

Literature, &c.

THE ANNUALS FOR 1841.

From the Forget-Me-Not.
THE KING'S BANNER BEARER.
BY MISS LAWRENCE,Author of *Historical Memoirs of the Queens of England*.

AMONG the many blessings so exultingly—would that they were as gratefully!—boasted by our countrymen, one, perhaps the most important has been often overlooked: it is that, while the nations of continental Europe have never witnessed the passing away of one generation without having also witnessed the invasion of a foreign army, or, more destructive still, the ravages of civil warfare, England, for the long space of six generations, has been undisturbed alike by foreign invader or domestic foe. To the English reader, therefore, the fierce and sanguinary conflicts of the earlier periods of our history is indeed but as 'a tale that is told,' and, while he reads the records of the parliamentary war, or that of the rival roses, interested, and probably deeply interested, in the principles involved in the one, or in the romantic incidents connected with the other, of the eager excitement, the feverish anxieties, the fears, more intense because vague and undefined, of such a period, he can know nothing. It is only when we open those delightful volumes of family correspondence, and read those letters, so graphically minute, in which one member of the family expressed to the other his suspicions and anxieties, or his expectations and plans, and which seem like an hourly record of passing events, that we gain some idea of the real state of a people threatened with war at their very thresholds.

It is curious to trace the progress of these events.—First, the obscure hint from the son, who has been sent up to London to push his fortune, that there is a difference between the duke and the king, 'and menne say they know not what may be;' then, that the lords 'do come to Westminster wyth their barges laden with weapons;' then, the eager canvassing of the higher rank of freeholders by the chief nobility of the various counties—the earl 'speking righte sweetlye' to the knight, whom before he passed without notice, and my lord the duke praying the burgesses of the neighbouring city 'to dysporte themselves in hys parke,' and my lady duchess, to the marvel of the whole country, sending a pot of marmalade to the highly honored mayoress.

And then comes the first note of open war. The summons of the monarch with the hanging seal, addressed to each noble the courteous and familiar 'trusty and well beloved, we greet you ryghte hertily wel,' contrasting so strongly with the peremptory conclusion, 'hereof faile not on peril of our displeasure.' Then the notification of the Sheriff at the market cross for all the burgesses of the town to assemble 'on ye morrow of St. Margaret, with all their fellowship, having jacks and brigandines, and fytting weapons, while the courteous letters of the nobles to their tenantry 'to meet us,' (for they on their respective estates, assumed as much as possible a royal style and bearing) and reiterating promises of support and aid, shew how important they felt the result of a war to be which might place them at the highest point of greatness, or transfer their lands to strangers, and bring their heads to the block.

But it is in the more private letters that a yet more vivid picture is presented to us. The younger brother requesting of the elder the loan of his 'cross bow and Normandie bill;' and the hurried letter of the son to his mother, praying that his war steed be sent 'righte carefully,' and concluding, 'we be all in good harte, for we doubt not to make them runne,' so contrasting with the anxious fears of the mother's reply, and her hope that more men may be sent for her protection, 'otherwyse if the duke should come, we may not kepe the place against hym three days,' and the wife's earnest entreaties to her husband that he will hasten his return, 'and in especial sende her store of bills, and also of cross bows, for as to long bows the windows be so low that we may shoot wyth them,' and when the war has actually begun the anxious inquiry whether any battle has been fought, 'for Will Sawton came here laste nyghte, and saith that ye are worsted,' and Sir Thomas Levenham (whom God assoil) dede of his woundes, and that they are coming hither in great force,' it is only from such minute touches as these, that a finished picture of so disastrous a period can be truly painted.

No wonder then that, when the battle of Bosworth placed the crown on the head of Henry Tudor, the nation, exhausted, impoverished, almost ruined by the thirty years strife of a war unequalled in English history for its sanguinary character, passively acquiesced in the decision of the sword, and recognized, if it did not welcome, Tudor, as successor of the Plantagenets; and no wonder was it, too, that when the crushing policy and the greivous exactions of the new monarch raised against him more than one rebellion, the mass of the people refused to take part in the contest, and chose rather to yield up to a despot the liberties for which their fathers had battled so bravely, than to plunge again into the miseries of civil war. But Tudor was not to wear the crown so easily won with the same ease;—powerful noblemen and influential statesmen again and again came forth to assert the claims of other competitors, and the suppression of the rebellion under Lambert Simnel was but the signal for the more important insurrection in favor of that most mysterious personage of his day, that unsolved, and perhaps unsolvable problem of English history, Perkin Warbeck.

It was the spring of 1569, and the royal proclamation commanding each man to put himself 'in uttermost devoir to resist the malice of oure enemyes and traitors,' has just been made; war had been declared against the King of Scots, at whose court Perkin had for some time found an asylum, and Sir George Daubeny had advanced to London, to array a large army intended to invade Scotland, all the bustle and anxious preparation which we have just described were now going on throughout the kingdom, and many a mother who had witnessed the disastrous strife of the roses, and who had trusted that war was at length ended, was called to bid farewell to their sons, even as thirty years before she had been called to bid farewell to her father and her brothers.

