DAME CHRISTIAN COLET

Her Life & Family

By

MARY L. MACKENZIE

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First Head & Leaving Exhibitioner of St Paul's Girls' School, Student of Newnham College Cambridge 1908-11

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To the MASTERS *and* WARDENS *of the* WORSHIPFUL COMPANY *of* MERCERS, TRUSTEES *of the* FOUNDATION *of* ST PAUL'S SCHOOL, *this short account of the* FOUNDER'S MOTHER *and her* ANCESTORS *is* DEDICATED

FOREWORD

WHEREVER English History is read the name of John Colet is known, and the School which he founded has faithfully performed its pious task of keeping green his memory. The *Lives* written by Dr Knight and by Dr Lupton tell us much of the man and of his work. They tell us, however, little of his family; and of his father's family it seems that but little can be certainly known. The family of his mother have left records of some interest in several generations, and as Dame Christian Colet was herself a woman of exceptional and attractive character, it has been found worth while to make some study of her ancestors and of her own personality. This work has been very appropriately performed by the first Head of the Girls' School which was opened, on John Colet's Foundation, nearly four hundred years after his death.

FRANCES R. GRAY
HIGH MISTRESS

ST PAUL'S GIRLS' SCHOOL,
Easter 1923.

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These homes, this valley spread below me here,
The rooks, the tilted stacks, the beasts in pen,
Have been the heartfelt things, past speaking dear
To unknown generations of dead men.

JOHN MASEFIELD

Now all is said, and all being said,—aye me!
There yet remains unsaid the very She.

FRANCIS THOMPSON

Chapter I

OUT OF THE MISTS OF TIME

PERHAPS one of the most striking paradoxes in the racial characteristics of the English people is the existence side by side of the impulse to travel and adventure which has built up the Empire, and the intense love of home, of the very soil itself, on which the history of Great Britain and the Empire is founded. An essential factor in this has been the hereditary principle, by which, generation after generation, not only the land itself but the love of it has been handed on from father to son, gathering strength as it rolls like a snowball down the ages. No hereditary principle, however, fortified though it might be by law and custom, could have safeguarded the succession of a purely parasitical class, and if among the landowners of to-day we still find names which, for centuries, have figured prominently in the communal life of the district, it is because, speaking generally, ownership of land has been accompanied by an acknowledgment of civic responsibility. In time of peace these men played a leading part in local, and often in national affairs: when the call to war sounded through the land they were the first to respond. Without such an acknowledgment of responsibility the system must have become an intolerable burden, which would have been shaken off long ago.

Much of the work done by these landowners, whether peers of the realm or country squires and

farmers, was performed out of the limelight of history, and it is only by the examination of old records, state documents and ecclesiastical memorials that their services can be traced. With one exception, this is true of the ancestors of Christian Knyvet, the mother of John Colet, Dean of St Paul's and founder of St Paul's School.

Although all authorities agree that the Knyvet family seems to have originated in Cornwall, nothing very definite is known of them until they had established themselves in the eastern and east midland counties, which were to be their home for many generations.

According to Camden and Leland, the name Knyvet is a corruption of Dunnevit, from Dunneheved, the original name of Launceston, in Cornwall. Tradition speaks of an Othomarus, lord, or possibly only constable, of the castle and town of Launceston, who, undaunted by his country's defeat at the Battle of Hastings, refused to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Conqueror. His rashness was punished by the forfeiture of his lands, but feeling, perhaps, that, having made his protest, and caused his enemies a great deal of trouble, he was justified in making the best terms he could for himself, he married the daughter of one of the invaders and secured his reinstatement. Polwhele, on the other hand, while he admits the possibility of the surname being a place name, is inclined rather to regard the original form as De Knivet, and speaks of Othomarus as being of Danish extraction*.

* *History of Cornwall*, II, p. 137.

Though Othomarus, after a brave attempt at resistance, bowed to the inevitable, and, by his marriage with Emma Dammartin, managed to safeguard his position under the new régime, his son, in spite of his half Norman birth, and the fact that he too married a Norman, seems to have come into conflict with the authorities, and "for sum suspition of treason died a banished man in the Kingdom of Bohemia."*

In the next generation the eldest son, Edmund, again chose a Norman wife, and it was probably one or more of the younger members of these families who founded the Norman branch of which evidence appears in the English records more than two hundred years later (1).†

By the end of the twelfth century English and Normans had so far become reconciled to each other that when Richard I called for volunteers to follow him to the Holy Land it was possible for his subjects to respond without the certainty that if they returned it would be to find their property annexed by their nearest neighbour and their wives and children homeless. After decades of civil strife, during which the patriotism which had resisted the encroachments of the invader had degenerated into ignoble family feuds, both elements welcomed the new inspiration offered for their favourite occupation of fighting. Hardly a family in the land but sent at least one representative to take his share in the struggle to recapture the holy places from the infidel, and the Knyvets were not behindhand, since we find that

* Harl. MS. 1411, pp. 63, 64.

† For references to numbers in the text see Appendix III.

Druge the grandson of Alfred, "was in the Holy Land with King Richard ye Ist."*

His grandson, Thomas, is also found taking part in one of the movements of the day, for he was killed in the Barons' Wars at Catford Bridge in 1264. He left no issue, and the succession passed to his brother Manser. Manser's son was the first of Christian Knyvet's direct ancestors to be christened John, the name which was given to the eldest son of her branch of the family in that and the following eight generations, although in two cases it was not borne by the head of the family, presumably because the eldest son died before succeeding to the estates.

Up to this point, with the exception of the generally accepted tradition that Cornwall was the first home of the Knyvets, no local habitation has been assigned to Christian's branch of the family. With the appearance, however, of the first John in the line of her direct ancestors, they figure as lords of the parish of Southwick in Northamptonshire, and from this time onwards they are firmly established as landowners in the eastern counties. The marriage of the heir, in more than one generation, to a wealthy heiress, helped to consolidate their position, and with the rapid growth of their importance and influence, the part they played in national and local affairs becomes more and more clearly discernible.

The history of Southwick is interesting in its uneventfulness, for it has passed through fewer hands than almost any other parish in Northamptonshire. It was held by Knyvets at least as early as the end of the twelfth century, for between 1194 and 1199

* Harl. MS. 1411, pp. 63, 64.

John Knyvet of Southwick granted a meadow in the parish to Andrew, Abbot of Peterborough, for rent. If, however, the pedigree of Christian's ancestors in Appendix I is correct, this was not a member of her branch of the family, for the name John appears there for the first time some three generations later, when John Knyvet, the son of Manser, is shewn as Knight of Southwick. In 1242 Thomas Knyvet, probably his son, and the husband of Millicent Benford, was holding one fee in Southwick of the Earl of Warwick, with Peter de Montfort as intermediary*. In 1306 John Knyvet, evidently Thomas's grandson, gave up the rent of Piryho meadow and Piryhow (*sic*) moor to the Abbey of Burgh†. Ten years later he still appears as Lord of Southwick‡.

Two hundred and fifty years after the Knyvet ownership is first recorded, John Knyvet, grandson of the Lord Chancellor, sold the manor to John Lynne, the husband of his daughter Joan§, and Christian's maternal uncle. From that time until the death of Mrs Martha Brode, sister and heiress of George Lynne, in 1796, it remained in the family. On her death it passed to a relative who took the name of Lynne, and it was not finally sold out of the family until 1840.

The first record of any member of the Knyvet family in either the Patent or the Close Rolls appears

* The de Montfort connection lasted until the fifteenth century, and the overlordship of the Warwicks lapsed soon after, though it was clearly understood in the seventeenth century that the manor was not held in chief but of the Warwick lands. *Victoria County History, Northamptonshire*, II, p. 591.

† Bridges, *History of Northants*, II, p. 473. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 469.

§ *Genealogist*, I, p. 345.

in 1273, when Thomas Knyvet, a merchant of Amiens, receives a licence to export wool (2). Whether this Thomas was one of the Norman branch of the family which, it has been suggested, may have been founded by one of the early Knyvets who married Normans, or whether he himself was an Englishman who had settled in Normandy, there is not sufficient evidence to shew.

The family predilection for the name "John," and the almost entire absence of dates from the pedigree, make it difficult to determine with certainty to which members of the family references in the records apply. When Edward I went to France in 1286, to "order affairs in Gascony" and try to establish peace in a Europe rent with feuds, he was accompanied by a John Knyvet, who, on "going with Master John de Lacy beyond seas with the King," was granted protection* with clause volumus for one year (3). There is nothing to shew from what part of the country he came, but it seems reasonable to assume that he was either the John who was Lord of Southwick in 1316 or his father, the husband of Mabel Horton. If this is so, it marks the first appearance of a member of Christian's branch of the family in the records of the Patent Rolls. The Master John de Lacy whom he accompanied seems to have been a relative of the Earl of Lincoln, and was employed by the King on more than one diplomatic mission on the continent.

In the year 1289 there is a record of a letter from Theobald de Verdun, "staying in England," nominating John Fikeys and Robert Knyvet his attorneys

* A writ of protection was given to enable a man to be quit of suits brought against him while absent beyond seas.

in Ireland for three years(4). At that time the position of attorney did not necessarily involve any acquaintance with the law; the qualifications required of the person chosen seem to have been simply that he should be "a free and lawful man," so that this Robert Knyvet cannot be regarded as the professional ancestor of the Lord Chancellor of the time of Edward III. Theobald de Verdun was at that time Constable of Ireland, but he was also a landowner in England and Wales, and the necessity for attending to his various interests constantly entailed the appointment of attorneys to look after his affairs in the country from which he was temporarily absent. Robert Knyvet filled the post on more than one occasion, sometimes in Ireland and sometimes in England, and in 1295 a John Knyvet was appointed for two years(5). It would be interesting to find in these appointments evidence of the presence of a branch of the Knyvets in Ireland, but as de Verdun's son, and possibly he himself, owned land in Northamptonshire, it seems probable that the connection between the families originated there. It evidently lasted for some time, for about fifty years later Richard Knyvet, then Lord of Southwick, acted as attorney to "John de Verdun, Knight, going beyond the seas"(6). Associated with him in the office was Alan de Hothum, a member of another Northamptonshire family which we shall meet later in a less friendly relationship with Richard.

While the Knyvets connected with the Constable of Ireland were evidently English, the existence of a branch of the family in Ireland seems possible, though by no means certain. At the beginning of

the fourteenth century Edward I was trying to raise troops in Ireland to reinforce his armies for the conquest of Scotland. On March 26th, 1301, there appears in the "Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland" a letter from the King to Richard de Burgh, Earl of Ulster, informing him that

> Having committed to John Wogan, justiciary of Ireland, Richard de Bereford &c. certain matters which the King has much at heart regarding the expedition to Scotland and which were to be communicated by word of mouth to the earl and other lieges in Ireland, the King prays the earl to place implicit credence in what the persons named shall tell him and to carry it into execution.

Amongst the "other lieges in Ireland" to which this letter was sent is a Reginald de Knyvet. The only ground for doubting this evidence of a branch of the family having settled in Ireland is the fact that in a similar document, written almost a year later, and addressed to the same persons, the name appears as Kynet(7). No other instance of its occurrence in either form is found in the Irish Calendar at that time, though more than two hundred years later the Lord Deputy of Ireland, writing to Lord Burghley, asks him to "have consideration of Knevet and Molyneux"(8).

An entry in the Close Rolls for 1278 brings into the light of history a less creditable member of the family than those who have hitherto made their appearance. In that year William Knyvet of Spalding is imprisoned at Okham (Oakham) for the death of Henry, son of John le Carpenter(9). Nor was he the only representative of the family in the thirteenth century to figure in the courts of justice on a charge

of murder, for in 1290 an order appears in the Close Rolls "to deliver in bail Hugh Knyvet imprisoned in Shrewsbury gaol for the death of Robert, son of William Acton" (10). Three years later, however, the Patent Rolls record a pardon granted to Hugh Knyvet in Shrewsbury gaol for the death of Robert, son of Adam Wylly (11). The change of name is probably due to misreadings on the part of a scribe who wrote Acton for Adam or vice versa, and did not realize that in one case or the other the Christian name followed the surname.

Further evidence of the violent temper of some members of the family appears in 1302, but in this case the offender, John, son of William Knyvet o Braundeston, seems to have indulged his combative instincts by killing the King's enemies as well as his own, so that, though he was guilty of the death of John, son of Geoffrey of Braundeston, he was pardoned "by reason of his service in Scotland" (12).

