

## CHAPTER III

### THE PLANTAGENET LADY

In the course of these years of adolescence, Godfrey Knight had developed into a rather unusual stamp of youth. In some ways he was clever, for instance at the classics and history which he had always liked; in others and especially where figures were concerned, he was stupid, or as his father called him, idle. In company he was apt to be shy and dull, unless some subject interested him, when to the astonishment of those present, he would hold forth and show knowledge and powers of reflection beyond his years. By nature he was intensely proud; the one thing he never forgot was a rebuff, or forgave, was an insult. Sir John Blake soon found this out, and not liking the lad, whose character was antagonistic to his own in every way, never lost an opportunity of what he called "putting him in his place," perhaps because something warned him that this awkward, handsome boy would become a stumbling-block to his successful feet.

Godfrey and Isobel were both great readers. Nor did they lack for books, for as it chanced there was a good library at Hawk's Hall, which had been formed by the previous owner and taken over like the pictures, when Mr. Blake bought the house. Also it was added to constantly, as an order was given to a large London bookseller to supply all the important new works that came out. Although he never opened a book himself, Sir John liked to appear intellectual by displaying them about

the rooms for the benefit of his visitors. These publications Isobel read and lent to Godfrey; indeed they perused a great deal which young people generally are supposed to leave alone, and this in various schools of thought, including those that are known as "free."

It was seldom that such studies led to unanimity between them, but to argument, which sharpened their intellects, they did lead, followed invariably by a charitable agreement to differ.

About the time of the addition of the name of John Blake to the roll of British Chivalry, a book on Mars came their way--it was one by a speculative astronomer which suggests that the red planet is the home of reasoning beings akin to humanity. Isobel read it and was not impressed. Indeed, in the vigorous language of youth, she opined that it was all "made-up rot."

Godfrey read it also and came to quite a different conclusion. The idea fired him and opened a wide door in his imagination, a quality with which he was well provided. He stared at Mars through the large Hall telescope, and saw, or imagined that he saw the canals, also the snow-caps and the red herbage. Isobel stared too and saw, or swore that she saw--nothing at all--after which they argued until their throats were dry.

"It's all nonsense," said Isobel. "If only you'll study the rocks and biology, and Darwin's 'Origin of Species,' and lots of other things,

you will see how man came to develop on this planet. He is just an accident of Nature, that's all."

"And why shouldn't there be an accident of Nature on Mars and elsewhere?" queried Godfrey.

"Perhaps, but if so, it is quite another accident and has nothing to do with us."

"I don't know," he answered. "Sometimes," here his voice became dreamy as it had a way of doing, "I think that we pass on, all of us, from star to star. At least I know I often feel as if I had done so."

"You mean from planet to planet, Godfrey; stars are hot places, you know. You should not swallow all that theosophical bosh which is based on nothing."

"There's the Bible," went on Godfrey, "which tells us the same thing, that we live eternally----"

"Then we must always have lived, since eternity is a circle."

"Why not, Isobel? That is what I was trying to say. Well, if we live eternally, we must live somewhere, perhaps in those planets, or others, which it would be a waste to keep empty."

"I daresay--though Nature does not mind waste, or what seems to be waste. But why should you think of living eternally at all? Many people live a great deal too long as it is, and it is horrible to believe that they go on for ever."

"You see they might grow to something splendid in the end, Isobel. You must not judge them by what they are now."

"Oh! I know, the caterpillar and the butterfly, and all the rest of it."

"The Bible"--continued Godfrey imperturbably--when she cut him short.

"Well, what of the Bible? How do you know that it is true?"

"Because I do know it, though the truth in it may be different for everyone. What is more, I know that one day you will agree with me."

She looked at him curiously in the flashing way that was peculiar to her, for something in his tone and manner impressed her.

"Perhaps. I hope so, Godfrey, but at present I often feel as though I believed in nothing, except that I am I and you are you, and my father is--there he's calling me. Goodbye," and she was gone.

This particular conversation, one of many, had, as it happened, important results on the lives of these two young creatures. Isobel, in

whom the love of Truth, however ugly it might be and however destructive of hope, faith, charity and all the virtues, was a burning, inbred passion, took to the secret study of theology in order to find out why Godfrey was so convinced as to the teachings of the Bible. She was not old or mellowed enough to understand that the real reason must be discovered, not in the letter but in the spirit, that is in the esoteric meaning of the sayings as to receiving the Kingdom of Heaven like a child and the necessity of being born again. Therefore with a fierce intensity, thrusting aside the spirit and its promptings which perhaps are shadows of the only real truths, she wrestled with the letter. She read the Divines, also much of the Higher Criticism, the lives of Saints, the Sacred Books themselves and many other things, only to arise bewildered, and to a great extent unbelieving.

