GRISLY GRISELL

OR

THE LAIDLY LADY OF WHITBURN

A TALE OF THE WARS
OF THE ROSES

BY

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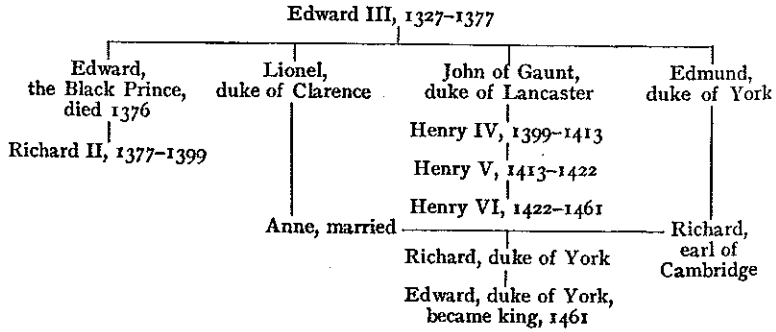
THE WARS OF THE ROSES-The close of the Hundred Years' War was only a change from war abroad to war at home for the next thirty years. The wealth and power of the English nobles were at this time very great. A number of them were related in one way or another to the royal family. They had valuable estates scattered in different parts of the country and kept in their service large numbers of retainers[1]. With these numerous bodies of followers in their service and wearing their badge the nobles were never at a loss for men to carry out their quarrels, which were very frequent. There were many jealousies and enmities, and parties were continually being formed among them in deadly opposition to one another. So long as there was a strong king reigning the nobles were forced to keep order among themselves, but after the death of Henry V there was a long period, while Henry VI was still a child, when they could not be controlled. Even after he had grown up he proved to be too mild, easy-going, and weak to keep a strong hand over the turbulent and disorderly elements of the country.

The king was always under the influence of one group of nobles or another. Those who

[1] Retainers were hired followers who could be called upon to act as attendants on occasions of show, to fulfill duties as messengers or servants about their lord's household, and, if there should be need, to fight for him.

were excluded from office plotted to drive from power those who surrounded the king. These efforts finally led to civil war, and a succession of bloody battles was fought, several years, in some cases, intervening between one battle and another. This series of battles is known as the "Wars of the Roses".

THE HOUSE OF YORK-The king's nearest kinsman and the most powerful and conspicuous noble in England was Richard, duke of York. He was descended on one side from an elder of Lancaster, the father of Henry IV and great-grandfather of Henry VI. The duke of York had, therefore, by strict hereditary right, a better claim to the throne than Henry himself.



He did not openly make this claim, simply acting as leader of one faction of the nobility. Yet more than once he and his party took arms against those nobles who were gathered around the king, and thus in a certain sense fought against the king himself. This division of parties gave its name to the civil war. A white rose was one of the family emblems of the duke of York, and was used by the nobles of his party. A red rose was then adopted as a badge by the nobles who surrounded the king and were adherents of the Lancastrian family from which the king was descended. The white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster thus became synonymous with the two great political parties.

Rose Noble of Edward IV, showing on the Side of the Ship the White Rose Badge of the House of York

Little by little the contest drifted into a struggle for the crown. As feelings became more embittered and as the king became subject to attacks of insanity, inherited no doubt from his grandfather, the king of France, the ambition of Richard of York to seize the kingship for himself was aroused, but in 1460, at the battle of Wakefield, he was defeated and slain. His claims to the leadership of his party, to the head of the House of York, and to the crown itself were then descended to his son Edward.

EDWARD IV-Events now moved on rapidly. After a successful battle against the king's party in 1461, Edward declared himself king by hereditary right and was crowned with the title of Edward IV. He treated Henry as a upsurper, and forced him to flee, with his wife, son, and principal adherents, into Scotland.

The civil war still continued, however; the party of the fugitive king fighting more than one successful battle, and even in 1471 driving Edward temporarily from the country and replacing Henry on the throne. This change of rulers was largely brought about by the change of sides of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, previously a strong supporter of the Yorkist claims. His influence over the changes in the holding of the crown has given him the name

of the "king-maker". This arrangement lasted but a few months, when Edward was restored and Henry was imprisoned in the Tower, where he soon died. On the whole of the reign of Edward IV, which continued until 1483, was peaceful, successful, and prosperous.

Men speak of Job, and for his humblesse,
And clerkes when hem list can well endite,
Namely of men, but as in stedfastnese
Though clerkes preisin women but a lite,
There can no man in humblesse him acquite
As women can, nor can be half so trewe
As women ben.

- CHAUCER, *The Clerke's Tale.*

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CHAPTER I

AN EXPLOSION

It was a great pity, so it was, this villanous saltpetre should be digg'd out of the bowels of the harmless earth.

SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry IV.*, Part I.

A TERRIBLE shriek rang through the great Manor-house of Amesbury. It was preceded by a loud explosion, and there was agony as well as terror in the cry. Then followed more shrieks and screams, some of pain, some of fright, others of anger and recrimination. Every one in the house ran together to the spot whence the cries proceeded, namely, the lower court, where the armourer and blacksmith had their workshops.