By the beginning of the fourteenth century the family appear to have been distributed fairly widely through the eastern and east midland counties, where they took a prominent part in the public life of their locality. Their names figure constantly in commissions of the peace, of oyer and terminer*, and of array, usually on the side of law and order, though in the troublous times of the Middle Ages it would be surprising if any family could shew a record entirely free from regrettable incidents.

An entry in the Patent Rolls of 1310 shews a grant

* Commission by virtue of which the courts of assize sit. Oyer and terminer is an Anglo-French legal term, meaning "to hear and determine."

by Master Adam de Suthwyk of "57 acres 35 perches of land which he holds from the King in the assarts within the metes of Clyve Forest to John Knyvet of Suthwyk," the husband of Joan d'Engayne. Knyvet, however, was not to enjoy immediate possession, for the record adds that he was to "demise them" to Master Adam for life(13).

Richard, the son of John Knyvet and Joan d'Engayne, was evidently a man of considerable importance, for his name occurs frequently in the Close Rolls and Patent Rolls during the reigns of Edward II and Edward III. He first appears in the records in the year 1311, when the Close Rolls shew an order to Roger de Wellesworth "to cause Richard Knyvet, of Southwyk, and Joan his wife, daughter and heiress of John de Worth, a tenant in chief of the late King, to have seisin of the said John's lands, as she has proved her age before the said escheator, and the King has taken the fealty of her husband"(14).

A later entry in the same records shews that Joan de Worth brought a considerable amount of property into the family, for, in addition to her father's estate, she inherited land in Haynton from her uncle, Serval de Worth, although it passed first to one Geoffrey Clerk, for his life-time(15). In 1324 Edward II grants the custody of the forest of Clyve to Richard Knyvet for life(16); and an entry in 1327 shews that the new King confirmed the title(17).

Various other entries prove him to have been a man entrusted with considerable authority and in close touch with public events. In 1326 he is appointed by Edward II, who was then at Kenilworth, to follow and arrest Ralph, son of Roger de la Zousch, and

others who were "indicted of the death of Roger Beler in the county of Leicester, and to bring them before Henry de Lancastre, Earl of Leicester, and his fellows, justices of oyer and terminer, touching the said felony" (18).

In 1336 he is one of several appointed in Northamptonshire to arrest suspected persons (19); the entry is dated at Auckland, and the order was probably made by Edward III on his way to Scotland with the expedition he led there that year.

The declaration of war following on the attack on the Agenois by France, in 1338, was the signal for a recruiting campaign throughout the country, and Knyvet's name appears as one of the Commissioners of Array in Rutland (20). These commissions were entrusted with the duty of securing men for the King's forces in their district.

The year 1340 was an eventful one for Knyvet, and added considerably to his duties and responsibilities. In April he was charged with the arrest of "certain persons" (21) whose names, this time, are not given. In August he undertakes the collection of the "ninth of sheaves, lambs, and fleeces granted to the King for two years" (22), to enable him to carry on his French wars, while in December, as a result of the unrest in Northamptonshire, he is appointed to a commission "on complaints... that confederacies and unlawful assemblies are more rife than before in that county" (23). Associated with him on this commission as well as on several others was Ralph Basset, probably the father of his daughter-in-law Alienore. The records of the same year provide evidence that Knyvet and his wife devoted some part

of their wealth to the needs of the Church, for their names are included in the list of benefactors of the chantry in the church of St Andrew Cotherstok* in the diocese of Lincoln, for whom "there shall be remembrance" (24).

The taxation and general expense involved in carrying on the war with France were causing widespread discontent in the country, and in 1341 the Commons refused to grant the King the necessary supplies except under certain conditions. Northamptonshire was again one of the counties where open expression was given to the general discontent, and this time it was not confined to "unlawful assemblies," but found vent in attacks by "assemblies of armed men formed against those who dwell there, whom they think to be rich, to extort ransoms;... these have imprisoned those who refuse to pay such ransoms and killed some" (25). The same conditions were prevalent in Lincolnshire and Rutland, and in response to complaints by the inhabitants, Knyvet and others were appointed on August 4th to a commission of oyer and terminer for the three counties. Six days later there appears in the Close Rolls an order to Knyvet with reference to the selection of archers in Rutland and Northampton (26), so that, in addition to his judicial duties, he was evidently still responsible for recruiting in his district.

This year (1341) saw the outbreak of the war of succession for the throne of Brittany between Charles of Blois, cousin of the King of France, and John of Montfort, whose claims were supported by England.

Knyvet's activities in the public service were not

* Cottestock.

confined to the maintenance of order and the raising of troops and funds for the war, for in 1337 we find him appointed one of the King's merchants in Northamptonshire with orders to buy 1200 sacks of wool at 8½ marks a sack*(27). In 1344 he received a writ of allowance in the port of London for £871. 17*s.* 8*d.*(28).

It is regrettable to find that this patriotic, hard-working country squire was not always prompt in the payment of his debts, for an entry in the Close Rolls of 1345 shews that he and certain other persons acknowledge that they owe 2000 marks, which, in default of payment, will "be levied of their lands and chattels in county Northampton"(29). From the year 1343 his appointment as Commissioner of the Peace is recited annually until 1350(30), when the last mention of him occurs under circumstances which suggest that his activities in the cause of law and order may have aroused resentment among his less law-abiding neighbours. On February 2nd a commission of oyer and terminer is granted to

John Dengayn and seven others on complaint by Richard Knyvet, keeper of Queen Philippa's forest of Clyve, that whereas he pursuant to the assize of the forest and according to his office had attached greyhounds and a cart of John son of John de Hothum of Bondeby, "chivaler," committing damage against the queen in that forest, the said John and others assaulted him on this account at Writthorpe by Staunford, Co. Northampton, and assaulted likewise his men, whereby he lost their service for a great time(31).

If we assume that he was at least as old as his wife, and that she was only twenty-one when she succeeded

* A mark was worth 13*s.* 4*d.*

to her father's estate in 1311, Knyvet cannot have been less than sixty in 1350, and his disappearance from the records of public life may have been due to a justifiable desire to end his days in retirement. Or the decision may have been forced upon him as a result of the rough handling he received from John, son of John de Hothum. Let us hope not.

Chapter II

THE LORD CHANCELLOR OF ENGLAND

WHILE Richard Knyvet must have been well known throughout the east midland district, his son John was the first member of the family to achieve distinction in the eyes of the general public. Camden speaks of the family as "an ancient house ever since Sir John Knyvet was Lord Chancellor under Edward III." He was called to the degree of Sergeant-at-law in 1357, became Justice of the Common Pleas in 1361, and Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1365. Seven years later the qualities of which he gave proof in that post were rewarded by his appointment to the Lord Chancellorship, the highest office in the land.

The history of this office is one of unusual interest, for in its expansion from a subordinate post in the King's household to the presidency of one of the Courts of Justice, the leadership of the House of Lords, and the position of the holder as first layman of the realm after the blood royal, is embodied the whole history of the development of State offices from the days when the King was personally responsible for all the affairs of the State.

The office of Lord Chancellor might almost be said to be of prehistoric origin, for even King Arthur seems to have possessed one. Whether or not this is only a part of the legend which has been woven round his name, it seems certain that, from the time

of Ethelbert, all the Anglo-Saxon kings included a chancellor amongst the members of their household. His original function was that of secretary to the King, to relieve him of some of the work which his position as the fount of all justice in the State entailed upon him. Even in very early times it became impossible for the King to deal personally with all the cases which came before him, and tribunals were appointed with special judges to represent the King and carry out the law in his name. All applications for redress, however, still came before him, to be allocated to the court best fitted to deal with them, and the King, finding, as time went on, that even this work made too great a demand upon his time, appointed a secretary to frame the writs, or letters, to the various judges. The place to which suitors brought their complaints was called the Chancery, and the officer in charge became known as the Chancellor. A further function which devolved upon the Chancellor, a man versed in the law and customs of the land, was the authentication of all grants of dignities, offices and lands made by the King. In days when writing was a little-known art, most documents of importance were confirmed by means of a seal, which, in the case of that used for writs and grants, came to be known as the Great Seal, and was placed in the custody of the Chancellor.

At a time when all learning was confined to the priests and monks, the holders of an office requiring legal knowledge, such as the Chancellorship, would naturally be drawn from one of these two classes. But there was further ground for this policy. Ever since the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Chris-

tianity the King had had a priest attached to his household, who acted as his confessor and as custodian of his chapel. It was the holder of this office who, by reason of his superiority over the ignorant laymen who composed the court, came to act as the King's secretary, and thus united with the office of "Keeper of the King's conscience" that of superintendent of writs and grants.

Like many secretaryships of the present day, whose external status does not at all correspond to their real influence and importance, the Chancellor's office was for a long time of no great dignity. No separate judicial power was attached to it, and it was generally coveted only as the stepping stone to a bishopric, to which it usually led. Under the Anglo-Norman kings the Chancellor ranked sixth among the great officers under the Crown, above him being the Chief Justiciary, the Constable, the Mareschal, the Steward, and the Chamberlain.

The gradual evolution of the office from its subordinate position seems to have been due partly to the energy of individual Chancellors such as à Beckett and Longchamp, and partly to the necessity for devolution in the courts of law. Originally all important cases were heard in the Aula Regia, of which the Chancellor was a member, but, with the growth of business, the various cases appear to have been distributed among the members of the court best qualified to deal with them. Under this arrangement, questions regarding the validity of grants and proceedings by virtue of mandatory writs or commissions under the Great Seal would naturally be referred to the Chancellor, while, in his capacity as "Keeper of

the King's conscience," he would be expected to deal with complaints that "the King had been advised to do any act, or been put in possession of any lands or goods to the prejudice of a subject."

By the end of the reign of Henry III, or the beginning of that of his son, Edward I, the office of Chancellor had, by some such process of development and extension of power as has been described, come to be the first in the State.

Throughout this time the office continued to be held by a priest, and it was not until 1340 that a layman was appointed, in the person of Sir Robert Bourchier.

The first experiment in this direction did not prove a success. Sir Robert was a distinguished soldier, but completely lacking in knowledge of legal procedure, and after holding office for little over a year, he was dismissed. His successor, Sir Robert Parnynge, on the other hand, had been trained in the law, and was the first properly qualified holder of the office.

Knyvet's immediate predecessor in the office of Lord Chancellor was Sir Robert Thorpe. He was appointed in 1371, and won universal esteem during the time he held office. In little more than a year, however, he was attacked by a fatal disease. Realising that his end was near, and anxious to leave his affairs in order, especially those connected with his office, he ordered the Great Seal to be brought to him and, placing it in a bag, closed it with his own seal and that of Chief Justice Knyvet. After his death it was carried to Westminster and delivered into the King's hands. Five days later, on July 5th, 1372, the King's

son, John of Gaunt, was commissioned to bear the Seal to Chief Justice Knyvet and administer the oaths to him. This was carried out with solemn ceremony in the King's Chapel.

In November of that year Parliament met for the purpose of voting supplies to the King. After the Treaty of Bretigny in 1360, peace had been maintained with France for nine years. In 1369 the struggle broke out again, but the Black Prince, after capturing Limoges and putting its defenders to the sword, was forced by illness to return home, and with his departure England's fair fortune in France deserted her. In 1372, Spain dealt a heavy blow at her maritime power by defeating one of her convoys off Rochelle. Encouraged by this, the French, led by Bertrand du Guesclin, took Poitou, Saintonge and Angoumois. Twelve months later, chiefly as a result of John of Gaunt's military incapacity, Bayonne and Bordeaux alone of the towns of Aquitaine remained in English hands.

In the autumn of 1372, however, the misfortunes which had befallen English arms were only such as to stiffen the country's determination to carry on the war and retrieve its position, and the King experienced no difficulty in obtaining from Parliament the supplies he needed.

For some reason, the Lord Chancellor did not preside at the opening of this Parliament, and only appeared to discharge his functions when Lords and Commons assembled to meet the King in the White Chamber, after the money had been granted. Here he recited the formula framed to remind the King of his dependence on the goodwill of his subjects.

