of being one of the most famous old coaching inns still remaining in our midst, in spite of railways. And by its big courtyard door, one bright morning in early spring, Mr. Edmund Plantagenet, ever bland and self-satisfied, stood sunning his portly person, and surveying the world of the little town as it unrolled itself in changeful panorama before him.

‘Who’s that driving the Hector’s pony, Tom?’ Mr. Plantagenet asked of the hostler in a lordly voice, as a pretty girl went past in an unpretentious trap. ‘She’s a stranger in Chiddingwick.’ For Mr. Plantagenet, as one of the oldest inhabitants, prided himself upon knowing, by sight at least, every person in the parish, from Lady Agatha herself to the workhouse children.

Tom removed the straw he was sucking from his mouth for a moment, as he answered, with the contempt of the horsy man for the inferior gentry: ‘Oh, *she!* she ain’t nobody, sir. That lot’s the new governess.’

Mr. Plantagenet regarded the lady in the carriage with the passing interest which a gentleman of his distinction might naturally bestow upon so unimportant a personage. He was a plethoric man, of pompous aspect, and he plumed himself on being a connoisseur in female beauty.

‘Not a bad-looking little girl, though, Tom,’ he responded condescendingly, closing one eye and scanning her as one might scan a two-year-old filly. ‘She holds herself well. I like to see a woman who can sit up straight in her place when she’s driving.’

Mr. Plantagenet’s opinion on all questions of deportment was much respected at Chiddingwick; so Tom made no reply save to chow a little further the meditative straw; while Mr. Plantagenet, having by this time sufficiently surveyed the street for all practical purposes, retired into the bar-parlour of the friendly White Horse for his regulation morning brandy-and-soda.

But the new governess, all unconscious of the comments she excited, drove placidly on to the principal bookseller and stationer’s.

There were not many booksellers’ shops in Chiddingwick; people in Surrey import their literature, if any, direct from London. But the one at whose door the pretty governess stopped was the best in the town, and would at least do well enough for the job she wanted. It bore, in fact, the proud legend, ‘Wells’s Select Library then by an obvious afterthought, in smaller letters, ‘In connection with Mudie’s.’ An obsequious small boy rushed up, as she descended, to hold the Rector’s horse, almost as in the days before compulsory education, when small hoys lurked unseen, on the look-out for stray ha’pence, at every street corner. Mary accepted his proffered aid with a sunny smile, and went into the shop carrying a paper parcel.

There was nobody in the place, however, to take her order; and Mary, who was a timid girl, not too sure of her position, stood for a moment irresolute, uncertain how to call the attention of the inmates. Just as she was on the point of giving it up as useless, and retiring discomfited, the door that led into the room behind the shop opened suddenly, and a young man entered. He seemed about nineteen, and he was tall and handsome, with deep-blue eyes, and long straggling locks of delicate yellow hair, that fell picturesquely though not affectedly about his ears and shoulders. He somehow reminded Mary of a painted window. She didn't know why, but instinctively, as he entered, she felt as if there were something medieval and romantic about the good-looking shopman. His face was almost statuesquely beautiful – a fair, frank, open face, like a bonny young sailor's, and the loose curls above were thrown lightly off the tall white forehead in a singularly graceful yet unstudied fashion. He was really quite Florentine. The head altogether was the head of a gentleman, and something more than that: it had the bold and clear-cut, fearless look about it that one seldom finds among our English population, except as the badge of rank and race in the very highest classes. Mary felt half ashamed of herself, indeed, for noting all these things immediately and instinctively about a mere ordinary shopman; for, after all, a shopman he was, and nothing more: though his head and face were the head and face of a gentleman of distinction, his dress was simply the every-day dress of his class and occupation. He was a son of the people. And as Mary was herself a daughter of the clergy, the eldest girl of a country rector, compelled by the many mouths and the narrow endowment at home to take a place as governess with a more favoured family at Chiddingwick Rectory, she knew she could have no possible right of any sort to take any personal interest in a bookseller's lad, however handsome and yellow-haired and distinguished-looking.

'I beg your pardon for not having come sooner,' the tall young man began in a very cultivated tone, which took Mary aback even more than did his singular and noteworthy appearance; 'but the fact is, you opened the door so very softly the bell didn't ring; and I didn't notice there was anybody in the shop, as I was busy cutting, till I happened to look up accidentally from my ream, and then I saw you. I hope I haven't kept you unnecessarily waiting?'

He spoke like a gentleman; and Mary observed, almost without remarking it, that he didn't call her 'miss,' though she was hardly even aware of the unusual omission, his manner and address were so perfectly those of a courteous and wellbred equal. If she had fancied the customary title was left out on purpose, as a special tribute of disrespect to her position as governess, her sensitive little soul would have been deeply hurt by the slight, even from an utter stranger; but she felt instinctively the handsome young man had no such intention. He didn't mean to be anything but perfectly polite, so she hardly even noticed the curious omission.

'Oh dear no,' she answered, in her timid little voice, unfolding her parcel as she spoke with a kind of shrinking fear that she must be hurting his feelings by treating him as a tradesman. 'I've only just come in; and I – well, I wanted to know whether you could bind this again for me? Or is it quite too old to be worth the trouble of binding?'

The young man took it from her hands, and looked at her as he took it. The book was a 'British Flora,' in two stout octavo volumes, and it had evidently seen wear and tear, for it was tattered and dog-eared. But he received it mechanically, without glancing at it for a moment. His eyes, in fact, were fixed hard on Mary's. A woman knows at once what a man is thinking – especially, of course, when it's herself he's thinking about; and Mary knew that minute the young man with the fine brow and the loose yellow hair was thinking in his own head how exceedingly pretty she was. That makes a girl blush under any circumstances, and all the more so when the man who thinks it is her social inferior. Now, when Mary blushed, she coloured up to her delicate shell-like ears, which made her look prettier and daintier and more charming than ever; and the young man, withdrawing his eyes guiltily and suddenly – for he, too, knew what that blush must mean – was still further confirmed in his first opinion that she was very pretty.

The young lady, however, was ashamed he should even look at her. He was accustomed to that, and yet somehow in this case it particularly hurt him. He didn't know why, but he wanted her to like him. He look up the book to cover his confusion, and examined it carefully. 'At the time of the French Revolution,' he observed, as if to himself, in a curious, far-away tone, like one who volunteers for no particular reason a piece of general information, 'many of the refugees who came to this country were compelled to take up mechanical work of the commonest description. A Rochefoucauld mended shoes – and Talleyrand was a bookbinder.'

He said it exactly as if it was a casual remark about the volume he was holding, or the comparative merits of cloth and leather, with his eyes intently fixed on the backs of the covers, and his mind to all appearance profoundly absorbed in the alternative contemplation of morocco or russia. Mary thought him the oddest young man she had ever met in her life; she fancied he must be mad, and wondered by what chance of fate or fortune he could ever have wandered into a bookseller's shop at Chiddingwick.

The young man volunteered no more stray remarks about the French Revolution, however, but continued to inspect the backs of the books with more business-like consideration. Then he turned to her quietly: 'We could do this for you very cheap in half-calf,' he said, holding it up. 'It's not at all past mending. I see it's a favourite volume; and a book of reference of the sort you're constantly using in the open air ought to have sound, stout edges. The original binding, which was cloth, is quite unsuitable, of course, for such a purpose. If you'll leave it to me, I'll do my best to make a workman-like job of it.'