"Why should I believe what I cannot prove?" she cried in her heart, and once with her lips to Godfrey.

He made her a very wise answer, although at the moment it did not strike either of them in that light.

"When you tell me of anything that you can really prove, I will show you why," he said. To this he added a suggestion that was most unwise, namely, that she should consult his father.

Now Mr. Knight was, it is true, a skilled theologian of a certain, narrow school and learned in his way. It is probable, however, that in

all the wide world it would have been difficult to find any man less sympathetic to a mind like Isobel's or more likely to antagonize her eager and budding intelligence. Every doubt he met with intolerant denial; every argument with offensive contradiction; every query with references to texts.

Finally, he lost his temper, for be it acknowledged, that this girl was persistent, far from humble, and in a way as dogmatic as himself. He told her that she was not a Christian, and in her wrath she agreed with him. He said that she had no right to be in church. She replied that if this were so she would not come and, her father being indifferent upon the point (Lady Jane did not count in such matters), ceased her attendance. It was the old story of a strait-minded bigot forcing a large-minded doubter out of the fold that ought to have been wide enough for both of them. Moreover, this difference of opinion on matters of public and spiritual interest ended in a private and mundane animosity. Mr. Knight could never forgive a pupil of his own, whose ability he recognized, who dared to question his pontifical announcements. To him the matter was personal rather than one of religious truth, for there are certain minds in whose crucibles everything is resolved individually, and his was one of them. He was the largest matters through his own special and highly-magnifying spectacles. So, to be brief, they quarrelled once and for all, and thenceforward never attempted to conceal their cordial dislike of each other.

Such was one result of this unlucky discussion as to the exact conditions of the planet Mars, god of war. Another was that Godfrey developed a strong interest in the study of the heavenly bodies and when some domestic debate arose as to his future career, announced with mild firmness that he intended to be an astronomer. His father, to whom the heavenly bodies were less than the dust beneath his human feet and who believed in his heart that they had been created, every one of them, to give a certain amount of light to the inhabitants of this world when there was no moon, was furious in his arctic fashion, especially as he was aware that with a few distinguished exceptions, these hosts of heaven did not reward their votaries with either wealth or honour.

"I intend you for my own profession, the Church," he said bluntly. "If you choose to star-gaze in the intervals of your religious duties, it is no affair of mine. But please understand, Godfrey, that either you enter the Church or I wash my hands of you. In that event you may seek your living in any way you like."

Godfrey remonstrated meekly to the effect that he had not made up his mind as to his fitness for Holy Orders or his wish to undertake them.

"You mean," replied his father, "that you have been infected by that pernicious girl, Isobel. Well, at any rate, I will remove you from her evil influence. I am glad to say that owing to the fact that my little school here has prospered, I am in a position to do this. I will send

you for a year to a worthy Swiss pastor whom I met as a delegate to the recent Evangelical Congress, to learn French. He told me he desired an English pupil to be instructed in that tongue and general knowledge. I will write to him at once. I hope that in new surroundings you will forget all these wild ideas and, after your course at college, settle down to be a good and useful man in the walk of life to which you are so clearly called."

Godfrey, who on such occasions knew how to be silent, made no answer, although the attack upon Isobel provoked him sorely. In his heart indeed he reflected that a year's separation from his parent would not be difficult to bear, especially beneath the shadow of the Swiss mountains which secretly he longed to climb. Also he really wished to acquire French, being a lad with some desire for knowledge and appreciation of its advantages. So he looked humble merely and took the first opportunity to slip from the presence of the fierce little man with small eyes, straight, sandy hair and a slit where his lips should be, through whose agency, although it was hard to believe it, he had appeared in this disagreeable and yet most interesting world.

In point of fact he had an assignation, of an innocent sort. Of course it was with the "pernicious" Isobel and the place appointed was the beautiful old Abbey Church. Here they knew that they would be undisturbed, as Mr. Knight was to sleep at a county town twenty miles away, where on the following morning he had business as the examiner of a local Grammar School, and must leave at once to catch his train. So,



when watching from an upper window, he had seen the gig well on the road, Godfrey departed to his tryst.