He pointed out to the King "how kind the parliament had been in granting him such a supply," and, in return, "the King very humbly thanked them for their great aid." After this ceremony the petitions of the Commons were read and answered. The Knights of the Shires were then allowed to leave, and, by the Chancellor's orders, writs were made out for their wages and expenses. Meanwhile the citizens and burgesses were ordered to remain, and "they, being assembled before the Prince, Prelates and Lords, granted for the safe conveying of their ships and goods, 2*s.* on every tun of wine imported or exported out of the kingdom, and 6*d.* in the pound on all their ships and merchandise for one year."* This system of determining the rate of the customs duties in consultation with those only who were directly responsible for paying them seems admirable, until it is remembered that the traders of the fourteenth century were no doubt quite as alive to the possibilities of "making the consumer pay" as those of the present time.

A year later Sir John Knyvet again received instructions from the King to summon Parliament, and the wording of the summons throws an interesting light not only on the qualifications then demanded of a Parliamentary candidate, but also on the virtues evidently assumed to be inseparable from a "dubbed Knight." The sheriff of each county was to cause to be chosen "two dubbed Knights, or the most honest, worthy and discreet esquires of that county, the most expert in feats of arms, and no others, and of every city two citizens, and of every borough two burgesses,

* Campbell, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors*, p. 265.

discreet and sufficient and such as had the greatest skill in shipping and merchandising."*

Once again the primary business before Parliament consisted in the voting of supplies for the King's needs, but this time he was not to obtain them without demur from his faithful subjects. In spite of the defeats and humiliations which the army had been suffering in France, which must have been a matter of common knowledge, no hint of the true state of affairs was allowed to appear in the Chancellor's speech, flattering the people that "by their good and noble government and deeds of arms they had done great damages and destructions to the enemy over there, and also on the sea a navy of great power had held themselves well and graciously against their enemies, to the great honour, quiet and tranquillity of our Lord the King, of the clergy, and of all others of the Kingdom."†

It would be easy to condemn Knyvet for giving such a rosy picture of a disastrous condition of affairs, but it must be remembered that, whereas at the present time the King's Speeches to Parliament are drafted by his ministers, in those days the Chancellor acted rather as the mouthpiece of the King, and Edward had not yet been driven to face the truth and publicly confess himself beaten. Nevertheless, in spite of Knyvet's eloquence and of his exhortations on the duty of "refreshing and comforting with force and aid the lords and others who had ventured their lives and fortunes to defend the nation from their

* Parl. Hist. 137, quoted by Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 266.

† See Longman, *Life and Times of Edward III*, II, p. 230.

enemies,"* there was a five days' debate before the Commons could be brought to sanction the taxation necessary to meet the King's request for money, and then their consent was only given on condition that the money should be spent on the war, and that the taxes should not be collected by the knights of shires, esquires, citizens or burgesses returned to Parliament.

Two and a half years elapsed before the people's representatives met again, and their attitude to the King and his military enterprises had undergone a marked change in the interval. Even the most optimistic could no longer regard the misfortunes in France as temporary reverses; the tide had turned, and, like many another general, Edward had to face the angry reaction of the people, starved of the military glory on which they had been fed for so long. Nor was the failure of the armies in France the only ground of the people's discontent. Overwhelmed by his anxieties, the King was spending an increasing proportion of his time in the society of his mistress, Alice Pierce, whose unscrupulous influence was seen in the distribution of the most valuable civil and ecclesiastical offices at the King's disposal amongst her favourites. Not content with this, she outraged the feelings of every decent citizen by sitting in the courts of justice in order to turn the scales in favour of the suitors who enriched her by their bribes.

Whatever may have been Sir John Knyvet's views of the King's behaviour, and whatever efforts he may have made behind the scenes to bring home to Edward the resentment which military failure abroad and a corrupt administration at home were arousing

* Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 266.

in the public mind, his speech was again a model in the art of ignoring unpleasant facts.

"The first and principal [reason of the summons]," he said, "was to advise about the good government and peace of the realm—for the defence and safety of the King as well by sea as land—to take order for the maintenance of the war with France and elsewhere—and how and in what manner it might be done for the best profit, quickest dispatch and greatest honour of the King and kingdom."*

He pointed out that what the King had hitherto done was always with their (the Commons') advice and assistance, for which His Majesty entirely thanked them and desired that they would diligently consult about these matters and give answer as soon as possible. Then the storm burst. For the Commons, while they did not refuse the supplies for which the King asked, proceeded to enumerate the aids which he had already received, and roundly asserted that if this money had been honestly applied there would have been no necessity to thrust this additional burden of taxation upon the people. Not content with merely registering a protest, they took steps to secure the removal of unsatisfactory ministers. They accused the King's favourites of bribery, of selling illegal grants, and raising loans for their own profit. William of Wickham, a former Chancellor, who was suspected of being under the influence of Alice Pierce, was charged with misdemeanour in the conduct of his office, condemned to forfeit his temporalities and to remain twenty miles from the King's person. Lord Neville, Lord Latimer and other members of the courts of justice were dismissed, and with a

* *Ibid.* p. 267.

view to removing one of the chief causes of the prevalent corruption, an act was passed prohibiting women from "pursuing causes and actions in the King's courts by way of maintenance and reward, and particularly Alice Pierce, under penalty of forfeiting all that she can forfeit, and of being banished out of the realm." Thus early was the precedent set in English law of penalising all women for the misdemeanours of one.

Throughout the storm which raged around him, shattering reputations and hurling from their pedestals some of the highest in the land, Knyvet stood firm, using every effort to allay the people's fury, and apparently untouched by the lightest breath of slander or reproach. But the strain and anxiety of the political situation told on his health, and on January 11th, 1377, he retired, "carrying with him the respect of all classes of the Community."* He only lived to enjoy four years of private life after his strenuous activity in the service of the State.

Coke, in his *Institutes*, calls him a man "famous in his profession," and says that

> in perusing the rolls of parliament in the times of these Lord Chancellors (Knyvet and his predecessor Thorpe) we find no complaint at all of any proceeding before them. But soon after, when a Chancellor was no professor of the law, we find a grievous complaint by the whole body of the realm, and a petition that the most wise and able men within the realm might be chosen Chancellors and that the King seek to redress the enormities of the Chancery.

In spite of this appeal, it was not until 1529, when Henry VIII appointed Sir Thomas More to the

* Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 268.

Chancellorship, that the office was again filled by a trained lawyer.

Campbell's remarks on the lack of information relating to Sir Robert Thorpe might be applied with almost equal force to Knyvet. "I find," he says, "...that while a Chancellor is going on in the equal and satisfactory discharge of his duty, little notice is taken of him, and that he is only made prominent by biographers and historians when he takes bribes, perverts the law, violates the constitution, oppresses the innocent, and brings ruin on his country."*

Sir John Knyvet married Alienore Basset, apparently a daughter of the Ralph Basset who was his father's colleague on more than one commission in Northamptonshire. Through her the Manor of Great Weldon, in that county, came to the Knyvets, and was held by them for two generations. In 1477, Christian's father sold it to her husband Henry Colet; from him it passed to his son John, and on his death it reverted to Christian. From her it descended to her nephew Edmund Knyvet, Sergeant Porter to Henry VIII.

* *Ibid.* p. 264.

Chapter III

A "TOWN AND GOWN ROW"

THE frequent references to Richard Knyvet in contemporary records and the historical importance of his son have made possible a fuller and more consecutive life story of these two than of any other of Christian Knyvet's ancestors, and have carried the family history up to the end of the fourteenth century. Certain facts, however, remain still to be noted before that date which throw light on the character and distribution of the family.

In 1320 the name appears in connection with property in Leicestershire, when a dispute between James Knyvet and others over some tenements in Lutterworth necessitated the appointment of a commission to investigate the rights of the case(32).

The first recorded association of the Knyvets with either of the Universities is not such as to suggest any appreciation on their part of the opportunities they offered of learning and culture. The history of both Oxford and Cambridge in the Middle Ages is chequered by "town and gown rows" which often resulted in disastrous fires and serious damage to the University buildings. For the most part the town party seem to have been the aggressors, inspired by jealousy of the privileged position of the members of the University; but it is conceivable that the learned professors may have shewn a want of tact and a consciousness of intellectual superiority which,

in an age when corporate feeling in the towns was at its height, must have been a constant source of irritation to the good burgesses.

The year 1322 witnessed a serious conflict between the two parties at Cambridge, when the townsmen

> in the name and with the authority of the commonalty of the town of Cantebrigg attacked and spoiled divers inns of the masters and scholars of the University, climbed the walls, broke the doors and windows, mounted by ladders into the solers and assaulted the said masters and scholars, imprisoned some, mutilated others of their members, and killed Walter de Skelton, parson of the church of Welton, carried away all they could of the books and other goods of all the masters and scholars, so that no person dare go to the University of the said town for study (33).

Foremost among the townsmen arraigned before the commission of oyer and terminer which was appointed to investigate the affair was Simon de Reefham, Mayor of the town of Cambridge, and among the two hundred or so aiding and abetting him was John Knyvet.

It is difficult to say with certainty whether this was one of the John Knyvets of Southwick. Richard's father was probably too old by that time to be taking part in affairs of the kind, while his son, the future Lord Chancellor, if involved in it at all, would be more likely to be found on the other side. Possibly it was Richard's elder brother, of whom we know nothing save that, according to the pedigree, he was named John, and apparently died before his father.

This same year finds another member of the family figuring in a tale of violence. The name Richard

suggests the Chancellor's father, but unless the statement by Thomas de Eye, parson of the church of Aylyngton, that Richard Knyvet and about a hundred others "broke his close and houses in Aylyngton, Co. Huntingdon, by night, took and led away two horses of the price of 10*l.*, and carried away his goods, and assaulted his servants" (34), is exaggerated for his own ends, the story does not seem to correspond with our knowledge of Richard Knyvet, though possibly Thomas de Eye was complaining of the natural consequences of his own resistance to the ordinary course of the law.

The first mention of any member of the family in holy orders occurs in 1324, when "John Knyvet pason of the church of Littelington" receives a grant of protection with clause nolumus for one year (35).

The year 1325 provides evidence, through an order to "John Knyvet, bailiff of the town of Sudbury" (36), of the presence of Knyvets in Suffolk. An entry a few years later stating that "John Knyvet of Sudberi and others acknowledge that they owe 408*l.*" probably refers to the same man.

In 1328 Charles IV of France died, and Edward III, then in the second year of his reign, put in a claim to the French throne, in right of his mother Isabella, daughter of Phillip the Fair. The hostilities which ensued bring us into touch with the Norman branch of the Knyvet family already mentioned, for the Close Rolls of that year record the "arrest of a ship belonging in part to Richard le Knyvet of Barflut in Normandy" (37).

A reference, again in the Close Rolls for the same

year, to Robert Knyvet, Co. Notts. "mainsperned* for the said men"(38), brings the family farther north than we have hitherto traced it. Sixty years later we find John Knyvet enfeoffed of a third part of the manor of Tuxford, Co. Notts.(39), so that they probably had some standing in that part of the country.

Until the end of the fourteenth century no evidence appears of the presence of Knyvets as landholders in or near London, and it was probably not until the official duties of Sir John Knyvet made it necessary for him to live within easy reach of Westminster that the family acquired property there. Even then it was not within the city walls, but in "the parish of St Bride, Fletestrete, in the suburb of London." Part of it he alienated "in mortmain†" in 1380(40) but that some of it remained in the family is shewn by the fact that of two gardens adjoining the cemetery of St Bride's, which were left to George Cressy by the Bishop of Salisbury in 1401, one is described as "abutting on the tenement of John Knyvet"(41).

* Misprint for "mainperned"? A mainperner=one who gives mainprise or surety, especially for the appearance in court of a prisoner to be released.

† Alienation in mortmain is the transfer of property to a corporation, which is said to be a *dead hand*, or one that can never part with it again.

Chapter IV

WAR AT HOME AND ABROAD

WASTEFUL and self-seeking in aim though the wars of Edward III in France were, the picturesque figure of the Black Prince and the tale of his victories against overwhelming odds at Crecy and Poictiers cast a glamour of romance over the period which partly veils the threatening figure of social unrest which stalks across the back of the stage. All the more surprising is it, therefore, to find ourselves, at the beginning of the next reign, face to face with the very modern conflict between Capital and Labour.