There was something in the earnest way the young man spoke that made Mary feel he took a pride in his work, simple and ordinary as it was; and his instant recognition of the needs and object of the particular volume in question, which in point of fact had been her companion in many country rambles over hill or moor, seemed to her singularly different from the perfunctory habit of most common English workmen. To them, a book is just a book to be covered. She conceived in her own mind, therefore, a vague respect at once for the young man's character. But he himself was just then looking down at the volume once more, engaged in examining the inside of the binding. As he turned to the fly-leaf he gave a sudden little start of intense surprise. 'Tudor!' he murmured – 'Mary Tudor! How very curious! Did this book, then, once belong to someone named Mary Tudor?'

'It belongs to me, and that's my name,' Mary answered, a little astonished, for he was gazing fixedly at her autograph on the blank page of the first volume. Never before in her experience had any shop people anywhere showed the slightest symptom of surprise at recognition of her royal surname.

The young man made a sudden gesture of curious incredulity. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, jotting down something in pencil in the inside of the book; 'do I understand you to mean your own real name is Mary Tudor?'

'Why, yes, certainly,' Mary answered, much amused at his earnestness. 'That's my own real name – Mary Empson Tudor.'

He looked at it again. 'What a singular coincidence!' he murmured to himself half inaudibly.

'It's not an uncommon name in Wales,' Mary answered, just to cover the awkwardness, for she was surprised the young man should feel any interest at all in so abstract a subject.

'Oh, that's not it,' the yellow-haired lad replied in a hasty little way. 'The coincidence is – that *my* name happens to be Richard Plantagenet.'

As he spoke, he drew himself up, and met her gaze once more with conscious pride in his clear blue eye. For a moment their glances answered each other; then both dropped their lids together. But Richard Plantagenet's cheek had flushed crimson meanwhile, as a very fair man's often will, almost like a girl's, and a strange fluttering had seized upon his heart well-nigh before he knew it. This was not remarkable. Mary Tudor was an extremely pretty girl; and her name seemed fateful; but who was she? Who could she be? Why had she happened to come there? Richard Plantagenet determined in

his own heart that moment he would surely search this out, and never rest until he had discovered the secret of their encounter.

‘You shall have it on Wednesday,’ he said, coming back to the book with a sudden drop from cloudland. ‘Where may I send it?’ This last in the common tone of business.

‘To the Rectory,’ Mary answered, ‘addressed to Miss Tudor.’ And then Richard knew at once she must be the new governess. His eye wandered to the door. He hadn’t noticed till that minute the Rectory pony; but once he saw it, he understood all; for Chiddingwick was one of those *very* small places where everyone knows everyone else’s business. And Fraulein had gone back just three weeks ago to Hanover.

There was a moment’s pause: then Mary said ‘Good-morning,’ sidling off a little awkwardly; for she thought Richard Plantagenet’s manner a trifle embarrassing for a man in his position; and she didn’t even feel quite sure he wasn’t going to claim relationship with her on the strength of his surname. Now, a shopman may be handsome and gentlemanly, and a descendant of kings, but he mustn’t aspire to acquaintance on such grounds as these with the family of a clergyman of the Church of England.

‘Good-morning,’ Richard replied with a courtly bow, like a gentleman of the old school, which indeed he was. ‘Your books shall be covered as well as we can do them.’

Mary returned to the pony, and Richard to his ream, which he was cutting into sermon-paper. But Mary Tudor’s pretty face seemed to haunt him at his work; and he thought to himself more than once, between the clips of the knife, that if ever he married at all, that was just the sort of girl a descendant of the Plantagenets would like to marry. Yet the last time one of his house had espoused a Tudor, he said to himself very gravely, the relative *roles* of man and woman were reversed; for the Tudor was Henry of Richmond, ‘called Henry VII., of our younger branch and the Plantagenet was Elizabeth of York, his consort. And that was how ‘the estates’ went out of the family.

But ‘the estates’ were England, Wales, and Ireland, he often complained in the bosom of the family.

CHAPTER II. THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Edmund Plantagenet residence in Chiddingwick High Street was less amply commodious, he often complained in the bosom of the family, than his ancestral home at Windsor Castle, erected by his august and famous predecessor, King Edward III. of illustrious memory. Windsor Castle is a house fit for a gentleman to live in. But as Mr. Plantagenet himself had never inhabited the home of his forefathers – owing to family differences which left it for the time being in the occupation of a Lady ‘belonging to the younger branch of the house’ – he felt the loss of his hereditary domains less keenly than might perhaps have been expected from so sensitive a person. Still, the cottage at Chiddingwick, judged even by the less exalted standard of Mr. Plantagenet’s own early recollections, was by no means unduly luxuriant. For Edmund Plantagenet had been well brought up, and received in his day the education of a gentleman. Even now, in his dishonoured and neglected old age, abundant traces of the Charterhouse still remained to the bitter end in his voice and manner. But little else was left. The White Horse had stolen away whatever other relics of gentility Mr. Plantagenet possessed, and had reduced him in his latter days to the miserable ruin of what was once a man, and even a man of letters.

It was a sad history, and, alas! a very common one. Thirty years before, when Edmund Plantagenet, not yet a believer in his own real or pretended royal descent, went up to London from Yorkshire to seek his fortune in literature, he was one of the handsomest and most popular young men in his own society. His name alone succeeded in attracting attention; we are not all of us Plantagenets. The admirable Lady Postlethwaite, arbiter in her day of literary reputation, gave the man with the royal surname the run of her well-known *salon*; editors accepted readily enough his inflated prose and his affected poetry; and all the world went well with him for a time – while he remained a bachelor. But one fine day Edmund Plantagenet took it into his head, like many better men, to fall in love – we have done it ourselves, and we know how catching it is – and not only to fall in love, but also, which is worse, to give effect to his feelings by actually getting married. In after-life Mr. Plantagenet regarded that unfortunate step as the one fatal error in an otherwise blameless career. He felt that with a name and prospects like his he ought at least to have married rank, title, or money. Instead of which he just threw himself away: he married only beauty, common-sense, and goodness. The first of these fades, the second palls, and the third Mr. Plantagenet was never constructed to appreciate. But rank and money appeal to all, and persist unchanged after such skin-deep attractions as intellect or good looks have ceased to interest.

From the day of his marriage, then, Edmund Plantagenet’s downward career began. As a married man, he became at once of less importance in Lady Postlethwaite’s society – he was so useful for dances. Editors found out by degrees that he had only affectation and audacity in place of genius; work fell short as children increased; and evil days began to close in upon the growing family. But what was worst of all, as money grew scarcer, a larger and larger proportion of it went each day to swell the receipts, at first of his club, and afterwards, when clubs became things of the past, of the nearest public-house. To make a long story short, before many years were over, Edmund Plantagenet, the young, the handsome, the promising, had degenerated from a dashing and well-bred fellow into a miserable sot of the sorriest description.