There was a group of children, the young people who were confided to the great Earl Richard and Countess Alice of Salisbury for education and training. Boys and girls were alike there, some of the latter crying and sobbing, others mingling with the lads in the hot dispute as to 'who did it.'

By the time the gentle but stately Countess had reached the place, all the grown-up persons of the

establishment — knights, squires, grooms, scullions, and females of every degree — had thronged round them, but parted at her approach, though one of the knights said, 'Nay, Lady Countess, 'tis no sight for you. The poor little maid is dead, or nigh upon it.'

'But who is it? What is it?' asked the Countess, still advancing.

A confused medley of voices replied, 'The Lord of Whitburn's little wench — Leonard Copeland — gunpowder.'

'And no marvel,' said a sturdy, begrimed figure, 'if the malapert young gentles be let to run all over the courts, and handle that with which they have no concern, lads and wenches alike.'

'Nay, how can I stop it when my lady will not have the maidens kept ever at their distaffs and needles in seemly fashion,' cried a small but stout and self-assertive dame, known as 'Mother of the Maidens,' then starting, 'Oh! my lady, I crave your pardon, I knew not you were in this coil! And if the men-at-arms be let to have their perilous goods strewn all over the place, no wonder at any mishap.

'Do not wrangle about the cause,' said the Countess. 'Who is hurt? How much?'

The crowd parted enough for her to make way

to where a girl of about ten was lying prostrate and bleeding with her head on a woman's lap.

'Poor maid,' was the cry, 'poor maid! 'Tis all over with her. It will go ill with young Leonard Copeland.'

'Worse with Hodge Smith for letting him touch his irons.'

'Nay, what call had Dick Jenner to lay his foul, burning gunpowder — a device of Satan — in this yard? A mercy we are not all blown to the winds.'

The Countess, again ordering peace, reached the girl, whose moans showed that she was still alive, and between the barber-surgeon and the porter's wife she was lifted up, and carried to a bed, the Countess Alice keeping close to her, though the 'Mother of the Maidens,' who was a somewhat helpless personage, hung back, declaring that the sight of the wounds made her swoon. There were terrible wounds upon the face and neck, which seemed to be almost bared of skin. The lady, who had been bred to some knowledge of surgical skill, together with the barber-surgeon, did their best to allay the agony with applications of sweet oil. Perhaps if they had had more of what was then considered skill, it might have been worse for her.

The Countess remained anxiously trying all that could allay the suffering of the poor little semi-conscious patient, who kept moaning for 'nurse.' She was Grisell Dacre, the daughter of the Baron of Whitburn, and had been placed, young as she was, in the household of the Countess of Salisbury on her mother being made one of the ladies attending on the young Queen Margaret of Anjou, lately married to King Henry VI.

Attendance on the patient had prevented the Countess from hearing the history of the accident, but presently the clatter of horses' feet showed that her lord was returning, and, committing the girl to her old nurse, she went down to the hall to receive him.

The grave, grizzled warrior had taken his seat on his cross-legged, round-backed chair, and a boy of some twelve years old stood before him, in a sullen attitude, one foot over the other, and his shoulder held fast by a squire, while the motley crowd of retainers stood behind.

There was a move at the entrance of the lady, and her husband rose, came forward, and as he gave her the courteous kiss of greeting, demanded, 'What is all this coil? Is the little wench dead?'

'Nay, but I fear me she cannot live,' was the answer.

'Will Dacre of Whitburn's maid? That's ill, poor child! How fell it out?'

'That I know as little as you,' was the answer. 'I have been seeing to the poor little maid's hurts.'

Lord Salisbury placed her in the chair like his own. In point of fact, she was Countess in her own right; he, Richard Nevil, had been created Earl of Salisbury in her right on the death of her father, the staunch warrior of Henry V. in the siege of Orleans.

'Speak out, Leonard Copeland,' said the Earl. 'What hast thou done?'

The boy only growled, 'I never meant to hurt the maid.'

'Speak to the point, sir,' said Lord Salisbury sternly; 'give yourself at least the grace of truth.'

Leonard grew more silent under the show of displeasure, and only hung his head at the repeated calls to him to speak. The Earl turned to those who were only too eager to accuse him.

'He took a bar of iron from the forge, so please you, my lord, and put it to the barrel of powder.'

'Is this true, Leonard?' demanded the Earl again, amazed at the frantic proceeding, and Leonard muttered 'Aye,' vouchsafing no more, and looking black as thunder at a fair, handsome

boy who pressed to his side and said, 'Uncle,' doffing his cap, 'so please you, my lord, the barrels had just been brought in upon Hob Carter's wain, and Leonard said they ought to have the Lord Earl's arms on them. So he took a bar of hot iron from the forge to mark the saltire on them, and thereupon there was this burst of smoke and flame, and the maid, who was leaning over, prying into his doings, had the brunt thereof.'