Since the beginning of the reign of Edward I the commutation of services for payment on the great feudal estates had gradually but surely been changing the conditions of life in England. The luxurious standard of living and the expenses of the French wars laid a heavy tax on the resources even of the wealthiest, and many of the nobles welcomed the opportunity of replenishing their coffers by the sale of freedom to their serfs, while, with the increase in population which had been taking place ever since the Conquest, the substitution of hired labour for the agricultural work formerly done by the bondmen presented no great difficulty. In the middle of the fourteenth century, however, the whole industrial position was reversed by the blasting touch of the plague. Originating in the Far East, it swept along

the great trade routes to Southern Europe, leaving death and devastation in its wake. From there it spread north, and appeared in Dorset in August, 1348. Relentlessly it marched onwards, gathering strength as it went for the culminating horror of 1349, when the whole of England, parts of Ireland and the south of Scotland were attacked. In 1350 it spread, with diminishing force, over Scotland, until by the end of the year its gruesome form had vanished into the Atlantic Ocean.

The estimates of the mortality caused by the epidemic in England vary considerably, but most historians now agree in putting the minimum loss at about half the population*.

It was this reduction in the number available for industry and agriculture which had such a marked effect on social conditions, and gave the workers a feeling of their value as individuals which they had not known when their numbers were more than equal to the requirements of the landlords and masters of industry. They were not slow to use the new power which fate had placed in their hands. Wages, especially in the rural areas, rose by leaps and bounds, and in spite of the Statutes of Labourers, penalising both those who demanded and those who paid more than the customary rate, it has been estimated that the wages of male agricultural labourers increased by 50 per cent. and those of women by 100 per cent.† The landlords, however, did not rely only on legislation to regain their former power over the workers. The emancipating process which, before

* E. Linson, *Economic History of England*, p. 88.

† Thorold Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, p. 237.

the plague, had suited their empty purses so well, was sternly checked, and in many cases manumissions were revoked on the ground of alleged inaccuracy or informality. It was this attempt to force the freedmen back into the slavery from which they had so recently emerged that aroused the burning sense of injustice and resentment which found vent in the Peasant Rising of 1381.

But the Black Death was not the only agent responsible for the economic and social disintegration of the fourteenth century. The Church, which for centuries had exercised undisputed sway over the minds of King, lord and commoner alike, was sinking in the morass of its own corruption, and, in his attempts to remind the priests and monks of the earlier and more simple ideals of which they had lost sight, John Wyclif and his followers were only giving expression to the people's longing for new and purer standards of life. It was, therefore, fitting that the spokesman of the peasants should be a Lollard preacher named John Ball, whom Froissart calls the "mad priest of Kent."

Economic distress and resentment of social injustice, contempt and disgust at the corruption of the Church, these formed the fuel which needed only a spark to be set ablaze. In 1381, not a spark but a brand was applied to it in the form of a poll tax, under which every person in the realm, from the richest noble to the poorest vagrant, paid a like sum to meet the expenses of the war with France. The outraged peasants could stand no more. Kent, Essex and East Anglia rose almost to a man.

Under Wat Tyler the Kentish bands marched to

London, gathering strength as they went. Their anger was directed chiefly against the lawyers, to whom had been entrusted the detection or invention of flaws in the manumissions of the serfs, and all who fell into their hands paid the penalty of their ingenuity by death.

The young King, who, alone of the Court party or the aristocracy seems to have kept his head, was anxious to hold a conference with the rebels, but his council, led by Archbishop Sudbury, refused to allow him to come to closer quarters with them than a boat on the river, from which he addressed them. The Archbishop's caution proved his own undoing, for so enraged were the peasants with the man who stood between them and their King, that when, the next day, he was discovered by a party of them who had forced their way into the Tower, he was dragged out and executed on Tower Hill.

Richard, meanwhile, having escaped from this over-zealous guardian, had entered into negotiations with the rebels at Mile End, and, oblivious of constitutional procedure, was freely giving away charters of freedom and promises of pardon. Happy in the possession of these, many of the peasants returned home, but Wat Tyler, with a large band, refused to leave London until the pledges so lightly given had materialised. This tenacity, while it was justified by after events, proved fatal to Tyler, for when, the next morning, the peasants approached the King for a fresh conference, a quarrel broke out between them and the King's followers, in the course of which Tyler was struck dead by the Mayor of London. The King's presence of mind alone averted a general

struggle. Putting himself at the head of the peasants, he called upon them to follow him, and led them to the Tower. But it was their last triumph. By this time the nobles had recovered their self-possession, and with their counsels of repression and revenge in his ears, Richard led a punitive expedition through part of Essex, in shameless repudiation of his pledges of pardon.

Meanwhile, much the same fate had attended the rising in East Anglia and Cambridgeshire. For a time fortune favoured the rebels, but with the appearance on the scene of Hugh Despenser, the warlike Bishop of Norwich, they had to give way to their better-armed opponents. Huntingdonshire did not entirely escape the infection of unrest, but it proved to be the least susceptible of the eastern counties. The county town itself went so far as to close its gates to the insurgents, and repel an armed band by force. Slight disturbances occurred in some of the rural districts, and at Ramsey the Abbot's tenants refused to pay him his dues. But an armed band of raiders from Ely who attempted to blackmail the Abbey were surprised by Despenser and taken prisoners.

Sir John Knyvet, the Lord Chancellor, had died early in this year (1381), and though he can hardly have failed to hear the mutterings of the coming storm in his own part of the country, he did not witness the actual outbreak, which did not take place until June. His son, however, felt the full inconvenience caused by the peasants' demands for their rights, for although the Chancellor had died at least as early as February 20th, by June 28th John the

younger could only obtain a grant "of the custody of his father's lands, as he is of full age but cannot obtain due delivery because the escheators of the counties where the lands are situated, on account of the recent disturbances, dare not return the inquisitions" (42). Even after the rising was officially over, Knyvet evidently had difficulty in collecting all the money due to him under his father's will, for as late as 1391, the Patent Rolls record a "pardon of outlawry to William Cardon for not appearing to render 100*s.* to John Knyvet, executor of the will of John Knyvet, Knight" (43).

During the year following the revolt John Knyvet was called upon to take his share in suppressing the disorder which was still simmering in the country. Commissions of oyer and terminer were set up in those counties where the unrest was most serious, reciting

> the treasonable hostile rising of divers evildoers in congregations and conventicles throughout the realm and their perpetration of treasons, homicides, arsons etc., and appointing... commissioners, with the advice of the nobles and magnates of the late Parliament for the establishment of quiet, to keep the peace...empowering them to arrest, imprison and punish such rebels and any who incite to rebellion, to suppress their meetings, arrest their goods, or take security as they think fit. If the meetings are suspicious or excessive in number, they are to take the posse comitatus*, both knights and esquires, lead them against the rebels, seize any found committing the offences aforesaid, and do justice upon them

* *I.e.* the power of the county. The sheriffs had the power to call out all suitable males to quell disorder or pursue felons. Although, since the establishment of an efficient police force, this is no longer necessary, the sheriffs still retain the power.

without delay. They are also appointed commissioners of oyer and terminer in respect of the premises, with power to arrest, and imprison and punish any who refuse to assist them (44).

From this it will be seen that the forces of reaction, having recovered from the panic which seized them at the first outbreak of revolt, had resumed full sway, and that the investigation and removal of grievances formed no part of their policy in dealing with the unhappy peasants.

The Commission for Huntingdon, on which Knyvet sat, was appointed on March 8th and again on December 21st.

On May 20th of the same year Knyvet himself had to pay two marks in the hanaper* in order to obtain pardon "for acquiring in fee simple certain lands at Mendlesham" (45). His marriage to Joan Botetort had brought the manor of Mendlesham, in Suffolk, into the family, so that probably a desire to extend his holding in that neighbourhood had led him to annex some common land. By the payment of the fine mentioned he would not only secure pardon for his robbery of the community, but would acquire the freehold of the lands he coveted. Two years later he seems to have committed an even more serious offence, for the Sheriff of Huntingdon and others are appointed "to arrest and bring before the King and council John Knyvet and Richard his brother, to answer for their contempt" (46). What the contempt was, or what were the issues of the case, there is no means of knowing, but from the fact that some years

* A department of the Court of Chancery which received fees, fines, etc.

pass before John's name again appears on any county commission, it may perhaps be inferred that in the interval his retirement from public life was either desirable or absolutely necessary. His appointment, however, in 1393 and again in 1394 to a commission of the peace suggests that if he had lain under a cloud, it was now lifted and his reputation restored.

A record in the Patent Rolls for 1392, of the revocation of a protection certificate by John Knyvet, Sheriff of Norfolk (47), is interesting because it shews one of the family already engaged in a civic capacity in the county which for so many generations was to be their principal home. If the Sheriff of Norfolk was the husband of Joan Botetort, he evidently divided his time between Huntingdon and the coast counties, for not only did his work as a commissioner require his presence in Huntingdon, but in 1397 he was returned to Parliament for the county.

In 1399 Richard II was forced to surrender the throne as one "incapable of reigning and worthy for his great demerits to be deposed"*. His abdication, however, did not bring peace to the troubled land, and one of the first acts of the new king was to send out commissions of array all over the country with instructions to "certify theron to the King and Council before the Octaves of the Purification†" (48). Once more Knyvet is called upon to serve on the Commission for Huntingdon.

The fifteenth century dawned in England on a scene of violence and bloodshed, of civil feud and foreign invasion. The barons who supported Henry's

* J. R. Green, *Short History of the English People*, p. 257.

† *I.e.* February 10th, or eight days after Candlemas.

claim to the throne were bent on a renewal of the war with France, and though the King was too much occupied with difficulties at home to carry out his avowed threat to "march further into France than ever his Grandfather had done,"* the tension between the two countries found vent in an outbreak of piracy. Encouraged by the French hostilities, the King of Scots, Robert the Third, refused to acknowledge Henry, and his freebooters emulated along the north-eastern coasts of England the exploits of the French in the Channel.

In 1400, Owen Glendower, who before Henry's accession had supported his claims to the throne, raised the standard of revolt in Wales, and on the alleged ground of his descent from the old Welsh princes proclaimed himself Prince of Wales. Although Hotspur's attempt to join forces with him was frustrated by his defeat and death at Shrewsbury, the French openly supported him, and, in 1404, formally acknowledged him as Prince of Wales, a title which he refused to surrender until he died fighting in the Welsh mountains in the year after the battle of Agincourt.

The disturbed state of the country necessitated constant additions to the King's forces, and in 1403 Knyvet is again found working on a commission to raise men "for defence against the King's enemies who have lately invaded the realm" (49).

Amongst the younger sons of the Lord Chancellor was one named Robert. Possibly it was he who, in 1405, was living at Horsted Keynes. Owing either to the personal animosity of some of his neighbours,

* J. R. Green, *History of the English People*, III, p. 6.

or to the unsettled conditions of the times, he seems to have led a somewhat precarious existence, for on January 7th an order was issued for the arrest of "William Chamberlayne who has threatened Robert Knyvet" (50), and later in the year the Sheriff of Sussex receives instructions "to enquire what evil-doers, armed, broke the close and houses of Robert Knyvet" (51). This is all that is known of him, but we may perhaps hope that after the law had twice intervened on his behalf, his neighbours found it wiser to leave him in peace.

From this time there is a gap of twelve years in the public records of the family, and after 1403 there is nothing to shew whether, in the plots and conspiracies which rent the land throughout the reign of Henry IV, John Knyvet took an active part for or against the King, or whether he preferred to remain a spectator. Nor do we know whether, when Henry V, gladly acting on his father's advice, "to busy giddy minds with foreign quarrels,"* plunged once more into the ill-fated wars with France, Dame Christian's forefathers followed him into battle or not, though her grandfather certainly fought there some twenty years later.