But just in proportion as his real position grew worse and worse did Mr. Plantagenet buoy himself up in secret with magnificent ideas about his origin and ancestry. Even in his best days, indeed, he would never consent to write under his own real name; he wouldn’t draggle the honour of the Plantagenets in the dirt of the street, he said with fine contempt; so he adopted for literary purposes the high-sounding pseudonym of Barry Neville. But after he began to decline, and to give way to drink, his pretensions to royal blood became well-nigh ridiculous. Not, indeed, that anyone ever heard him boast noisily of his origin; Edmund Plantagenet was too clever a man of the world

to adopt such futile and obvious tactics; he knew a plan worth two of that; he posed as a genuine descendant of the old Kings of England, more by tacit assumption than by open assertion. Silence played his game far better than speech. When people tried to question him on the delicate point of his pedigree, he evaded them neatly, but with a mysterious air which seemed to say every bit as plain as words could say it: 'I choose to waive my legitimate claim, and I won't allow any man to bully me into asserting it.' As he often implied to his familiar friends, he was too much a gentleman to dispute the possession of the throne with a lady.

But Mr. Plantagenet's present ostensible means of gaining an honest livelihood was by no means a regal one. He kept, as he was wont to phrase it gently himself, a temple of Terpsichore. In other words, he taught the local dancing-class. In his best days in London, when fortune still smiled upon him, he had been famed as the most graceful waltzer in Lady Postlethwaite's set; and now that the jade had deserted him, at his lowest depth, he had finally settled down as the Chiddingwick dancing-master. So as he was, all Chiddingwick supported him loyally, for his name's sake; even Lady Agatha's children attended his lessons. It was a poor sort of trade, indeed, for the last of the Plantagenets; but he consoled himself under the disgrace with the cheerful reflection that he served, after all, as it were, as his own Lord Chamberlain.

On this particular night, however, of all the year, Mr. Plantagenet felt more profoundly out of humour with the world in general and his own ancestral realm of England in particular, than was at all usual with him. The fact was, his potential subjects had been treating him with marked want of consideration for his real position. Kings in exile are exposed to intolerable affronts. The landlord of the White Horse had hinted at the desirability of arrears of pay on the score of past brandies and sodas innumerable. The landlord was friendly, and proud of his guest, who 'kept the house together'; but at times he broke out in little fits of petulance. Now, Mr. Plantagenet, as it happened, had not the wherewithal to settle this little account off-hand, and he took it ill of Barnes, who, as he justly remarked, 'had had so much out of him,' that he should endeavour to hurry a gentleman of birth in the matter of payment. He sat by his own fireside, therefore, in no very amiable humour, and watched the mother bustling about the room with her domestic preparations for the family supper.

'Clarence,' Mr. Plantagenet said, after a moment of silence, to one of the younger boys, 'have you prepared your Thucydides? It's getting very late. You seem to me to be loafing about doing nothing.'

'Oh, I know it pretty well,' Clarence answered with a nonchalant air, still whittling at a bit of stick he was engaged in transforming into a homemade whistle. 'I looked it over in class. It's not very hard. Thucydides is rot – most awful rot! It won't take five minutes.'

Mr. Plantagenet, with plump fingers, rolled himself another cigarette. He had come down in the world, and left cigars far behind, a fragrant memory of the distant past; but as a gentleman he could never descend to the level of a common clay pipe.

'Very well,' he said blandly, leaning back in his chair and beaming upon Clarence: a peculiar blandness of tone and manner formed Mr. Plantagenet's keynote. 'That may do for *me*, perhaps; but it won't do for Richard.'

After which frank admission of his own utter abdication of parental prerogatives in favour of his own son, he proceeded very deliberately to light his cigarette and stare with placid eyes at the dilatory Clarence.

There was a minute's pause; then Mr. Plantagenet began again.

'Eleanor,' he remarked, in the same soft, self-indulgent voice, to his youngest daughter, 'you don't seem to be doing anything. I'm sure you've got some lessons to prepare for to-morrow.'

Not that Mr. Plantagenet was in the least concerned for the progress of his children's education; but the deeper they were engaged with their books, the less noise did they make with their ceaseless chatter in the one family sitting-room, and the more did they leave their fond father in peace to his own reflections.

‘Oh, there’s plenty of time,’ Eleanor answered, with a little toss of her pretty head. ‘I can do ‘em by-and-by – after Dick comes in. He’ll soon be coming.’

‘I wish to goodness he’d come, then!’ the head of the house ejaculated fervently; ‘for the noise you all make when he isn’t here to look after you is enough to distract a saint. All day long I have to scrape at my fiddle; and when I come back home at night I have to sit, as best I can, in a perfect bedlam. It’s too much for my poor nerves. They never were vigorous. – Henry, my boy, *will* you stop that intolerable noise? – A Jew’s harp, too! Goodness gracious! what a vulgar instrument! – Dick’s late to-night. I wonder what keeps him.’

It was part and parcel of Mr. Plantagenet’s silent method of claiming royal descent that he called all his children with studious care after the earlier Plantagenets, his real or supposed ancestors, who were Kings of England. Thus his firstborn was Richard, in memory of their distinguished predecessor, the mighty Cour-de-Lion; his next was Lionel Clarence, after the second son of Edward IV., the particular prince upon whom Mr. Plantagenet chose to affiliate his family pedigree; and his third was Henry, that being the Plantagenet name which sat first and oftenest upon the throne of England. His eldest girl, in like manner, was christened Maud, after the foundress of his house, who married Geoffrey Plantagenet, and so introduced the blood of the Conqueror into the Angevin race; his youngest was Eleanor, after the wife of Henry II., ‘who brought us Poitou and Aquitaine as heirlooms.’

Mr. Plantagenet, indeed, never overtly mentioned these interesting little points in public himself; but they oozed out, for all that, by lateral leakage, and redounded thereby much the more to their contriver’s credit. His very reticence told not a little in his favour. For a dancing-master to claim by word or deed that he is *de jure* King of England would be to lay himself open to unsparing ridicule; but to let it be felt or inferred that he is so, without ever for one moment arrogating to himself the faintest claim to the dignity, is to pose in silence as an injured innocent – a person of most distinguished and exalted origin, with just that little suspicion of pathos and mystery about his unspoken right which makes the thing really dignified and interesting. So people at the White Horse were wont to whisper to one another in an awe-struck undertone that ‘if every man had his rights, there’s some as says our Mr. Plantagenet had ought to be sot pretty high well up where the Queen’s a-sitting.’ And though Mr. Plantagenet himself used gently to brush aside the flattering impeachment with one wave of his pompous hand – ‘All that’s been altered long ago, my dear sir, by the Act of Settlement’ – yet he came in for a good many stray glasses of sherry at other people’s expense, on the strength of the popular belief that he might, under happier auspices, have filled a throne, instead of occupying the chair of honour by the old oak chimney-piece in a public-house parlour.

Hardly, however, had Mr. Plantagenet uttered those memorable words, ‘Dick’s late to-night; I wonder what keeps him,’ when the front door opened, and the Heir Apparent entered.

Immediately some strange change seemed to pass by magic over the assembled household. Everybody looked up, as though an event had occurred. Mrs. Plantagenet herself, a weary-looking woman with gentle goodness beaming out of every line in her worn face, gave a sigh of relief.

‘Oh, Dick,’ she cried, ‘I’m so glad you’ve come! We’ve all been waiting for you.’

Richard glanced round the room with a slight air of satisfaction. It was always a pleasure to him to find his father at home, and not, as was his wont, in the White Horse parlour; though, to say the truth, the only reason for Mr. Plantagenet’s absence that night from his accustomed haunt was this little tiff with the landlord over his vulgar hints of payment. Then he stooped down and kissed his mother tenderly on the forehead, patted Eleanor’s curly head with a brotherly caress, gave a kindly glance at Prince Hal, as he loved to call him mentally, and sat down in the easy-chair his mother pushed towards him.