Arriving in the dim and beautiful old fane, the first thing he saw was Isobel standing alone in the chancel, right in the heart of a shaft of light that fell on her through the rich-coloured glass of the great west window, for now it was late in the afternoon. She wore a very unusual white garment that became her well, but had no hat on her head. Perhaps this was because she had taken the fancy to do her plentiful fair hair in the old Plantagenet fashion, that is in two horns, which, with much ingenuity she had copied more or less correctly from the brass of an ancient, noble lady, whereof the two intended to take an impression. Also she had imitated some of the other peculiarities of that picturesque costume, including the long, hanging sleeves. In short, she wore a fancy dress which she proposed to use afterwards at a dance, and one of the objects of the rubbing they were about to make, was that she might study the details more carefully. At least, that was her object. Godfrey's was to obtain an impression of the crabbéd inscription at the foot of the effigy.

There she stood, tall and imposing, her arms folded on her young breast, the painted lights striking full on her broad, intellectual forehead and large grey eyes, shining too in a patch of crimson above her heart. Lost in thought and perfectly still, she looked strange thus, almost unearthly, so much so that the impressionable and imaginative Godfrey, seeing her suddenly from the shadow, halted,

startled and almost frightened.

What did she resemble? What might she not be? he queried to himself. His quick mind suggested an answer. The ghost of some lady dead ages since, killed, for there was the patch of blood upon her bosom, standing above the tomb wherein her bones crumbled, and dreaming of someone from whom she had been divorced by doom and violence.

He sickened a little at the thought; some dread fell upon him like a shadow of Fate's uplifted and pointed finger, stopping his breath and causing his knees to loosen. In a moment it was gone, to be replaced by another that was nearer and more natural. He was to be sent away for a year, and this meant that he would not see Isobel for a year. It would be a very long year in which he did not see Isobel. He had forgotten that when his father told him that he was to go to Switzerland. Now the fact was painfully present.

He came on up the long nave and Isobel, awakening, saw him.

"You are late," she said in a softer voice than was usual to her.

"Well, I don't mind, for I have been dreaming. I think I went to sleep upon my feet. I dreamed," she added, pointing to the brass, "that I was that lady and--oh! all sorts of things. Well, she had her day no doubt, and I mean to have mine before I am as dead and forgotten as she is. Only I would like to be buried here. I'll be cremated and have my ashes put under that stone; they won't hurt her."

"Don't talk like that," he said with a little shiver, for her words jarred upon him.

"Why not? It is as well to face things. Look at all these monuments about us, and inscriptions, a lot of them to young people, though now it doesn't matter if they were old or young. Gone, every one of them and quite forgotten, though some were great folk in their time. Gone utterly and for always, nothing left, except perhaps descendants in a labourer's cottage here and there who never even heard of them."

"I don't believe it," he said almost passionately, "I believe that they are living for ever and ever, perhaps as you and I, perhaps elsewhere."

"I wish I could," she answered, smiling, "for then my dream might have been true, and you might have been that knight whose brass is lost," and she pointed to an empty matrix alongside that of the great Plantagenet lady.

Godfrey glanced at the inscription which was left when the Cromwellians tore up the brass.

"He was her husband," he said, translating, "who died on the field of Crecy in 1346."

"Oh!" exclaimed Isobel, and was silent.

Meanwhile Godfrey, quite undisturbed, was spelling out the inscription beneath the figure of the knight's wife, and remarked presently:

"She seems to have died a year before him. Yes, just after marriage, the monkish Latin says, and--what is it? Oh! I see, 'in sanguine,' that is, in blood, whatever that may mean. Perhaps she was murdered. I say, Isobel, I wish you would copy someone else's dress for your party."

"Nonsense," she answered. "I think its awfully interesting. I wonder what happened to her."

"I don't know. I can't remember anything in the old history, and it would be almost impossible to find out. There are no coats of arms, and what is more, no surname is given in either inscription. The one says, 'Pray for the soul of Edmundus, Knight, husband of Phillipa, and the other, 'Pray for the soul of Phillipa, Dame, wife of Edmundus.' It looks as though the surnames had been left out on purpose, perhaps because of some queer story about the pair which their relations wished to be forgotten."

"Then why do they say that one died in blood and the other on the field of Crecy?"

Godfrey shook his head because he did not know. Nor indeed was he ever able to find out. That secret was lost hundreds of years ago. Then the

conversation died away and they got to their work.

At length the rubbing, as it is termed technically, was finished and the two prepared to depart out of the gloom of the great church which had gathered about them as the evening closed in. Solitary and small they looked in it surrounded by all those mementoes of the dead, enveloped as it were in the very atmosphere of death. Who has not felt that atmosphere standing alone at nightfall in one of our ancient English churches that embody in baptism, marriage and burial the hopes, the desires, and the fears of unnumbered generations?