A beautiful brass in the church at Mendlesham shews that the Lord Chancellor's son died in 1417. He was succeeded by his son, the John Knyvet who married Elizabeth Clifton, through whom the estates in Norfolk were to come into the family. From the entries concerning him in contemporary documents he seems to have been a man of somewhat spendthrift habits. In 1427 he is summoned "for not

* *Henry IV, Pt II*, Act IV, Sc. iv.

appearing before the King's Justices of the Bench to answer Nicholas Lovet, citizen and goldsmith of London touching two pleas of debt"(52), one of 12*l.* 6*s.* 4*d.* and the other of 28*l.* This debt need not necessarily be regarded as evidence that Knyvet was indulging a taste in jewellery or plate beyond his means, for in the fifteenth century the goldsmiths were the bankers and money lenders of the nation, and it is quite likely that Nicholas Lovet was acting in that capacity. Possibly Knyvet was exceeding his resources on the strength of his wife's prospects, although she did not become her brother's sole heiress until the death of his daughter, Margaret. In any case, whether as the result of personal extravagance or because the heavy taxation imposed to meet the expenses of the long war with France had reduced his means unduly in proportion to his responsibilities, he seems to have been fairly frequently in financial difficulties. In 1430 he is again summoned for failing to put in an appearance "to answer Geoffrey Peynell, esquire, touching a plea of debt of 8*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*"(53). Some years after he is reduced to selling part of the manor of Great Weldon which Alienore Basset(54), the wife of the Lord Chancellor, had brought into the family. A few months later he has gone to the wars, perhaps with a hope in his mind that the spoils of some French town or castle might assist in straightening his tangled finances. If so, his hopes were grievously disappointed, for we find that

> by the petition of Elizabeth, wife of John Knyvet, Knight, it is understood that he has been taken prisoner by the King's adversaries in Picardy and there put to the ransome of 1000*l.*, which is more than he can bear without help from his friends,

who are unwilling to help because they suppose that for certain reasons he will be out of the King's favour when he returns to England. But in consideration of this petition, and of the fact that he was captured by the fortune of war, leaving a wife and ten children, mostly of too tender age to help themselves, and but little to maintain them, the King receives and accepts him as his faithful liegeman, the past notwithstanding(55).

What the unfortunate circumstances were which had added the King's displeasure to his financial burdens we have no means of knowing, but we may at least hope that with his restoration to favour his fortunes may have taken a turn for the better.

Chapter V

TWO FIFTEENTH CENTURY WOMEN

AMONGST the county families of Norfolk in the fifteenth century were the Pastons, whose correspondence is one of the principal sources of information regarding the domestic life and customs of the time. The Knyvets are more than once mentioned in their letters, and in 1453 the suggestion was mooted of a marriage between the two families.

The life of an unmarried woman in the fifteenth century was not a happy one. If she owned property she was liable to be the prey of unscrupulous suitors, who often did not trouble to veil their greed under the guise of polite courtship, but simply carried off the heiress and either forced her into an unwilling marriage or exacted large sums in ransom for her release. On the other hand, if she were not endowed she had no independent standing and remained the property of her parents, subject to their whims and caprices, and to methods of discipline which sometimes amounted to actual cruelty.

Such was the lot of Elizabeth Paston, whose mother carried her system of chastisement so far as to call forth the commiseration of her cousin, Elizabeth Clere, who writes a long letter to John Paston urging him to find his sister a husband,

for sche was never in so gret sorow as sche is now a dayes, for sche may not speke with no man, ho so ever come, ne not may see ne speke with my man, ne with servauntes of hir moderys, but that sche bereth hire an hand otherwyse

than she menyth*. And sche hath sen Esterne the most part be betyn onys in the weke or twyes, and some tyme twyes on o day, and hir hed broken in to or thre places†.

This unnatural behaviour on the part of Agnes Paston was presumably a method of giving vent to her annoyance at her daughter's failure to marry, for, says Margaret Paston, Elizabeth's sister-in-law, "It semyth be my moder's langage that she wold never so fayn to have be delyveryd of her as she woll now."‡ At her mother-in-law's desire, she adds the name of a man whom it might be worth while to sound as to his willingness to relieve her of her unhappy, unwanted daughter.

It was told here that Knyvet the heyer is for to mary; bothe his wyffe and child be dede, as it was told here: Wherfor she wold that ye shuld inquyr whedder it be so or no, and what hys lyvelode is, and if ye thynke that it be for to do, to lete hym be spoke with therof§.

Unless this rumour of the death of Knyvet's wife and child turned out to be false, it could not have referred to Christian's brother, William, who by then must have been the heir in her branch of the family, for although he married three times, his first wife, Alice Grey de Ruthin, did not die until 1474. But even with all the facilities of communication which the twentieth century affords, false rumours occasionally have a long run before they are finally stamped out, and when all news was carried by hand or passed by word of mouth, it must often have been a long time before misunderstandings or false statements could be overtaken and corrected. As the

* Accuses her unjustly.
† *Paston Letters*, No. 71.
‡ *Ibid.* No. 185.
§ *Ibid.* No. 185.

Paston correspondence does not shew that the suggestion was ever acted upon, we may perhaps assume that Margaret had been misinformed. After six more years of waiting Elizabeth found a husband in Robert Poynings, of whom, after her unhappy youth, we are glad to find her writing that "he is full kynde unto me."*

More than a hundred years later, the two families were connected by the marriage of Katharine, daughter of Sir Thomas Knyvet of Ashwellthorpe, a great-great-nephew of Dame Christian, to Sir Edward Paston†.

If unmarried women in the fifteenth century were little better than chattels, wives often had an important part to play, though rather as the representative of their husbands than in their own individual capacity. The unsettled state of the Paston affairs, owing to the disputes over Sir John Fastolf's will, which kept John Paston in London for long periods at a time, made his wife Margaret's position one of immense responsibility, for, however detailed and careful instructions he might send her, emergencies constantly arose which necessitated her taking immediate action on her own initiative, and she never failed to rise to the occasion. The only evidence which has come down to us of the character of Dame Christian's mother seems to suggest that she was a woman of much the same type as Margaret Paston, and that when her husband was obliged to be away from home, he could leave his affairs in her hands

* *Paston Letters*, No. 322.

† Blomefield, *History of Norfolk*, XI, p. 59.

with the same confidence that John Paston felt in his wife's administrative capacity.

The Knyvets, no less than the Pastons, knew from experience that the position of legatee to large estates had its anxieties as well as its advantages, and in 1461 Alice Knyvet, like Margaret Paston, found herself called upon to defend one of her husband's manors in his absence.

By the death of Margaret Ogard, the daughter of Sir John Clifton of Buckenham Castle, before her father, his wide lands in Norfolk came on the expiry of twelve years from the date of his death*, through his sister Elizabeth, who had married Christian's grandfather, to the Knyvets. The inheritance gave the family an important position among the landowners of Norfolk, and many traces still remain of the former greatness of that "race of giants, conspicuous in the sixteenth century for their valour, strength and great personal beauty—the Knyvets of Buckenham Castle." †

Among the manor houses which they inherited was Griston Old Hall, which, some hundred and fifty years after Christian was living in Norfolk, acquired a notoriety of romantic horror as the House of the Wicked Uncle of the Babes in the Wood. At the present time it stands about a quarter of a mile from Wayland's Wood, which, from its association with the tragic little tale of the wandering, weeping children, appears in old maps as "Wailing Wood." The house itself seems to have contained a good deal of evidence in support of its alleged identity, for

* Carthew, *History of East and West Bradenham*, p. 7.

† *Ibid.* p. xix.

"many old people, living in 1879, remember having seen an antique carved representation of the story." An old labourer said that "when he was a boy he used to see standing against the wall of a garret, two blocks of oak, on which were carved the Babes." One room had "carvings in it of the two Babes, two Robins and the Uncle, and there was also a very handsome carved mantelpiece in oak, on which were representations of the story....All the carved woodwork has disappeared."*

The Knyvets do not appear ever to have lived at Griston Old Hall themselves, so that no suspicion rests on any of the descendants of Dame Christian of having presented to the nursery mind the possibility of a lapse from the traditional benevolence of uncles.

Buckenham Castle itself has a history dating back to very early times. According to Blomefield, the village (ham) took its name from the fact that in old times the woods near by abounded with bucks, and not, he rather scornfully adds, from the number of beeches in the neighbourhood, as Camden says, "there being none in this county."†

When William the Conqueror was generously distributing the lands of the English among his own followers, he gave Buckenham Castle and Manor and the lands belonging to them to William d'Albini, to hold by the service of being butler to the King at his coronation. Apparently d'Albini disliked the site of the Anglo-Saxon castle and had it removed nearer to what is now the village of New Buckenham.

Lying just off the main road which leads into the

* Charles Kent, *The Land of the Babes in the Wood*, p. 13.

† *History of Norfolk*, I, p. 369.

village is a circular enclosure about 216 feet in diameter, surrounded by a rampart, now overgrown with trees and shrubs, which slopes steeply down to a wide moat, still filled with water, and crossed on the west side by a bridge. In the south-east corner is a low, round building of rubble, with walls about eleven feet in thickness and divided down the centre. The openings for light and air are some narrow slits high up in the wall, from which, together with the absence of any traces of a staircase, it has been conjectured* that this, the only portion of the castle buildings still standing, was a dungeon.

A hundred yards or so away from the castle stands an old barn, formerly a chapel dedicated to St Mary; the Norman doors and windows may still be seen from the inside, but the apse has disappeared, and is now replaced by a modern brick wall. The chapel seems to have fallen into disuse after the church of St Martin, which was built by the Knyvets during Christian's lifetime, was completed.

At the end of the eighteenth, or even the beginning of the nineteenth century, this church was full of relics of the days when the Knyvets worshipped here, and were christened and buried within its walls. The stone figure representing Alice, daughter of John Grey, son of Lord Grey de Ruthin, and Sir William Knyvet's first wife, may still be seen, though rather mutilated, but the stained glass which formerly filled the windows has all been removed.

In Old Buckenham Church, a mile or two away, the windows still bear the arms of the Cailleys, Cliftons, Thorps and Knyvets, all families who, at

* Harrod, *Castles and Convents of Norfolk*, p. 216.

some period, held the manors, or through whom they descended. The glass at New Buckenham, however, would have been of greater interest for the records of the Knyvet family, for not only did it shew the arms of the Knyvets and of the families into which several generations of them married, but the south chapel window held "3 pictures of ladies most beautifull,"* Alice, daughter of John Grey de Ruthin, Joan, daughter of Humphrey, Duke of Buckingham, and Joan, sister of Thomas Courtenay, Earl of Devon, the three wives of Christian's brother, William†. The church itself is a fine building with a beautiful tower and porch, on the outside of which the Knyvet arms still appear, carved in the stone.

The church stands some little distance from the castle, but from the top of the ramparts it must have been easy to see its walls gradually rising, and even hear the clink of the hammer on the hard flints.

It was not the building of the church, however, that attracted the gaze of the men on the ramparts on the Tuesday before St Matthew's Day (September 21st) in the year 1461. They were looking farther afield—for the approach of the King's commissioners "to take into the King's hands the Castle of Buckenham" and the lands belonging to it, and "to remove John Knyvet and William Knyvet esqs. and their adherents from the possession of the same" (56).

This attempt to oust Christian's father and brother

* Rye MSS., No. 17, p. 1. Tom Martin's Church Notes.

† For the date of these windows and a full description of them see "Armorial Glass in Old and New Buckenham Churches," by H.H. Prince F. Duleep Singh, V.P.F.S.A., in *Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society Papers*, xv, pp. 324–34.

from their property was based on what seems to have been an act of piracy committed by the Marquis of Suffolk in 1447, on the death of Sir John Clifton. Suffolk at that time was at the height of his power and influence over Henry VI and his young wife Margaret, and practically exercised the functions of a dictator. Such a position, however, had its dangers as well as its advantages, and it was probably a desire to ensure the support of one of the most powerful houses in the land that led him to expend a sum of £22 on a licence which enabled him to grant the reversion of the castle of Buckenham and its manors, "held in chief," to Richard, Earl of Salisbury, Sir Andrew Ogard and others(57). It was on this licence that the inquisition taken in 1460, after the death of Dame Alice Ogard, widow of Sir Andrew Ogard, who was Sir John Clifton's son-in-law by his first marriage, was based, on the strength of which the lands were "taken into the King's hands." In November of that year, however, the Knyvets, relying on the disposition of the property made by Sir John Clifton, entered into occupation of the castle and the land belonging to it. Their action was countered by the appointment of a commission with instructions to take possession of the property and remove the occupants. The Knyvets, however, had no intention of allowing themselves to be turned out of their inheritance, and so it came about that when the commissioners entered the outer ward (*custodiam*) of the castle they found the drawbridge raised against them, and the ramparts bristling with slings, "paveises," faggots, timber and "other armaments of war." It is evident from the tone of surprise

in the commissioners' report that this hostile reception was not at all what they had expected. Their astonishment must have been still greater when Alice Knyvet, attended by William Toby, a neighbour from Old Buckenham, and a band of fifty followers armed with swords, glaives and bows and arrows, appeared in a little tower at the inner end of the bridge, and with quiet confidence flung her defiance at the King's representatives, at the same time throwing upon them the whole responsibility for any breach of the peace.