For a moment there was silence; then Dick began in an explanatory voice:

‘I’m sorry I’m late; but I had a piece of work to finish to-night, mother – rather particular work, too: a little bit of bookbinding.’

‘You get paid extra for that, Richard, don’t you?’ his father asked, growing interested.

‘Well, yes,’ Dick answered, rather grudgingly;

‘I get paid extra for that; I do it in overtime.

But that wasn’t all,’ he went on hurriedly, well aware that his father was debating in his own mind whether he couldn’t on the strength of it borrow a shilling. ‘It was a special piece of work for the new governess at the Rectory. And, mother, isn’t it odd? her name’s Mary Tudor!’

‘There isn’t much in that,’ his father answered, balancing his cigarette daintily between his first and second finger. “‘A’ Stuarts are na sib to the King,” you know, Richard. The Plantagenets who left the money had nothing to do with the Royal Family – that is to say, with *us*,’ Mr. Plantagenet went on, catching himself up by an after-thought.

‘They were mere Sheffield cutlers, people of no antecedents, who happened to take our name upon themselves by a pure flight of fancy, because they thought it high-sounding. Which it is, undoubtedly. And as for Tudors, bless your heart, they’re common enough in Wales. In point of fact – though I’m proud of Elizabeth, as a by-blow of the family – we must always bear in mind that for *us*, my dear boy, the Tudors were never anything but a distinct *mesalliance*.’

‘Of course,’ Richard answered with profound conviction.

His father glanced at him sharply. To Mr. Plantagenet himself this shadowy claim to royal descent was a pretty toy to be employed for the mystification of strangers and the aggrandisement of the family – a lever to work on Lady Agatha’s feelings; but to his eldest son it was an article of faith, a matter of the most cherished and the profoundest belief, a reason for behaving one’s self in every position in life so as not to bring disgrace on so distinguished an ancestry.

A moment’s silence intervened; then Dick turned round with his grave smile to Clarence:

‘And how does Thucydides get on?’ he asked with brotherly solicitude.

Clarence wriggled a little uneasily on his wooden chair.

‘Well, it’s not a hard bit,’ he answered, with a shamefaced air. ‘I thought I could do it in a jiffy after you came home, Dick. It won’t take two minutes. It’s just that piece, don’t you know, about the revolt in Corcyra.’

Dick looked down at him reproachfully..

‘Oh, Clarry,’ he cried with a pained face, ‘you know you can’t have looked at it. Not a hard bit, indeed! why, it’s one of the obscurest and most debated passages in all Thucydides! Now, what’s the use of my getting you a nomination, old man, and coaching you so hard, and helping to pay your way at the grammar school, in hopes of your getting an Exhibition in time, if you won’t work for yourself, and lift yourself on to a better position?’ And he glanced at the wooden mantelpiece, on whose vacant scroll he had carved deep with his penknife his own motto in life, ‘Noblesse oblige,’ in Lombardic letters, for his brother’s benefit.

Clarence dropped his eyes and looked really penitent.

‘Well, but I say, Dick,’ he answered quickly, ‘if it’s so awfully difficult, don’t you think it ‘ud be better for me to go over it with you first – just a running construe – and then I’d get a clearer idea of what the chap was driving at from the very beginning?’

‘Certainly *not*,’ Dick answered gravely, with a little concern in his voice, for he saw in this clever plea somewhat too strong an echo of Mr. Plantagenet’s own fatal plausibility. ‘You should spell it out first as well as you can by yourself; and then, when you’ve made out all you’re able to with grammar and dictionary, you should come to me in the last resort to help you. Now sit down to it, there’s a good boy. I shan’t be able in future to help you quite as much in your work as I’ve been used to do.’

He spoke with a seriousness that was above his years. To say the truth, Mr. Plantagenet’s habits had almost reversed their relative places in the family. Dick was naturally conscientious, having fortunately inherited his moral characteristics rather from his mother’s side than from his father’s; and being thrown early into the position of assistant bread-winner and chief adviser to the family, he had grown grave before his time, and felt the weight of domestic cares already heavy upon his shoulders. As for Clarence, who had answered his father with scant respect, he never thought for a moment of

disobeying the wishes of his elder brother. He took up the dog-eared Thucydides that had served them both in turn, and the old Liddell and Scott that was still common property, and began conning over the chapter set before him with conspicuous diligence. Dick looked on meanwhile with no little satisfaction, while Eleanor went on with her work, in her chair in the corner, vaguely conscious all the time of meriting his approbation.

At last, just as they sat down to their frugal supper of bread and cheese and water – for by Dick's desire they were all, save one, teetotalers – Dick sprang a mine upon the assembled company by saying out all at once in a most matter-of-fact voice to his neighbour Clarry:

'No, I shan't be able to help you very much in future, I'm afraid – because, next week, I'm going up to Oxford – to try for a scholarship.'

A profound spell of awed silence followed this abrupt disclosure of a long-formed plan. Mr. Plantagenet himself was the first to break it. He rose to the occasion.

'Well, I'm glad at least, my son,' he said, in his most grandiose manner, 'you propose to give yourself the education of a gentleman.'

'And therefore,' Dick continued, with a side-glance at Clarence, 'I shall need all my spare time for my own preparation.'

CHAPTER III. DISCOUNTING IT

Mrs. Plantagenet looked across the table at her son with vague eyes of misgiving. ‘This is all very sudden, Dick,’ she faltered out, not without some slight tremor.

‘Sudden for you, dear mother,’ Dick answered, taking her hand in his own; ‘but not for me.

Very much otherwise.. I’ve had it in my mind for a great many months; and *this* is what decided me.’

He drew from his pocket as he spoke a small scrap of newspaper and handed it across to her. It was a cutting from the *Times*. Mrs. Plantagenet read it through with swimming eyes. ‘University Intelligence: Oxford. – Four Foundation Scholarships will be awarded after public examination at Durham College on May 20th. Two will be of the annual value of One Hundred Pounds, for Classics; one of the same value for Natural Science; and one for Modern History. Application to be made, on or before Wednesday, the 19th, to the Rev. the Dean, at Durham College, who will also supply all needful information to intending candidates.’

The words swam in a mist before Mrs. Planta-genet’s eyes. ‘What does it all mean, dear Dick?’ she inquired almost tearfully.

‘It means, mother,’ Dick answered with the gentlest tenderness, ‘that Durham is the only college in the University which gives as good a Scholarship as a hundred a year for Modern History. Now, ever since I left the grammar school, I haven’t had it out of my mind for a day to go, if I could, to Oxford. I think it’s incumbent upon a man in my position to give himself, if possible, a University training.’

He said the words without the slightest air of conceit or swagger, but with a profound consciousness of their import; for to Richard Plantagenet the myth or legend of the ancient greatness of his family was a spur urging him ever on to make himself worthy of so glorious an ancestry. ‘So I’ve been working and saving ever since,’ he went on, ‘with that idea constantly before me; and I’ve looked out for twelve months or more in the *Times* every day for the announcement of an exam, for the Durham Scholarship.’

‘But you won’t get it, my boy,’ Mr. Plantagenet put in philosophically, after a moment’s consideration. ‘You never can get it. Your early disadvantages, you know – your inadequate schooling – so many young fellows well coached from Eton and Harrow!’