It was however, with no mournful feeling that the lady of Northwode Hall saw her son, although he was her only one, brace on his mail, and prepare to join the army at London, and it was with no sorrowful forebodings that Sir Robert Northwode superintended the preparations for his departure, and unsheathed and poised the heavy sword which his father had worn, and chided the young page for his delay as he knelt buckling the jambaux. But it was not merely anxiety to distinguish himself in a career, at this period almost the only one by which a young man of family could advance himself, that caused Sir Robert Northwode to look forward to the coming war with such exultation—it was the high and honourable station which he was to fill in the army that made him impatient to set forth. The most important of the Northwode estates was the manor of Shorne, and this was held of the king by the especial service of 'bearing at the head of the king's tenantry a white banner for forty days, whenever the king should make war on Scotland.' Now, after the lapse of many years, this duty was to be performed, and the master of Northwode Hall was to go forth to the army not merely with his customary array of horsemen and footmen, but at the head of the king's tenantry of the whole county of Kent, and as the king's banner-bearer.

There was but one person in all that extensive household who did not participate in the common feeling, this was the young maiden who sate on the broad bench in the inner hall, her eyes moodily fixed on the ground, as though unwilling to behold the warlike preparations. That she did so was, however, not considered surprising by any one, for Alice Brereton was the daughter of a Yorkist knight, whose death had alone prevented his seizure for carrying on a treasonable correspondence, and the wary Tudor had consigned both the daughter and the estate to the custody of the Northwodes, thus alike securing the property and rewarding an ancient Lancastrian family for its devotion to his cause. It was seldom indeed that a ward, who viewed herself as little less than a prisoner, in the house of her guardian, felt attachment to the family in which she was placed; but Alice Brereton regarded both the situation and the family with abhorrence, for not merely were the political opinions of the Northwodes opposed to her's but she had from a child expressed a strong wish to lead a conventual life, and to this her father had never offered any opposition; but Sir Robert had prohibited her taking the veil, for he had a needy relation on whom he wished to bestow her estate, and therefore he determined to bestow her hand.

'Ye look wo begone fair maiden,' said he carelessly, 'what say you to these preparations.'

Alice fixed her eyes on the snowy banner which, as King's banner bearer, Sir Robert was to unfurl, and which hung in readiness on the opposite side of the hall. 'I might well say 'God speed you,' when Lancastrien fights beneath the colours of York,' said she.

'But not for the cause of York,' said the knight, 'no; sooner shall this trusty sword break in my hand,' 'And trusty swords have broken ere now,' said Alice solemnly. 'Or my good steed stumble and fall.'

'And good steeds have fallen ere now.' 'Keep your warnings, maiden, until you are lady prioress of Dartford convent,' said the knight, scornfully, 'I again say and swear, this sword shall break in my hand, my war steed shall stumble and fall, ay, and yonder banner be borne at the head of Perkins army, ere I forsake the cause of Tudor.' 'Amen good master,' cried the page laughingly, and springing up, 'for should these three things happen, then truly King Henry will have no claim to your faith.'

'Should these three things happen, silly boy,' said Sir Robert yet more scornfully; 'should these three things happen say you, 'tis as likely as that I should perform these offices for you that you are now doing for me.'

The page spake not, but he glanced an earnest look at the young maiden, and then again kneeling down busied himself with buckling the leg-armour of his lord, who, leaning on his trusty sword, smiled a smile of contempt, as the mere passing thought arose in his mind that he ever should prove recreant to the cause of Tudor.

The preparations were finished, the last rivets were attached to Sir Robert Northwode's armour, his gallant war steed stood neighing in the court yard, and he turned to take leave of his mother.

'This is a proud day for us, my son,' said she, and she took with her own hands the banner from the wall, and delivered it to him; and when he mounted his steed, and, waving that banner proudly, gave the word to his tenantry to depart, Lady Northwode watched the goodly company as they glided through the neighbouring wood, now hidden, now apparent by their bright armour gleaming through the thick leaves, and she exulted with an exceeding joy, but she never asked the care of Heaven to watch over him.

'I am strangely cast down at all this,' said the aged steward of the household, 'for when we fear oftentimes we are in great safety: but when we are too boastful, the axe may be over our heads. I like not the sayings of yonder maiden, she hath proved ere now a true prophet, and she is vowed to holy church. Saints! that Sir Robert had but had her blessing rather than her warning ere he set forth!'

Meanwhile Sir Robert and his company proceeded on their road to London, each town and village they passed through augmenting their numbers by the addition of the King's tenantry, who were bound to follow the white banner; and, ere they arrived at Blackheath, the young knight saw himself at the head of some hundred men. With yet more pride, and with yet more exultation, did he enter London; and as he proceeded along the bridge, at this period lined on each side with houses, and heard the shouts that welcomed the white banner, and the whispered words of admiration bestowed by many a fair one on himself, he blessed the summons that had called him from the quiet of his ancestral hall to a scene so stirring, and an office so high and honorable.