Maister Twyer (she proclaimed) ye bee a justice of the pees and I require you to kepe the peas for I woll nott leve the possession of this castell to dye therfore and if ye begyn to breke the peas or make any warre to gete the place of me I shall defende me, for leve I had in such wyse to die than to be slayne when my husband cometh home, for he charget me to kepe it(58).

There is a strong sense of the dramatic in this dark hint of the fate that would await her at the hands of her husband, should she fail to keep her trust, and it would be interesting to know whether it was inspired by a knowledge of her husband's character and probable action, or whether, perhaps, she was a reader of old romances, the memory of which coloured her language in a crisis which might have been taken from their pages.

The commissioners, conscious, perhaps, of the weakness of their case, shewed no inclination to take up the challenge of their determined opponent. Thoroughly discomfited by her attitude, and by the sea of unfriendly faces around them, they seem to have retired without further parley to write their

report and explain that, under the circumstances, "they were unable to take the castle into their hands"(59). After events shewed their unwillingness to use force to have been amply justified, for the end of the year found John Knyvet confirmed in his possession of Buckenham, as the heir of Sir John Clifton, while a pardon is extended to him and "Alice his wife, and William Knyvet, of all debts, accounts, issues and profits of lands due to the King"(60).

Chapter VI

THE BUCKINGHAM CONSPIRACY

THE first ten years of the reign of Edward IV were marked by a succession of risings inspired by Henry VI's Queen, Margaret. So long as she and her son Edward offered a rallying point for the Lancastrians the country knew no peace, and the Yorkists were kept in a constant state of anxiety and watchfulness. One of the measures taken for the security of the new King and his adherents was to provide for the lighting of the beacons which, from the days of the Danish marauders, and probably of the first invasions of British shores, had signalled danger to the surrounding country. In Norfolk this was entrusted in 1462 to a commission including John Knyvet, which was instructed "to place watchmen and watches and signals called 'bekyns' within the county of Norfolk according to the old custom for defence against the King's enemies" (61).

By this time the lord of Buckenham Castle was evidently fully re-established in the King's favour, and was taking his full share of the responsibilities, which, as the history of Richard Knyvet, his great-great-grandfather shewed, fell to the lot of the leading county landowners, especially in times of civil unrest. In 1469 he was appointed a member of a commission headed by the Duke of Norfolk to arrest four gentlemen "and commit them to prison until ordered to bring them before the King in Council" (62). The

next year he and his son and seventeen other gentlemen were commissioned to "enquire into all felonies, murders, homicides, and other offences in the county of Norfolk" (63).

This son, who was Dame Christian's only brother, must have been a busy man, for in 1463 he was made "controller of the great and petty custom, the subsidy of wools, hides, and wool-fells, and the subsidy of the 3*s.* in the tun and the 12*d.* in the pound in the port of Boston and ports and places adjacent, provided that he execute the office in person, with the custody of one part of the coket seal"* (64).

At the beginning of the thirteenth century Boston was a staple town and one of the chief ports for the export of wool. By the middle of the fifteenth century its importance had considerably diminished, but a certain amount of the cloth traffic with the Continent still passed through it.

Presumably William carried out his duties to the satisfaction of the authorities and observed the provision that he should execute them in person, for two years later he received a similar appointment at Ipswich (65), which, as that town was still one of the centres of the wool trade, was probably in the nature of a promotion. By 1480 he has become sheriff of Suffolk, and one John Balhede, of Ipswich, has his protection with clause volumus revoked, on a certificate from the sheriff that "he delays at Ipswich" (66).

Perhaps it was as the dowry of his second wife, Joan, daughter of Humphrey Stafford, first Duke of Buckingham, that in 1481, he received from her nephew, Henry, who had succeeded his father to the

* The customs house official seal.

dukedom, "certain of the manors and lands which he held in chief from the King" (67).

This connection with the Buckingham family was destined to be an important influence in the fortunes of Sir William and his family. The Duke was a staunch supporter of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in his designs upon the throne of England, and the influence which he exerted over the people of London was largely instrumental in turning the tide of popular feeling sufficiently in Richard's favour for him to assume the crown without serious opposition. Sir William Knyvet, leaving local affairs to look after themselves, followed his kinsman into the wider sphere of national politics, and his name appears in the list of dukes, earls, lords and knights who were present at the coronation of the new King on July 6th, 1483*.

His services did not go unrewarded, for in the same month he was appointed "during pleasure... to the offices of steward of the King's castle, manor and lordship of Rysyng, Co. Norfolk, constable of the castle, and ranger of the chase of Rising, receiving 26*l.* yearly from the issues of the castle, manors and lordships with all profits" (68).

This was in July, 1483. By the beginning of November in the same year, his patron had been executed without trial, and he himself was a fugitive with a price upon his head.

Various motives have been ascribed to Buckingham for his treachery to the monarch whom he had been so largely instrumental in placing upon the throne. Some believed that even the princely gifts of lands

* C. A. Halsted, *Richard III*, Appendix L.

and offices which he had received were insufficient to satisfy his ambition; others that, intoxicated by his accession of wealth and power, he aimed at the throne himself. The reason he himself gave for his sudden change of front was certainly more creditable to him, and there seems no particular ground for refusing to accept it.

"When I was credibly enformed" (he said) "of the death of the two yong innocents, his (Richard's) awne naturall Nephews, contrarie to his fayth and promise, to the which God be my judge, I never agreed nor condescended. O Lord how my vaynes panted, howe my body trembled and howe my heart inwardly grudged, in so much that I so abhorred the sight and much more the company of him, that I could no lenger abide in his Court, except I should be openly revenged. The ende wherof was doubtfull, and so I fayned a cause to departe, and with a merie countenaunce and a dispitefull heart, I tooke my leave humbly of him (he thinking nothing lesse then that I was displeased) and so returned to Brecknock."*

Here he found an influence ready and anxious to foster the tendency to revolt which the death of the young princes had already awakened. On his accession to the throne, Richard had imprisoned Morton, Bishop of Ely, who had been chaplain to Henry VI and Edward IV in turn, in the Tower. Later he had been entrusted to the less rigorous custody of the Duke of Buckingham, and his persuasions seem to have been the deciding factor in detaching the Duke's allegiance from the King.

Finding himself alone with the Duke one day, Morton began tentatively and rather nervously to sound him as to his real attitude to the usurper. When

* Grafton's *Chronicle*, II, p. 127.

he found that his advances were not repelled, but were even listened to with attention and interest, he grew bolder and concluded with an eloquent peroration to his gaoler to rescue his country from the oppression of the tyrant he had himself enthroned.

"I say and affirme," he urges, "if you love God, your linage, or your native countrie, you must your selfe take upon you the Crowne and Diademe of this noble Empyre, both for the maintenaunce of the honour of the same (which so long hath flourished in fame and renowne) as also for the deliverance of your naturall Countrie men, from the bondage and thraldome (worse then the captivitie of Egypt) of so cruell a tyraunt and arrogant oppressor.... And if you your selfe... will refuse to take upon you the Crowne and Scepter of this realme; Then I adjure you by the fayth that you owe to God, by your honour, and by your othe made to Saint George, patrone of the noble order of the Gartier (whereof you be a Companion)... to devise some way how this realme now beyng in miserie may... be brought and reduced to some suretie and convenient regiment under some good governour by you to be named or picked out. For if you could either devise to set up againe the linage of Lancaster, or advaunce the eldest daughter of King Edwarde to some highe and puissant Prince, not onely the newe crowned King shall small tyme enjoy the glory of his dignitie, but also all civill warre should ceasse, and peace, profite and quietnesse should be set forth and embrased."*

The silence with which this appeal was received made the Bishop fear he had gone too far, and he was relieved when the Duke told him that he must have time to consider the matter before giving him a definite answer.

The following day the Duke returned to the subject, and admitted that, as a matter of fact, he had con-

* Grafton's *Chronicle*, p. 125.

sidered the possibility of making a bid for the throne himself on the ground of his descent from Edmund, Duke of Somerset, who was his maternal grandfather. On his way to Brecknock, however, he had met the Countess of Richmond, whose existence he had momentarily forgotten, and he then realised that she and her son Henry both had a prior claim to the throne. The two conspirators agreed to open negotiations with Edward IV's widow, who, since Richard's accession, had remained with her five daughters in Sanctuary at Westminster, for a marriage between Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, and her eldest daughter Elizabeth. The widowed queen accepted a proposal which offered the possibility, not only of ousting the murderer of her sons, but also of placing her daughter on the throne, and the Duke at once arranged for messengers to convey the news, as well as the money required for a voyage to England, to the Earl of Richmond, at the court of the Duke of Brittany, where he had taken refuge.

The coming and going of messengers between Brecknock and London and the communications with the Earl of Richmond did not escape the notice of the King, and he made more than one attempt to persuade the Duke of Buckingham to come to Court. At first the Duke excused himself; finally he threw off the mask and declared roundly that he "woulde not come to his mortal enemie, whom he neyther loved nor favoured."*

By that time the conspiracy had spread to other parts of the country. Thomas, Marquis of Dorset, had put himself at the head of a number of rebels in

* *Ibid.* p. 133.

Yorkshire, while Sir Edward Courtenay and his brother, the Bishop of Exeter, were fomenting a rising in Devon and Cornwall. With the intention of joining forces with them, Buckingham marched south, but when he arrived at Gloucester, he found the Severn swollen by a flood so abnormal that it went down to history as the Great Water, or Buckingham's Water. For it proved to be the undoing of the Duke and his fellow conspirators. His Welsh troops, faced with starvation, since the cattle which they had counted on requisitioning had been drowned, deserted wholesale, and the Duke found himself forced to fly. He took refuge at Shrewsbury, in the house of Humphrey Banister, a man who was under many obligations to him, and with whom he believed he would be safe from the King's forces. But Banister, either from fear of the King's vengeance, or tempted by the bribe offered for the Duke's person, betrayed his presence. The house was surrounded by the sheriff and his men, and Buckingham was captured and taken to Salisbury, where he was beheaded, without trial, in the market place.

Before his capture he had made provision for the safety of his son, Lord Stafford, a child of five years old, by placing him in the charge of Sir Richard Delabeare, one of his supporters, and his wife "for to keep until he sent for him by a token etc, viz.: 'et tu es Petrus O super hanc petram'." Not long after the Duke had left the child, whom he was never to see again, Sir William Knyvet arrived, together with a Mistress Oliffe, to share the responsibility of guarding his young kinsman, and the whole party took refuge in Sir Richard's house at Kynnardsley.

Then followed many days of anxiety for Sir Richard Delabeare and his companions, as they watched over the boy who had been entrusted to their care, hardly daring to let him out of their sight, and waited fearfully for news of his father. Nor can their anxiety have been lessened when

> a proclamation came to Hereford, for the said duke his son and Sir William Knevet, that whosoever would take them, he should have for the said duke four thousand pounds, for the Lord Stafford a thousand marks, for my Lord Henry five hundred pounds, and for Sir William Knevet five hundred marks.... And then was there great search made where this said company was become.

Then came the news they had been dreading, for "Duke Henry of Buckingham was brought by Sir James Tylor (to Salisbury) where he was pitifully murdered by the said King, for raising power to bring in Henry VII."