‘If it had been a classical one, I should agree with you: I couldn’t, I’m afraid,’ Richard responded frankly, for he was by no means given to over-estimate his own abilities; ‘but in history it’s different. You see, so much of it’s just our own family pedigree and details of our ancestry. That acted as a fillip – gave me an interest in the subject from the very first; and as soon as I determined to begin reading for Oxford, I felt at once my best chance would lie in Modern History. And that’s why I’ve been working away at it as hard as ever I could in all my spare time for more than a twelvemonth.’

‘But have you been reading the right books, Dick? – that’s the question,’ his father put in dubiously, with a critical air, making a manful effort to recall the names of the works that were most authoritative in the subject when he himself last looked at a history: ‘Sharon Turner, Kemble, Palgrave, Thierry, Guizot and so forth?’

Richard had too deep a respect for the chief of the Plantagenets, miserable sot though he was, to be betrayed into a smile by this belated catalogue. He only answered with perfect gravity: ‘I’m afraid none of those would be of much use to me nowadays in a Scholarship exam.: another generation has arisen, which knows not Joseph. But I’ve got up all the books recommended in the circular of the Board of Studies – Freeman, you know, and Stubbs and Green, and Froude and Gardner. And I’ve worked especially at the reigns of the earlier Plantagenets, and the development of the towns and guilds, and all that sort of thing, in Brentano and Seebohm.’

Mr. Plantagenet held his peace and looked profoundly wise. He had barely heard the names of any of these gentlemen himself: at the best of times his knowledge had always been shallow – rather

showy than exact; a journalist's stock-in-trade – and since his final collapse into the ignominious position of dancing-master at Chiddingwick he had ceased to trouble himself much about any form of literature save the current newspaper. A volume of 'Barry Neville's Collected Essays,' bound in the antiquated style of the 'Book of Beauty,' with a portrait of the author in a blue frock-coat and stock for frontispiece, stood on his shelf by way of fossil evidence to his extinct literary pretensions; but Barry Neville himself had dropped with time into the usual listless apathy of a small English country town. So he held his peace, not to display his ignorance further; for he felt at once, from this glib list of authorities, that Dick's fluent display of acquaintance with so many new writers, whose very names he had never before heard – though they were well enough known in the modern world of letters to be recommended by an Oxford Board of Studies – put him hopelessly out of court on the subject under discussion.

'Jones tertius has a brother at Oxford,' Clarence put in very eagerly; 'and he's a howling swell – he lives in a room that's panelled with oak from top to bottom.'

'And if you get the Scholarship, Dick,' his mother went on wistfully, 'will you have to go and live there, and be away from us always?'

'Only half the year, mother dear,' Richard answered coaxingly; for he knew what she was thinking – how hard it would be for her to be left alone in Chiddingwick, among all those unruly children and her drunken husband, without the aid of her one help and mainstay. 'You know, there's only about five months of term, and all the rest's vacation. In vacation I'd come home, and do something to earn money towards making up the deficit.'

'It's a very long time, though, five months,' Mrs. Plantagenet said pensively. 'But, there!' she added, after a pause, brightening up, 'perhaps you won't get it.'

Grave as he usually was, Richard couldn't help bursting into a merry laugh at this queer little bit of topsy-turvy self-comfort. 'Oh, I hope to goodness I shall,' he cried, with a twinkle, 'in spite of that, mother. It won't be five months all in a lump, you know; I shall go up for some six or eight weeks at a time – never more than eight together, I believe – and then come down again. But you really needn't take it to heart just yet, for we're counting our chickens before they're hatched, after all. I mayn't get it, as you say; and, indeed, as father said just now, when one comes to think how many fellows will be in for it who have been thoroughly coached and crammed at the great public schools, my chance can't be worth much – though I mean to try it.'

Just at that moment, as Dick leaned back and looked round, the door opened, and Maud, the eldest sister, entered.

She had come home from her singing lesson; for Maud was musical, and went out as daily governess to the local tradesmen's families. She was the member of the household who most of all shared Dick's confidence. As she entered Harry looked up at her, full of conscious importance and a mouthful of Dutch cheese.

'Have you heard the news, Maudie?' he asked all breathless. 'Isn't it just ripping? Dick's going up to Oxford.'

Maud was pale and tired from a long day's work – the thankless work of teaching; but her weary face flushed red none the less at this exciting announcement, though she darted a warning look under her hat towards Richard, as much as to say:

'How could you ever have told him?'

But all she said openly was:

'Then the advertisement's come of the Durham Scholarship?'

'Yes, the advertisement's come,' Dick answered, flushing in turn. 'I got it this morning, and I'm to go up on Wednesday.'

The boys were rather disappointed at this tame announcement. It was clear Maud knew all about the great scheme already. And, indeed, she and Dick had talked it over by themselves many an evening on the hills, and debated the pros and cons of that important new departure.

Maud's face grew paler again after a minute, and she murmured half regretfully, as she unfastened her hat:

'I shall miss you if you get it, Dick. It'll be hard to do without you.'

'But it's the right thing for me to do,' Richard put in almost anxiously.

Maud spoke without the faintest hesitation' in her voice.

'Oh yes; it's the right thing,' she answered. 'Not a doubt in the world about that. It's a duty you owe to yourself, and to us – and to England. Only, of course, we shall all feel your absence a very great deal. Dick, Dick, you're so much to us! And I don't know,' she went on, as she glanced at the little ones with an uncertain air – 'I don't know that I'd have mentioned it before babes and sucklings – well, till I was sure I'd got it.'

She said it with an awkward flush; for Dick caught her eye as she spoke, and read her inner meaning. She wondered he had blurted it out prematurely before her father. And Dick, too, saw his mistake. Mr. Plantagenet, big with such important news, would spread it abroad among his cronies in the White Horse parlour before tomorrow was over!

Richard turned to the children.

'Now, look here, boys,' he said gravely: 'this is a private affair, and we've talked it over here without reserve in the bosom of the family. But we've talked it over in confidence. It mustn't be repeated. If I were to go up and try for this Scholarship, and then not get it, all Chiddingwick would laugh at me for a fellow that didn't know his proper place, and had to be taught to know it.'

For the honour of the family, boys – and you too, Nellie – I hope you won't whisper a word of all this to anybody in town. Consider what a disgrace it would be if I came back unsuccessful, and everybody in the parish came up and commiserated me: "We're so sorry, Mr. Dick, you failed at Oxford. But there, you see, you had such great disadvantages!"

His handsome face burned bright red at the bare thought of such a disgrace; and the little ones, who, after all, were Plantagenets at heart as much as himself, every one of them made answer with one accord:

'We won't say a word about it.'

They promised it so earnestly, and with such perfect assurance, that Dick felt he could trust them. His eye caught Maud's. The same thought passed instinctively through both their minds. What a painful idea that the one person they couldn't beg for very shame to hold his tongue was the member of the family most likely to blab it out to the first chance comer!

Maud sat down and ate her supper. She was a pretty girl, very slender and delicate, with a fair pink-and-white skin, and curious flashing eyes, most unusual in a blonde, though she was perhaps just a shade less handsome and distinguished-looking than the Heir Apparent.

All through the meal little else was talked of than this projected revolution, Dick's great undertaking. The boys were most full of it. 'Our Dick at Oxford! It was ripping – simply ripping! A lark of the first dimensions!' Clarence made up his mind at once to go up and see Dick his very first term, in oak-panelled rooms at Durham College. They *must* be oak-panelled. While Harry, who had feasted on 'Verdant Green' for weeks, was anxious to know what sort of gown he'd have to wear, and whether he thought he'd have ample opportunities for fighting the proctors.