For remember, that in a majority of instances, long before the Cross rose above these sites, they had been the sacred places of faith after faith. Sun-worshippers, Nature-worshippers, Druids, votaries of Jove and Venus, servants of Odin, Thor and Friga, early Christians who were half one thing and half another, all have here bowed their brows to earth in adoration of God as they understood Him, and in these hallowed spots lies mingled the dust of every one of them.

So Godfrey felt in that hour and the same influences impinged upon and affected even the girl's bold, denying soul. She acknowledged them to herself, and after a woman's way, turned and almost fiercely laid the blame upon her companion.

"You have infected me with your silly superstitions," she said, stamping her foot as they shut and locked the door of the church. "I

feel afraid of something, I don't know what, and I was never afraid of anything before."

"What superstitions?" he asked, apologetically. "I don't remember mentioning any."

"There is no need for you to mention them, they ooze out of you. As though I could not read your mind! There's no need for you to talk to tell me what you are thinking of, death--and separations which are as bad, and unknown things to come, and all sorts of horrors."

"That's odd," he remarked, still without emotion, for he was used to these attacks from Isobel which, as he knew, when she was upset, always meant anything but what she said, "for as a matter of fact I was thinking of a separation. I am going away, Isobel, or rather, my father is sending me away."

He turned, and pointing to the stormy western sky where the day died in splendour, added simply in the poetic imagery that so often springs to the lips of youth:

"There sets our sun; at least it is the last we shall look upon together for a whole year. You go to London to-morrow, don't you? Before you come back I shall be gone."

"Gone! Why? Where? Oh! what's the use of asking? I knew something of

the sort was coming. I felt it in that horrible old church. And after all, why should I mind? What does it matter if you go away for a year or ten years--except that you are the only friend I have--especially as no doubt you are glad to get out of this dreadful hole? Don't stand there looking at me like a moon-calf, whatever that may be, but tell me what you mean, or I'll, I'll----" and she stopped.

Then he told her--well, not quite everything, for he omitted his father's disparaging remarks about herself.

She listened in her intent fashion, and filled in the gaps without difficulty.

"I see," she said. "Your father thinks that I am corrupting you about religion, as though anybody could corrupt you when you have got an idea into your stupid head; at least, on those subjects. Oh! I hate him, worse even than I do my own, worse than you do yourself."

Godfrey, thinking aloud, began to quote the Fourth Commandment. She cut him short:

"Honour my father!" she said. "Why should we honour our fathers unless they are worthy of honour? What have we to thank them for?"

"Life," suggested Godfrey.

"Why? You believe that life comes from God, and so do I in a way. If so, what has a father to do with it who is just a father and no more? With mothers perhaps it is different, but you see I love my mother and he treats her like--like a dog, or worse," and her grey eyes filled with tears. "However, it is your father we are talking of, and there is no commandment telling me to honour him. I say I hate him and he hates me, and that's why he is sending you away. Well, I hope you won't find anyone to contaminate you in Switzerland."

"Oh! Isobel, Isobel," he broke out, "don't be so bitter, especially as it is of no use. Besides after all you have got everything that a girl can have--money and position and looks----"

"Looks!" she exclaimed, seizing on the last word, "when you know I am as ugly as a toad."

He stared at her.

"I don't know it; I think you beautiful."

"Wait till you see someone else and you will change your mind," she snapped, flushing.

"And you are going to come out," he went on hastily.

"Yes, at a fancy ball in this Plantagenet lady's dress, but I almost



wish I was--to go out instead--like her."

"And I daresay you will soon be married," he blurted, losing his head for she bewildered him.

"Married! Oh! you idiot. Do you know what marriage means--to a woman? Married! I can bear no more of this. Goodbye," and turning she walked, or rather ran into the darkness, leaving him amazed and alone.

This was the last time that Godfrey spoke with Isobel for a long while. Next morning he received a note addressed in her clear and peculiar writing, which from the angular formation of the letters and their regularity, at a distance looked not unlike a sheet of figures.

It was short and ran:--

Dear Old Godfrey,--Don't be vexed with me because I was so cross this evening. Something in that old church upset me, and you know I have a dreadful temper. I didn't mean anything I said. I daresay it is a good thing you should go away and see the world instead of sticking in this horrid place. Leave your address with Mother Parsons, and I will write to you; but mind you answer my letters or I shan't write any more. Good-bye, old boy.

Your affectionate Isobel. Who is always thinking of you.

P.S.--I'll get this to the Abbey with your milk. Can't leave it myself, as we are starting for town at half-past seven to-morrow morning to catch the early train.