Beset by the haunting fear of the usurper, Richard III could not rest with the knowledge that any of the rebels or their children were still at large, and after the Duke's execution, the search for his son and for the man who had been left in charge of him grew hotter than ever. But Dame Elizabeth Delabeare was not to be caught napping. Evidently fearing that information of Lord Stafford's presence at Kynnardsley might have leaked out, she shaved his head, "put upon him a maiden's raiment," and took him away to Newchurch. And then began a game of hide-and-seek. Hardly was the child out of the way when a servant of Sir James Tylor's named Christopher Wellsbourne arrived with a message purporting to come from the Duke "to have the said

Lord Stafford delivered." But Dame Delabeare, whether or not she had already heard of the Duke's execution, was not going to surrender his son to anyone who did not bring with him the token agreed upon. At that moment she must have congratulated herself upon the foresight that now enabled her to declare boldly "that there was none such Lord there and that shall ye well know, for ye shall see the house searched." The story does not say whether Wellsbourne took advantage of the lady's offer, and as soon as he was safely out of the way the boy and Sir William Knyvet, who had accompanied him to his new hiding place, were brought back to Kynnardsley. But the danger was not over. Before long news arrived that another of the King's officers was on his way to make a fresh search for the wanted child. Once more he and his guardian were hustled out of sight, this time to a place called Adeley in the parish of Kynnardsley. Here they remained for four days, but the difficulty of conveying sufficient food to them without arousing the suspicions of the neighbourhood made it necessary, grave though the risk was, to bring them back once more to Kynnardsley. For another week Dame Delabeare allowed them to remain there, perhaps hoping that, as the house had twice been searched without result, the hue and cry in the neighbourhood would die down. But evidently the enemy were hot on the scent, for at the end of a week "there came a great cry out of Wales." This time it was a case of touch and go; all they could do was to get out of the house as quickly as possible and hide in the open country. Probably in order to attract less attention, they separated; Knyvet with a

servant named William Pantwall, went out into the fields, while Dame Elizabeth, picking up the boy, "went through a brook with him into the park of Kynnardsley." There she sat with him, not daring to move, lest they should be seen, perhaps listening to the shouts of the King's men growing ever angrier as they searched the house from top to bottom in vain, and felt the chance of winning a thousand marks slipping through their fingers, as room after room failed to yield up their prey. At last, after four long hours of waiting, her faithful servant William ap Symon brought the welcome news that "no man came nigh the place," and once more Dame Elizabeth and her young charge returned to the house. But this last and narrowest escape had evidently convinced her that the neighbourhood was becoming too hot for them, and she determined not to risk another night in a place which, in spite of all her subterfuges, was evidently regarded as the fugitives' lair. So "after that the Dame Elizabeth and William ap Symon took the said Lord Stafford, and went to Hereford in the midst of the day, and he riding behind William ap Glin (Symon?) aside upon a pillion like a gentlewoman, rode in a gentlewoman's apparel. And I wis," the chronicle bursts out suddenly, in a tone which suggests that the writer was Dame Elizabeth herself, "he was the fairest gentlewoman, and the best that ever she had in her days, or ever shall have, whom she prayeth God daily to preserve from his enemies, and to send him good fortune and grace." On their arrival at Hereford the young Lord Stafford was placed in charge of Mistress Oliffe with a friend of Dame Elizabeth, and

here she and William Knyvet, who had accompanied the party, left them*.

From this moment Knyvet disappears from the stage until the next reign. Possibly he joined the rest of the conspirators who had escaped the King's clutches, and fled to the Duke of Brittany's court, there to await the moment when the Earl of Richmond made his final and successful attempt for the crown of England. Certainly if he remained in England, he must have led the life of a hunted man, for, as one of the "great and singular movers, stirrers and doers of the said offences and heinous treasons," who, "being with the said Duke (of Buckingham) at Brecknock in Wales the 18th Oct. A° 1483 falsely conspired the death and destruction of the King and to depose him,"† he was convicted and attainted of high treason, and his estates were forfeited.

Wherever he hid himself, however, his outlawry did not last long, for less than two years after the first move in the Duke of Buckingham's rebellion Richard III was lying dead on Bosworth field, while the crown which had cost him his honour lay derelict under a hawthorn bush.

With the accession of Henry VII fortune smiled once more on Sir William Knyvet. Not only was he restored to his family possessions, but, on his marriage with Joan, the sister and heiress of the former Earl of Devon, and widow of Lord Clifford, who was

* This story of the escape of the Duke of Buckingham's son is taken from "a copy of an old roll of papers found out in the treasury at Thornbury Castle among the evidences there" in July, 1575, and printed, as Appendix V, in C. A. Halsted's *Richard III.*

† Bill of Attainder passed in the first Parliament of Richard III, Jan. 1484.

executed in May, 1485, for his support of the usurper, he received a further grant of the manors and hundreds of Crokehorne and Westcoker in Somerset, and the manors of Iwerne Courtney and Iverton in Dorset (69). But, while he no doubt appreciated the revenues which he drew from his new estates in the west country, he does not seem to have made any attempt to settle there, but rather threw himself with renewed vigour, after his enforced absence, into the work which awaited him in his native county, as a member of commissions of the peace, of oyer and terminer and of array.

He visited London at least once again, for in 1494, the year before Sir Henry Colet's second mayoralty, he was present at the feast held to celebrate the creation of Prince Henry (afterwards Henry VIII) a Knight of the Bath and Duke of York. Probably he again stayed with his sister in London or at Stepney, and told once more the tale of his adventures and escapes in the fatal rising of 1483.

In 1516 he died at the age of seventy-six, seven years before his youngest sister, after a life full of strenuous activity and keen participation in the political and social events of his time. At his own request he was buried in "the parish chirche of our Lady in Wymondham." No trace of his tomb can now be seen, for the church where he lies is now under the grass of the churchyard, outside the fine sixteenth century building which has taken its place. A reminder of the part which he and his family played in the history of England and of their native county remains, however, in their arms*, which appear in the recently restored east window of the present church.

* Argent, a bend sable, a bordure, engraved of the last.

Chapter VII

DAME CHRISTIAN'S WORLD

In a letter to his friend Amerbach, written in 1532, Erasmus, speaking of his experiences and the people whom he had met during his visits to England, says that he knew John Colet's mother. At the time that he met her, he remarks, she was approaching her ninetieth year. What led Erasmus to make such an overestimate of Dame Christian's age it is impossible to say. Certainly it could not have been her appearance that led him to think her twenty years older than she actually was, for he goes on to say that in spite of the sorrows which had darkened her life "she looked so smooth and was so cheerful, that you would think she had never shed a tear, nor brought a child into the world." In the fifteenth century sixteen or seventeen was a normal age for girls to marry; and even if Christian's childhood had not ended quite as early as that, she could not have been much more than twenty in 1466, when John, the eldest of her twenty-two children, was born. The earliest date at which her birth can be put is therefore about 1446, the year after the marriage of the young Henry VI to Margaret of Anjou, so that, if Erasmus is speaking of his last visit to England, which took place in 1514, she must then have been rather under seventy, and some six years younger than her brother, Sir William Knyvet.

It was a rough, turbulent world into which the

future mother of John Colet was born, with all the vices of the mediæval apotheosis of physical force, and none of the glory and picturesqueness acquired by military conquest, as seen, at least, through the vista of the ages. And while the chief characteristics of the preceding age had lost their inner meaning, and remained, where they did remain, only as empty forms, the new ideas and conceptions which were to take their place had not yet acquired form and substance.

In 1451 the Hundred Years' War came to an end, and the battlefields of France ceased to provide an outlet for the physical energy of the barons and their followers, who, trained to a life of fighting and looting, knew and cared for no other occupation. Without imputing to them the responsibility for the Wars of the Roses, which arose directly from personal and political quarrels, there can be little doubt that a large number of them welcomed this fresh opportunity of indulging in their favourite pastime.

The devout and cultured Henry VI was no match for his unruly subjects, whose noisy, barbarous ways he did not understand. The history of his reign presents the tragic picture of a man of a gentle, studious nature, only fitted for the seclusion of the cloister, exposed to the violence of political turmoil in an age when party politics meant, not wordy speeches from rival platforms, but civil war. Who can wonder that his reign was marked by his periodical retirement from public life suffering from a malady which would now probably be diagnosed publicly as a "nervous breakdown." In less turbulent times, when the principal function of the throne was not

to keep the balance between the rival ambitions of the nobles, he might have gathered round him all the intellect and culture of Europe. As it was, the studies and meditations to which he would fain have devoted his life could only be pursued under such constant interruption that in desperation one day he exclaimed, "So do they disturb me that scarce am I able by snatches, day or night, to refresh myself with the reading of the sacred dogmata, without somebody making a noise."*

Never had the intellectual level of the country been lower. The monasteries, for a time havens of pure living and high thinking, had, like all human institutions, lost their inspiration, as, with the passing of time, the motives of the men who entered them became more and more complicated and materialistic. The constant fighting, for the last hundred years, in France and at home, had filled men's ears with the clash of arms and killed all impulse to mental activity. And so we are faced with the historical phenomenon that the reign of the first English King whose disposition and interests would, under more favourable circumstances, have made his court a centre of learning and culture, produced no work of permanent literary value. If the names of Occleve and Lydgate are remembered to-day, it is rather because their work is typical of the literary poverty of the time than for its intrinsic value. There is no doubt that this poverty is the more marked by contrast with the sudden and unexpected brilliance of the preceding and following centuries. The fifteenth century lies like a dark, stagnant pool between two

* Blakman, *De Virtutibus Henrici VI.*

swiftly flowing, sparkling streams. One stream, flowing into it, is lost in its gloomy, sullen depths, another, rising from hidden springs, grows, from a tiny trickle, into the rushing, flashing torrent of the Elizabethan age.

"Most of the poets," says Warton*, "that immediately succeeded Chaucer, seem rather relapsing into barbarism, than availing themselves of those striking ornaments which his judgment and imagination had disclosed. They appear to have been insensible to his vigour of versification and his flights of fancy." Occleve (1368?–1448) himself confesses that "My father Chaucer would willingly have taught me, but I was dull and learnt little or nothing." Some of his best verses were written in lament for Chaucer's death, and shew a sincerity of appreciation and affection which, to a certain extent, compensate for the barrenness of his other productions.

Dethe was to hastyf
To renne on thee and reve thy lyf
She might han tarried her vengeance a whyle
Til that some man had egal to thee be.
Nay, let be that! she knew wel that this yle
May never man bring forthe like to thee,
And her office do mote she:
God bade her do so, I truste for the beste,
O maister, maister, God thy soule reste!

The most prolific writer of the century was John Lydgate, a monk of Bury, in Suffolk. His monastic profession appears to have been no obstacle to his acquiring a knowledge of the world which placed him in great demand as a writer of *ad hoc* verses,

* *History of English Poetry*, p. 349.

masques and plays. Rarely does he rise above the dead level of the commonplace, or give expression to a thought or sentiment which has enriched the world's treasury of imagination. Working without inspiration, seeking his material in sources themselves far removed from the originals, he produced literature which was drearily typical of an age which was not only barren of new ideas, but had nothing to contribute to the development or elaboration of those of its predecessors.

The only form of art which achieved a character of its own appears to be architecture. With the growing wealth of the burgher class, building, both ecclesiastical and domestic, was carried on with vigour and enthusiasm, and while the Perpendicular style which developed during the period cannot be compared for beauty of line and proportion with the Early English, it nevertheless has a charm of its own, and was a sincere expression of the thought and sentiment of the time.

Unfortunately, with the arrogant iconoclasm frequently characteristic of a new class, the builders of the fifteenth century could not always refrain from replacing the wonderful work of the preceding centuries with their own less inspired productions.

In spite, however, of the inauspicious character of the times, and the entire want of sympathy with his intellectual pursuits and ideals which makes Henry VI such a lonely figure, his achievements in the provision of educational facilities were such as to deserve greater recognition than is usually accorded to them. "Educationally, the fifteenth century was a time of progress. Henry VI, far more than Edward VI, de-

serves to be remembered as a founder of English schools and as an eminent promoter, though by no means creator, of English education."*

The two most important foundations for which he was directly responsible, and which are always associated with his name, were Eton (1440) and King's College, Cambridge, first called St Nicholas, the saint on whose feast day Henry was born, which was opened in 1441. About the same time St Antony's School was founded in London, probably on the initiative of John Carpenter, the master of St Antony's Hospital, who had been concerned in the foundation of Eton. It has been stated by some authorities that John Colet himself was educated at St Antony's, but the claim seems to be based on no very firm foundation.

If the England into which Christian Knyvet was born was only beginning to grope its way out of the intellectual darkness of the Middle Ages, her lifetime was to see changes as momentous and profound as any that have taken place in a similar length of time. When she died, Henry VIII, the sixth monarch under whom she had lived, and the man whose matrimonial quarrels were to alter the destiny of the English Church, was on the throne, and men's whole outlook had been changed, not only by the New Learning opened up to them by the Renaissance and the limitless possibilities of the printing press, but by the broader horizons which the discovery of the new hemisphere and the sea route to the East had set to their knowledge of the world.

* A. F. Leach, *Schools of Mediaeval England*, p. 251.

Chapter VIII

HER LIFE IN NORFOLK

OF Christian's girlhood no records remain, and we can only hope that she escaped the worst sufferings to which, under the name of discipline, the children of her time were subjected. It is not so many generations ago that parental affection found expression in a sternness and severity which the child was asked to believe were assumed for his "own good." In still earlier times the system of repressive discipline and of the subjection of the child's inclinations to the will of his elders was practised to a degree which at the present day would provoke the interference of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Even girls of a marriageable age knew no peace or freedom, as Elizabeth Paston's experience proved, and Lady Jane Grey's description of her parents' methods provides a horrible picture of child torture.