'Twas a foregone conclusion. So innocently did they all discount 'Our Dick's' success, and so firmly did they believe that whatever he attempted he was certain to succeed in!

After supper Mr. Plantagenet rose with an important air, and unhooked his hat very deliberately from its peg. His wife and Dick and Maud all cried out with one voice:

'Why, surely you're not going out to-night, father!'

For to go out, they knew well, in Mr. Planta-genet's dialect, meant to spend the evening in the White Horse parlour.

'Yes, my dear,' Mr. Plantagenet answered, in his blandest tone, turning round to his wife with apologetic suavity. 'The fact is, I have a very particular engagement this evening. No, no, Dick, my

boy; don't try to detain me. Gentlemen are waiting for me. The claims of social life, my dear son – so much engaged – my sole time for the world – my one hour of recreation! Besides, strangers have been specially invited to meet me – people who have heard of my literary reputation! 'Twould be churlish to disappoint them.'

And, brushing his son aside, Mr. Plantagenet stuck his hat on jauntily just a trifle askew, with ponderous airiness, and strolled down the steps as he adjusted his Inverness cape on his ample shoulders, with the air of a gentleman seeking his club, with his martial cloak around him.

For in point of fact it had occurred to Mr. Plantagenet as they sat at supper that, if he burst in upon the White Horse as the first bearer of such novel and important gossip – how his son Richard was shortly going to enter as an undergraduate at Durham College, Oxford – not only would he gain for himself great honour and glory, but also some sympathizing friend, proud to possess the privilege of acquaintance with so distinguished a family, would doubtless mark his sense of the dignity of the occasion by offering its head the trifling hospitality of a brandy-and-soda. And since brandy-and-soda formed the mainspring of Mr. Plantagenet's scheme of being, so noble an opportunity for fulfilling the end and aim of his existence, he felt sure, was not to be lightly neglected.

He strolled out, all smiles, apologetic, but peremptory. As soon as he was gone, the three remaining elders glanced hard at one another with blank surmise in their eyes; but they said nothing openly. Only, in his heart, Richard blamed himself with bitter blame for his unwonted indiscretion in blurting out the whole truth. He knew that by ten to-morrow morning all the world of Chiddingwick would have heard of his projected little trip to Oxford.

When the younger ones were gone to bed, the three still held their peace and only looked at each other. Mutual shame prevented them from ever outwardly commenting on the father's weaknesses. Maud was the first to break the long deep silence.

'After this, Dick,' she said decisively, 'there's no other way out of it. You've burnt your boats. If you kill yourself to do it, you must win that Scholarship!'

'I must,' Dick answered firmly. 'And what's more, I will. I'll get it or die for it. I could never stand the disgrace, now, of coming back empty-handed to Chiddingwick without it.'

'Perhaps,' Mrs. Plantagenet suggested, speaking boldly out the thought that lurked in all their minds, 'he won't say a word of it.'

Maud and Dick looked up at her with incredulous amazement. 'Oh, mother!' was all they could say. They knew their father's moods too well by far to buoy themselves up with such impossible expectations.

'Well, it seals the business, anyhow,' Dick went on, after a moment's pause. 'I *must* get it now, that's simply certain. Though, to be sure, I don't know that anything could make me try much harder than I'd have tried before, for your sake, mother, and for Maud's, and the children's, and the honour of the family.'

'I wish I had your faith, Dick, in the honour of the family,' Mrs. Plantagenet sighed wearily. 'I can't feel it myself. I never could feel it, somehow. Though, of course, it's a good thing if it makes you work and hold your head up in life, and do the best you ever can for Maud and the children. Anything's good that's an incentive to exertion. Yet I often wish, when I see how hard you both have to toil and moil, with the music and all that, we didn't belong to the royal stock at all, but to the other Plantagenets, who left the money.'

Both Richard and Maud exclaimed with one accord at these painful words: 'Oh, don't, dear mother!' To them, her speech sounded like sheer desecration. Faith in their own unsullied Plantagenet blood was for both a religion. And, indeed, no wonder. It had spurred them on to all that was highest and best within them. To give up that magnificent heritage of princely descent for mere filthy lucre would have seemed to either an unspeakable degradation. They loved their mother dearly; yet they often reflected, in a vague, half-unconscious sort of undercurrent of thought, that after all she was not herself a born Plantagenet, as they were; she had only married into the family, and couldn't

be expected to feel quite as they did on so domestic a matter. It never struck either of them that in point of fact all those better qualities in themselves which made them so jealous for the honour of the family had descended to them solely from their mother's side of the house, and were altogether alien to the lower nature of that good-humoured, idle, unprincipled scamp and ne'er-do-well, their father.

At the very same moment, indeed, in the cosiest corner of the White Horse parlour, Mr. Plantagenet himself, the head of the house, was observing complacently, in a mellifluous voice, to an eager little group of admiring listeners: 'Yes, gentlemen, my son Richard, I'm proud to say, will shortly begin his career at Oxford University. I'm a poor man myself, I admit; I might have been richer but for untoward events; and circumstances have compelled me to submit in my old age to a degrading profession, for which neither my birth, my education, nor my literary habits have naturally fitted me. But I trust I have, at least, been a good father to my children. A good – father – to my children. I have given them the very best education this poor town can afford; and now, though I know it will sadly cripple my slender resources, I mean to make a struggle, my friends, a manful struggle, and send my boy Richard up to Oxford. Richard has brains, undoubted brains; he's proud and reserved, as you all know, and doesn't shine in society; he lacks the proper qualities; but he has undoubted brains, for all that; and brilliancy, I know to my cost' – here he heaved a deep sigh – 'is often a pitfall to a man of genius. Richard hasn't genius; but he's industrious and plodding, and possesses, I'm told, a remarkable acquaintance with the history of his country. So I've made up my mind to brave the effort and send him up to our ancestral University. He may do something in time to repair the broken fortunes of a respectable family. Gentlemen,' Mr. Plantagenet went on, glancing round him for confirmation of his coming statement, 'I think you'll all bear me witness that I've never boasted or bragged about my family in any way; but you'll all admit, too, that my family is a respectable one, and that the name I bear has not been wholly undistinguished in the history of this country. – Thank you, sir; I'm very much obliged indeed to you for your kindness; I don't mind if I do. – Brandy, if you please, *as usual*, Miss Brooks —*and* a split soda. – Gentlemen, I thank you for your generous sympathy. Misfortune has not wholly deprived me, I'm proud to notice, of appreciative friends. I will drain this sparkling beaker, which my neighbour is good enough to offer, to an appropriate toast – the toast of Success to Richard Plantagenet of Durham College, Oxford.'

CHAPTER IV. A ROYAL POURPARLER

Next morning, when Richard went down to his work in town, Mr. Wells, his employer, accosted him at once with the unwelcome greeting:

‘Hullo, Plantagenet, so I hear you’re going up to college at Oxford!’

Nothing on earth could well have been more unpleasant for poor Dick. He saw at once from Mr. Wells’s tone that his father must have bragged: he must have spoken of the projected trip at the White Horse last night, not as a mere speculative journey in search of a problematical and uncertain Scholarship, but as a *fait accompli*— a domestic arrangement dependent on the mere will of the house of Plantagenet. He must have treated his decision as when a Duke decides that he shall send his son and heir to Christ Church or Trinity.