'Thanks to the saints that no further harm was done,' ejaculated the lady shuddering, while her lord proceeded — 'It was not malice, but malapert meddling, then. Master Leonard Copeland, thou must be scourged to make thee keep thine hands off where they be not needed. For the rest, thou must await what my Lord of Whitburn may require. Take him away, John Ellerby, chastise him, and keep him in ward till we see the issue.'

Leonard, with his head on high, marched out of the hall, not uttering a word, but shaking his shoulder as if to get rid of the squire's grasp, but only thereby causing himself to be gripped the faster.

Next, Lord Salisbury's severity fell upon Hob the carter and Hodge the smith, for leaving such perilous wares unwatched in the court-yard. Servants were not dismissed for carelessness in

those days, but soundly flogged, a punishment considered suitable to the 'blackguard' at any age, even under the mildest rule. The gunner, being somewhat higher in position, and not in charge at the moment, was not called to account, but the next question was, how the 'Mother of the Maids' — the gouvernante in charge of the numerous damsels who formed the train of the Lady of Salisbury, and were under education and training — could have permitted her maidens to stray into the regions appropriated to the yeomen and archers, and others of the meiné, where they certainly had no business.

It appeared that the good and portly lady had last seen the girls in the gardens 'a playing at the ball' with some of the pages, and that there, on a sunny garden seat, slumber had prevented her from discovering the absence of the younger part of the bevy. The demure elder damsels deposed that, at the sound of wains coming into the court, the boys had rushed off, and the younger girls had followed them, whether with or without warning was not made clear. Poor little Grisell's condition might have been considered a sufficient warning, nevertheless the two companions in her misdemeanour were condemned to a whipping, to enforce on them a lesson of maidenliness; and

though the Mother of the Maids could not partake of the flagellation, she remained under her lord's and lady's grave displeasure, and probably would have to submit to a severe penance from the priest for her carelessness. Yet, as she observed, Mistress Grisell was a North Country maid, never couthly or conformable, but like a boy, who would moreover always be after Leonard Copeland, whether he would or no.

It was the more unfortunate, as Lord Salisbury lamented to his wife, because the Copelands were devoted to the Somerset faction; and the King had been labouring to reconcile them to the Dacres, and to bring about a contract of marriage between these two unfortunate children, but he feared that whatever he could do, there would only be additional feud and bitterness, though it was clear that the mishap was accidental. The Lord of Whitburn himself was in Ireland with the Duke of York, while his lady was in attendance on the young Queen, and it was judged right and seemly to despatch to her a courier with the tidings of her daughter's disaster, although in point of fact, where a house could number sons, damsels were not thought of great value, except as the means of being allied with other houses. A message was also sent to Sir William Copeland that his

son had been the death of the daughter of Whitburn; for poor little Grisell lay moaning in a state of much fever and great suffering, so that the Lady Salisbury could not look at her, nor hear her sighs and sobs without tears, and the barber-surgeon, unaccustomed to the effects of gunpowder, had little or no hope of her life.

Leonard Copeland's mood was sullen, not to say surly. He submitted to the chastisement without a word or cry, for blows were the lot of boys of all ranks, and were dealt out without much respect to justice; and he also had to endure a sort of captivity, in a dismal little circular room in a turret of the manorial house, with merely a narrow loophole to look out from, and this was only accessible by climbing up a steep broken slope of brick-work in the thickness of the wall.

Here, however, he was visited by his chief friend and comrade, Edmund Plantagenet of York, who found him lying on the floor, building up fragments of stone and mortar into the plan of a castle.

'How dost thou, Leonard?' he asked. 'Did old Hal strike very hard?'

'I reck not,' growled Leonard.

'How long will my uncle keep thee here?' asked Edmund sympathisingly.

'Till my father comes, unless the foolish wench should go and die. She brought it on me, the peevish girl. She is always after me when I want her least

'Yea, is not she contracted to thee?'

'So they say; but at least this puts a stop to my being plagued with her — do what they may to me. There's an end to it, if I hang for it.'

'They would never hang thee.'

'None knows what you traitor folk of Nevil would do to a loyal house,' growled Leonard.

'Traitor, saidst thou,' cried Edmund, clenching his fists. ''Tis thy base Somerset crew that be the traitors.'

'I'll brook no such word from thee,' burst forth Leonard, flying at him.

'Ha! ha!' laughed Edmund even as they grappled. 'Who is the traitor forsooth? Why, 'tis my father who should be King. 'Tis white-faced Harry and his Beauforts ——'

The words were cut short by a blow from Leonard, and the warder presently found the two boys rolling on the floor together in hot contest.

And meanwhile poor Grisell was trying to frame with her torn and flayed cheeks and lips, 'O lady, lady, visit it not on him! Let not Leonard be punished. It was my fault for getting into his

way when I should have been in the garden. Dear Madge, canst thou speak for him?'

Madge was Edmund's sist Margaret of York, who stood trembling and cry g by Grisell's bed.