Sir Robert and his company passed along Thames street to Tower Hill, then a broad green meadow surrounded by fields, where, in grim majesty, and girt about by triple walls and ramparts; stood the Tower, to which he was bound; and he urged his weary war steed through the various groups of men at arms who had mustered there, and presenting himself before the chief gate of the tower with all his company, blew his horn thrice, and thrice waved his banner, and proclaimed aloud that he, Sir Robert Northwode of Northwode Hall, was come to do suit and service to his liege and sovereign for the manor of Shorne in Kent, 'by sergeantry of bearing a white banner forty days at his own cost and charge, when the King should make war in Scotland.' In answer to the summons, the huge portcullis slowly rose, the ponderous drawbridge descended and Sir Robert advanced, but, ere he had attained firm footing on it, his good steed stumbled and fell.

'Pray Heaven ye meet not the fate of Lord Hastings within yonder walls,' said the page, as he aided his master to rise, and lifted the white banner from the

ground, 'that maiden's words were right forsooth, for the good steed hath stumbled and fallen.'

Sir Robert frowned sternly on the boy, and resumed his seat, but from that moment an intense yet fearful expectation arose in his mind that, perchance, the other omens might come to pass.

In the inner court yard Sir Giles Daubeny stood inspecting the military appointments of the various companies who, at the royal summons, had come from other parts of the country, and conversing with some of the chief nobles. His reception of the young knight was scarcely courteous, for Sir Giles was no chivalrous warrior, as graceful in speech as brave in battle, but a stern, unyielding, iron man of war; nor did he express aught of admiration of the number or equipments of the company—many knights were there who had brought many more, and the armour and weapons of the retainers of the nobles far outshone those of the Kentish knight's men. The ruling passion of Sir Robert Northwode's heart was pride, and to this everything from his earliest infancy had administered; but he was sated with the homage of his retainers, and he thirsted for a wider sphere; now, for the first time in his life, he found himself in company of his superiors, and discovered the mortifying truth that the knight so honored in the words of Kent, was indeed a person of little consequence in the presence of the nobles of the land. Disappointed and mortified, he withdrew from the presence of Sir Giles Daubeny, and the recollection of the omen that had marked his entrance into the Tower recurred with unwelcome force to his mind.

Days passed on, but the army delayed its march, for the news had arrived of a rising in the west, ostensibly to resist the subsidy just before imposed by parliament, but in reality to assert the claim of Perkin Warbeck to the throne; and there were strange rumours abroad of the wide extent of this rising, and though men dared not to speak openly, yet there were not wanting reports of dreams, and prophecies, and omens, betokening that the white rose once more should resume its ascendancy. Meanwhile Sir Robert Northwode occupied the lodgings which had been provided for him and his company beside Tower Hill, conversing with few, and expressing no interest in the amusements of the knights and nobles by whom he was surrounded, for he fancied himself looked down upon by them, and he who had always stood first in every company preferred solitude to a second place. 'Would to heaven we were on our journey to the north,' said he to the page; 'I am weary of this place and of this idle life, and I long to see King Henry and receive from him the honor that his nobles deny me.'

At length orders for the army to march northwards were given; and when Sir Robert, with white banner in hand, preceded himself once more at the head of his company, the slights he received vanished from his mind, and he exulted in the thought the time would soon arrive when he should prove himself a worthy champion of Tudor. Long and toilsome was the march, at length they arrived at Northampton, where King Henry was staying, and then, when the young knight had learned that the king had summoned all the army to meet him, all the toils of the way were forgotten, and he proceeded with joyful anticipations to the royal presence. He, however as in the former instance, the pride of Sir Robert Northwode was doomed to severe disappointment, son of the knight who had fought bravely at Bosworth, the heir of the family which from the fight of St. Albans to the final contest, had held unblenched faith to the red rose, stood an almost unnoticed stranger, while nobles, whose fathers had uplifted the banner of the white rose, were greeted with every honor by the wary monarch. 'St. Margaret!' exclaimed the young knight when he turned, 'wherefore can King Henry respect allegiance of his subjects, if he rewards his oldest friends.'

'What reward did the oldest and tried of them meet at his hands?' said the page bitterly; 'what did Sir William Stanley, without whose aid he never would have gained the battle of Tewkesbury—the headsman's axe?' 'Tewkesbury hard fate,' replied the knight. 'It was a good master—ay, who would not have his trusty sword right boldly in the cause of so grateful a monarch!'

'Saints! methought but three weeks ago that to have wielded a sword in his service would have been the proudest boast of my life,' exclaimed the knight, angrily striking his sword upon the ground. He started back, the trusty sword had broke, and the only remained in his hand.