This mode of envisaging the subject was doubly annoying to Dick, for not only would he feel most keenly the disgrace of returning empty-handed if he failed in the examination, but relations might perhaps become strained meanwhile between himself and Mr. Wells, if the employer thought he might at any moment be deprived of the assistant’s services. However, we must all answer for the sins of our fathers: there was nothing for it now but to brazen it out as best he might; so Dick at once confided to his master the true state of the case, explaining that he would only want a few days’ holiday, during which he engaged to supply an efficient substitute; that his going to Oxford permanently must depend on his success in the Scholarship examination; and that even if he succeeded – which he modestly judged unlikely – he wouldn’t need to give up his present engagement and go into residence at the University till October.

These explanations, frankly given with manly candour, had the good effect of visibly mollifying Mr. Wells’s nascent and half-unspoken resentment. Richard had noticed just at first that he assumed a sarcastic and somewhat aggrieved tone, as one who might have expected to be the first person informed of this intended new departure. But as soon as all was satisfactorily cleared up, the bookseller’s manner changed immediately, and he displayed instead a genuine interest in the success of the great undertaking. To say the truth, Mr. Wells was not a little proud of his unique assistant. He regarded him with respect, not unmixed with pity.

All Chiddingwick, indeed, took a certain compassionate interest in the Plantagenet family. They were, so to speak, public property and local celebrities. Lady Agatha Moore herself, the wife of the Squire, and an Earl’s daughter, always asked Mrs. Plantagenet to her annual garden-party. Chiddingwickians pointed out the head of the house to strangers, and observed with pardonable possessive pride: ‘That’s our poor old dancing-master; he’s a Plantagenet born, and some people say if it hadn’t been for those unfortunate Wars of the Roses he’d have been King of England. But now he holds classes at the White Horse Assembly Rooms.’

Much more than had Mr. Wells special reason to be proud of his own personal relations with the heir of the house, the final inheritor of so much shadowy and hypothetical splendour. The moment he learned the real nature of Dick Plantagenet’s errand, he was kindness itself to his clever assistant. He desired to give Dick every indulgence in his power. Mind the shop? No, certainly not! Richard would want all his time now to cram for the examination. He must cram, cram, cram; there was nothing like cramming!

Mr. Wells, laudably desirous of keeping well abreast with the educational movement of the present day, laid immense stress upon this absolute necessity for cram in the modern world. He even advised Richard to learn by heart the names and dates of all the English monarchs Dick could hardly forbear a smile at this naïve but well-meant proposal. He had worked hard at Modern History, both British and continental, in all his spare time, ever since he left the grammar school, and few men at the University knew as much as he did of our mediaeval annals. We are all for ‘epochs’ nowadays; and Dick’s epoch was the earlier middle age of feudalism. But the notion that anything so childish as

the names and dates of kings could serve his purpose tickled his gravity not a little. Still, the advice was kindly meant, up to Mr. Wells's lights, and Dick received it with grave courtesy, making answer politely that all these details were already familiar to him.

During the four days that remained before the trip to Oxford, Mr. Wells wouldn't hear of Richard's doing any more work in the shop than was absolutely necessary. He must spend all his time, the good man said, in reading Hume and Smollett – the latest historical authorities of whom the Chiddingwick bookseller had any personal knowledge. Dick availed himself for the most part of his employer's kindness; but there was one piece of work, he said, which he couldn't neglect, no matter what happened. It was a certain bookbinding job of no very great import – just a couple of volumes to cover in half-calf for the governess at the Rectory. Yet he insisted upon doing it.

Somehow, though he had only seen Mary Tudor once, for those few minutes in the shop, he attached a very singular and sentimental importance to binding that book for her. She was a pretty girl, for one thing – an extremely pretty girl – and he admired her intensely. But that wasn't all; she was a Tudor, as well, and he was a Plan-tagenet. In some vague, half-conscious way he reflected more than once that 'it had gone with a Tudor, and with a Tudor it might come back again.' What he meant by that *it* he hardly knew himself. Certainly not the crown of this United Kingdom; for Dick was far too good a student of constitutional history not to be thoroughly aware that the crown of England itself was elective, not hereditary; and he had far too much common-sense to suppose for one moment that the people of these three realms would desire to disturb the Act of Settlement and repeal the Union in order to place a local dancing-master or a bookseller's assistant on the throne of England – for to Scotland he hadn't even the shadowy claim of an outside pretender. As he put it himself, 'We were fairly beaten out of there once for all by the Bruce, and had never at the best of times any claim to speak of.' No; what he meant by *It* was rather some dim past greatness of the Plantagenet family, which the bookseller's lad hoped to win back to some small extent in the noblest and best of all ways – by deserving it.

The days wore away; Stubbs and Freeman were well thumbed; the two books for Mary Tudor were bound in the daintiest fashion known to Chiddingwickian art, and on the morning of the eventful Wednesday itself, when he was first to try his fate at Oxford, Dick took them up in person, neatly wrapped in white tissue-paper, to the door of the Rectory.

Half-way up the garden-path Mary met him by accident. She was walking in the grounds with one of the younger children; and Dick, whose quick imagination had built up already a curious castle in the air, felt half shocked to find that a future Queen of England, Wales, and Ireland (*de jure*) should be set to take care of the Rector's babies. However, he forgot his indignation when Mary, recognising him, advanced with a pleasant smile – her smile was always considered the prettiest thing about her – and said in a tone as if addressed to an equal:

'Oh, you've brought back my books, have you? That's punctuality itself. Don't mind taking them to the door. How much are they, please? I'll pay at once for them.'

Now, this was a trifle disconcerting to Dick, who had reasons of his own for not wishing her to open the parcel before him. Still, as there was no way out of it, he answered in a somewhat shamefaced and embarrassed voice: 'It comes to three-and-sixpence.'

Mary had opened the packet meanwhile, and glanced hastily at the covers. She saw in a second that the bookseller's lad had exceeded her instructions. For the books were bound in full calf, very dainty and delicate, and on the front cover of each was stamped in excellent workmanship a Tudor rose, with the initials M. T. intertwined in a neat little monogram beneath it. She looked at them for a moment with blank dismay in her eye, thinking just at first what a lot he must be going to charge her for it; then, as he named the price, a flush of shame rose of a sudden to her soft round cheek.

'Oh no,' she said hurriedly. 'It must be more than that. You couldn't possibly bind them so for only three-and-sixpence!'

‘Yes, I did,’ Dick answered, now as crimson as herself. ‘You’ll find the bill inside. Mr. Wells wrote it out. There’s no error at all. You’ll see it’s what I tell you.’

Mary fingered her well-worn purse with uncertain fingers.

‘Surely,’ she said again, ‘you’ve done it all in calf. Mr. Wells can’t have known exactly how you were doing it.’

This put a Plantagenet at once upon his mettle.

‘Certainly he did,’ Dick answered, almost haughtily. ‘It was a remnant of calf, no use for anything else, that I just made fit by designing those corners. He said I could use it up if I cared to take the trouble. And I *did* care to take the trouble, and to cut a block for the rose, and to put on the monogram, which was all my own business, in my own overtime. Three-and-sixpence is the amount it’s entered in the books for.’

Mary gazed hard at him in doubt. She scarcely knew what to do. She felt by pure instinct he was too much of a gentleman to insult him by offering him money for what had obviously been a labour of love to him; and yet, for her own part, she didn’t like to receive those handsome covers to some extent as a present from a perfect stranger, and especially from a man in his peculiar position. Still, what else could she do? The books were her own; she couldn’t refuse them now, merely because he chose to put a Tudor rose upon them – all the more as they contained those little marginal notes of ‘localities’ and ‘finds’ which even the amateur botanist prizes in his heart above all printed records; and she couldn’t bear to ask this grave and dignified young man to take the volumes back, remove the covers on which he had evidently spent so much pains and thought, and replace them by three-and-sixpence worth of plain cloth, unlettered. In the end she was constrained to say frigidly, in a lowered voice:

‘They’re extremely pretty. It was good of you to take so much trouble about an old book like this. There’s the money; thank you – and – I’m greatly obliged to you.’

The words stuck in her throat. She said them almost necessarily with some little stiffness. And as she spoke she looked down, and dug her parasol into the gravel of the path for nervousness. But Richard Plantagenet’s pride was far deeper than her own. He took the money frankly; that was Mr. Wells’s; then he answered in that lordly voice he had inherited from his father:

‘I’m glad you like the design. It’s not quite original; I copied it myself with a few variations from the cover of a book that once belonged to Margaret Tudor. Her initials and yours are the same. But I see you think I oughtn’t to have done it. I’m sorry for that; yet I had some excuse. I thought a Plantagenet might venture to take a little more pains than usual over a book for a Tudor. *Noblesse oblige*.’

And as he spoke, standing a yard or two off her, with an air of stately dignity, he lifted his hat, and then moved slowly off down the path to the gate again.

Mary didn’t know why, but with one of those impulsive fits which often come over sympathetic women, she ran hastily after him.

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said, catching him up, and looking into his face with her own as flushed as his. ‘I’m afraid I’ve hurt you. I’m sure I didn’t mean to. It was very, very kind of you to design and print that monogram so nicely. I understand your reasons, and I’m immensely obliged. It’s a beautiful design. I shall be proud to possess it.’

As for Richard, he dared hardly raise his eyes to meet hers, they were so full of tears. This rebuff was very hard on him. But the tell-tale moisture didn’t quite escape Mary.

‘Thank you,’ he said simply. I meant no rudeness; very much the contrary. The coincidence interested me; it made me wish to do the thing for you as well as I could. I’m sorry if I was obtrusive. But – one sometimes forgets – or perhaps remembers. It’s good of you to speak so kindly.’

And he raised his hat once more, and, walking rapidly off without another word, disappeared down the road in the direction of the High Street.

As soon as he was gone Mary went back into the Rectory. Mrs. Tradescant, the Rector’s wife, was standing in the hall. Mary reflected at once that the little girl had listened open-eared to all this

queer colloquy, and that, to prevent misapprehension, the best thing she could do would be to report it all herself before the child could speak of it. So she told the whole story of the strange young man who had insisted on binding her poor dog-eared old botany-book in such regal fashion. Mrs. Tradescant glanced at it, and only smiled.

‘Oh, my dear, you mustn’t mind him,’ she said. ‘He’s one of those crazy Plantagenets. They’re a very queer lot – as mad as hatters. The poor old father’s a drunken old wretch; come down in the world, they say. He teaches dancing; but his mania is that he ought by rights to be King of England. He never says so openly, you know; he’s too cunning for that; but in a covert sort of way he lays tacit claim to it. The son’s a very well-conducted young man in his own rank, I believe, but as cracked as the father; and as for the daughter, oh, my dear – such a stuck-up sort of a girl, with a feather in her hat and a bee in her bonnet, who goes out and gives music-lessons! It’s dreadful, really! She plays the violin rather nicely, I hear; but she’s an odious creature. The books? Oh yes, that’s just the sort of thing Dick Plantagenet would love. He’s mad on antiquity. If he saw on the title-page your name was Mary Tudor, he’d accept you at once as a remote cousin, and he’d claim acquaintance off-hand by a royal monogram. The rose is not bad. But the best thing you can do is to take no further notice of him.’

A little later that very same morning, however, Richard Plantagenet, mad or sane, was speeding away across country, in a parliamentary train, towards Reading and Oxford, decided in his own mind now about two separate plans he had deeply at heart. The first one was that, for the honour of the Plantagenets, he mustn’t fail to get that Scholarship at Durham College; the second was that, when he came back with it to Chiddingwick, he must make Mary Tudor understand he was at least a gentleman. He was rather less in love with her, to be sure, after this second meeting, than he had been after the first; but, still, he liked her immensely, and in spite of her coldness was somehow attracted towards her; and he couldn’t bear to think a mere Welsh Tudor, not even really royal, should feel herself degraded by receiving a gift of a daintily-bound book from the hands of the Heir Apparent of the true and only Plantagenets.

CHAPTER V. GOOD SOCIETY

Dick knew nothing of Oxford, and would hardly even have guessed where in the town to locate himself while the examination was going on, had not his old head-master at Chiddingwick Grammar School supplied him with the address of a small hotel, much frequented by studious and economical young men on similar errands. Hither, then, he repaired, Gladstone bag in hand, and engaged a modest second-floor room; after which, with much trepidation, he sallied forth at once in his best black suit to call in due form on the Reverend the Dean at Durham College.

By the door of the Saracen's Head, which was the old-fashioned name of his old-fashioned hostelry, two young men – mere overgrown schoolboys of the Oxford pattern – lounged, chatting and chaffing together, as if bent on some small matter of insignificant importance. Each swung a light cane, and each looked and talked as if the town were his freehold. One was a fellow in a loose gray tweed suit and a broad-brimmed slouch-hat of affectedly large and poetical pretensions; the other was a faster-looking and bolder young person, yet more quietly clad in a black cut-away coat and a billycock hat, to which commonplace afternoon costume of the English gentleman he nevertheless managed to give a touch of distinctly rowdy and rapid character.

As Dick passed them on the steps to go forth into the street, the young man in black observed oracularly: 'Lamb ten to the slaughter to which his companion answered with brisk good-humour in the self-same dialect: 'Lamb ten it is; these meadows pullulate; we shall have a full field of them.'

By a burst of inspiration Dick somehow gathered that they were referring to the field for the Durham Scholarships, and that they knew of ten candidates at least in the place who were also going in for them. He didn't much care for the looks of his two fellow-competitors, for such he judged them to be; but the mere natural loneliness of a sensitive young man in such strange conditions somehow prompted him, almost against his will, to accost them.

'I beg your pardon,' he said timidly, in a rather soft voice, 'but I – that is to say – could you either of you tell me which is the nearest way to Durham College?'

The lad in the gray tweed suit laughed, and surveyed him from head to foot with a somewhat supercilious glance as he answered with a curious self-assertive swagger: 'You're going to call on the Dean, I suppose. Well, so are we. Durham it is. If you want to know the way, you can come along with us.'

Companionship in misery is dear to the unsophisticated human soul; and Richard, in spite of all his father's lessons in deportment, shrank so profoundly from this initial ordeal of the introductory visit that he was really grateful to the supercilious youth in the broad-brimmed hat for his condescending offer. Though, to be sure, if it came to that, nobody in England had a right to be either supercilious or condescending to a scion of the Plantagenets.

'Thank you,' he said, a little nervously. 'This is my first visit to Oxford, and I don't know my way about. But I suppose you're not in for the Scholarship yourself?' And he gazed half unconsciously at his new acquaintance's gray tweed suit and big sombrero, which were certainly somewhat noisy for a formal visit.

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