One of the greatest benefites that God ever gave me, is, that he sent me so sharpe and severe Parentes.... For when I am in presence of either father or mother, whether I speke, kepe silence, sit, stand, or go, eate drink, be merie or sad, be sewyng, plaiyng, dauncyng, or doing anie thing els, I must do it, as it were, in soch weight mesure, and number, even so perfitelie as God made the world, else I am so sharpelie taunted, so cruelie threatened, yea presentlie some tymes with pinches, nippes, and bobbes, and other waies which I will not name, for the honor I beare them... that I think myself in hell*.

* Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, quoted by H. S. Bennett, *The Pastons and their England*, p. 81.

This severity in the attitude of parents towards their children was remarked upon by the author of the *Italian Relation*, written, probably, about 1495.

The want of affection in the English is strongly manifested toward their children; for after having kept them at home till they arrive at the age of seven or nine years at the utmost, they put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the houses of other people, binding them generally for another seven or nine years;...and few are born who are exempted from this fate, for every one, however rich he may be, sends away his children into the houses of others, whilst he, in return, receives those of strangers into his own. And on enquiring their reason for this severity, they answered that they did it in order that their children might learn better manners*.

As Mr Bennett points out, however, the training provided in their own homes was in most cases quite severe enough to enable them to attain the required standard of manners. "Unquestionably, in many cases the real motive was the hope that some material benefit might be gained therefrom. If parents could get children domiciled in the house of a great lord, or of some rich patron, their chances of advancement and of a profitable marriage were greatly enhanced."†

Another alternative for the education of girls, before the Dissolution, was offered by some of the nunneries. Less than twenty miles from Buckenham was the beautiful Benedictine priory of Carrow, founded in 1146 by Seyna and Lescelina, and dedicated to the Virgin and St John. The nuns were originally nine in number, with a prioress, but at the Dissolution

* *A Relation, or rather a true account of the Island of England*, trans. by C. A. Sneyd. p. 24.

† H. S. Bennett, *op. cit.* p. 83.

they had increased to twelve. As, according to a local tradition, they kept a school where the daughters of the chief families in the neighbourhood were educated*, it is possible that Christian spent the later years of her youth here.

But whatever method John and Alice Knyvet chose for the education of their daughter, all the evidence is opposed to our conjuring up a picture of Christian spending a happy childhood running wild in the fields and woods round Buckenham. The restraints imposed by the educational theories of the time, however, were not the only ones which would make impossible for her the free, open-air life of the country-bred child of to-day. In the fifteenth century the fields and lanes were no place for children to roam unattended. The breakdown of the old feudal system of land tenure and the reversion of large areas of tillage to sheep-pasture, owing to the demands of the cloth trade, caused widespread unemployment, which had its natural result in unrest and outbreaks of violence. Norfolk was never slow to give vent to its feelings, and the *Paston Letters* are full of evidence of the disturbed state of the county in the middle of the fifteenth century. But it was not only those who were suffering from the effects of the economic upheaval who terrorised the countryside. Modern times provide plenty of instances of the detrimental effect of a few years of war on the self-control and discipline which are the basis of the security and happiness of a community. In an age when many grown men had never known their country at peace from foreign

* *Norfolk and Norwich Arch. Society, Original Papers*, xx, p. 1.

wars, it is not surprising that the official cessation of hostilities with France did not bring the spirit of peace to a country nurtured on war. For some of the returned soldiers, as we have seen, the Wars of the Roses provided a new outlet for their energies; others preferred to make war on their neighbours on their own account. In Norfolk,

> Sir Thomas Tuddenham, John Heydon and Thomas Daniel are three men who seem to have been at the back of much of the trouble. They and their adherents were continuously in conflict with the more law-abiding men in the country. Were one of their number indicted, Tuddenham, or Heydon or their friends, would appear at the court with so overwhelming a force at their back that the jury would be overawed, and justice defeated*.

Amongst the Paston MSS. of the year 1451 is one giving "the names of men who arne mischevesly oppressed and wronged be Sir T. Tuddenham and Heydon and their adherentes,"† which shews that John Knyvet, probably Christian's grandfather, was among those who suffered serious inconvenience from the escapades of this lawless pair.

The disputes arising out of Sir John Fastolf's will, by which John Paston inherited his lands in Norfolk and Suffolk, were another fruitful source of trouble throughout the district, and on one occasion the Pastons make a direct appeal to the Knyvets to help them in the defence of their property at Cotton, a request to which John Knyvet, presumably Christian's father, responds with neighbourly promptness.

> I sent Richard Calle on Tusday to Knevett, dysyryng hym that he woulde sende to hys baley and tenaunts at Mendle-

* H. S. Bennett, *op. cit.* p. 185. † *Paston Letters*, No. 145.

sham, that thei choulde be redy to come to John Paston whan he sent for them; and he sent a man of his forthwith, chargyng them in aney wyse that they choulde do so. And he sent me wourde be Richard and hys sonne also, yf wee were not stronge inough, that owther he or hys sonne, or bothe yf nede were, would come with suche feleschipp as they coude gett abowt them, and that thei woulde do as feythfully as they kowde for yow, bothe in that mater and in alle other*.

Even Christian's own father and brother cannot be exempted from the charge of lawlessness, for however well justified they may have felt their claims to Buckenham to be, their refusal to surrender it when called upon by the King's officers was a typical instance of the defiance of authority which was responsible for the anarchic condition of the country.

If the Knyvets had preferred to keep the upbringing of their children in their own hands, Christian was probably at Buckenham during the siege, perhaps taking an active part in the preparations to fortify the castle against the King's men, and listening anxiously for the first warning of their approach from the sentries who swept the surrounding country from the ramparts. It would have been a strange and stirring incident to look back upon in after years from her quiet home at Stepney, in the atmosphere of culture and intellectual progress created by Colet and his circle, and one which must have brought home forcibly to her mind the difference between the England of her youth and that of her old age.

It was probably about four years after this memorable event that Christian was married to Henry Colet and went to live in London.

* *Paston Letters*, No. 529.

The branch of the Colet family to which Christian's husband belonged was established at the Hale, Wendover, in Buckinghamshire. His father, Robert Colet, seems to have had five sons, of whom Henry was the youngest. The third was apparently a John Colet, citizen and mercer of London, who died in 1461. Possibly it was his membership of the Mercers' Company that led his younger brother to enter their ranks, and so set in train the circumstances which have made possible the expansion of Dean Colet's foundation to its present dimensions.

The origin of the City Companies is lost in the mists of the ages, for, by the reign of Henry II, when they are first found in anything approaching their modern form, they are spoken of as institutions so common and well-known that no explanation of their origin or history seemed necessary.

It is certain that even in Anglo-Saxon times gilds, or associations of men and women, were formed for purposes of keeping the peace, or with religious or ecclesiastical aims, but whether the merchant gilds lay in a direct line of descent from these, or whether, by chance or intention, they were framed on their model, there is not sufficient evidence to shew.

By the reign of Edward II the merchant guilds had established themselves so firmly in London that they were able to pass an ordinance, and secure its incorporation in a charter, providing that no one, whether an inhabitant of London or otherwise, should be admitted into the civic freedom, unless he were a member of one of the Trades or Mysteries, or unless with the full consent of the whole community convened. This is the first mention of any mercantile

qualification being required for the admission of a householder to the Corporation of London. In the next reign the grip of the merchants over the destinies of London tightened still more firmly. By an enactment passed by the whole assembled commonalty of the city the right of election of all city dignitaries and officers, including the members of Parliament, was transferred from the ward representatives to the trading companies, who were directed to send a certain number of their members to the Guildhall for election purposes. By a later Act of Common Council the right of election was opened to all the livery men of the companies, and this exclusive franchise was only removed by the Reform Act of 1832.

Some of the companies received their charters from Edward III, others were not formally incorporated until the next reign, when Richard II demanded from each of them a full statement of the nature of their foundation, the charters they had received, the land they owned and the oath taken by their members. From the charters which were subsequently granted it may be inferred that many of the companies were unable to supply all the information required, for most of them begin by stating the company in question to be of great antiquity, or to have existed "from time whereof there is no memory."

The Mercers' Company was one of those which received its first charter in this reign, in the year 1394, although it was certainly in existence as far back as 1172, when the first mention of it is found. The first two mayors of London, Roger and Henry Fitzaylwin, have been claimed as Mercers, but whether

this is founded on fact or not, it seems certain that Robert Serle, or Serle le Mercer, who was mayor from 1212 to 1214 and again from 1217 to 1222, was one of their number. From then to the year 1376 ten of the mayors of London were Mercers, and for a hundred and seventy-eight years after the Company received its first charter, one out of three mayors belonged to the Mercers' Company. Perhaps a stronger title to fame in mayoral history than statistics of the number of mayors supplied by the Mercers' Company, lies in the fact that the only Lord Mayor of London who has been made the hero of a fairy tale came from their ranks. When Dick Whittington arrived in London, after his weary tramp from Gloucestershire, and had recovered from his disappointment at finding that the streets were not paved with gold, he apprenticed himself to the Mercers, and so put his foot on the first step of the ladder which was to lead him to a fulfilment of the prophecy of Bow bells—"Thrice Lord Mayor of London."

Chapter IX

FROM NORFOLK TO LONDON

To a young girl brought up in the depths of the country, as, in default of other evidence, we must imagine Christian to have been, her first sight of London must have been an exciting experience. Even the journey itself, on horseback from Buckenham, was probably a source of wonder and interest to her.

Leaving Buckenham in the morning, she and her husband would probably ride to Thetford, and perhaps spend the night there.

> Once at Thetford, our travellers were on the Icknield Way, and rode across open downs over the chalk, and then through wild heath country to Newmarket, and so on to Barkway. Here they turned south along a post-Roman road, and went across the Cam valley as far as Broughing. Here again they met an ancient road, believed to be Roman, which took them through Ware and Waltham into London. . . .
>
> Along these roads, which had been used by generations of travellers, villages and hostelries had gradually multiplied. Halts were chiefly determined by the position of fords and bridges and by the need for food and shelter at reasonably equal distances*.

The principal stopping places, after Thetford, seem to have been Newmarket, Babraham, Barkway, Ware and Waltham. The rate of travel naturally varied with the nature and object of the journey. If Henry Colet was in love with his young bride, and in no

* H. S. Bennett, *op. cit.* p. 154.

hurry to reach London, where he would be immersed once more in his business affairs, they would probably travel in easy stages of fifteen to twenty miles a day. If, however, he regarded his marriage as a business transaction, to be carried through with as little loss of time as possible, they might cover thirty or forty miles a day, with fresh relays of horses at short intervals. Riding almost due south from Waltham, they would enter the city by the Bishopsgate, and pass down Bishopsgate Street, still on the edge of the open country, until they came to Cornhill. As Christian rode further into the city, where the streets grew narrower, so that the houses seemed almost to meet overhead, and the horses had to go at a foot's pace through the jostling crowds which filled the air with the clamour of buying and selling in the corn market and the Stocks, "a market both of fish and of fleshe," she must have become more and more amazed and bewildered. Was she thrilled as she looked on the crowded scene of her future life, or did she long for the wide, level fields and quiet lanes of Norfolk? We cannot tell, but we may be sure that when at last she and her husband turned into the comparative quiet of Budge Row, where Henry Colet's house stood, it was a weary little bride that he lifted from her horse, and welcomed into her new home.

Chapter X

IN LONDON

It would be interesting to know whether, when Christian arrived in London, she found her husband's bachelor house to her liking, or whether, with her æsthetic sense stimulated by the undreamt of possibilities suggested by the shops of London, she set to work to furnish it afresh. Probably, whatever it was like, it was a good deal more luxurious than the home she had left, for in the fifteenth century the furniture in country houses, even of people like the Pastons and the Knyvets, seems to have been of the barest description.

There was little else in the chief living room, or the hall, besides tables, benches, stools, tapestries and the fireplace accessories.... A fifteenth century vocabulary detailing the contents of a hall, gives the following articles in connection with the fire and its utensils: "A fire, a hearth-hand, logs, andirons, tongs and bellows."... The fireplace in the hall at this time was usually built into one of the walls, and was not in the centre of the hall where it had sometimes stood in earlier days; chimneys were becoming more common, although it was another century before many small houses had them. When the fire burnt on an open hearth in the middle of the hall, there was often no possibility of getting rid of the smoke-fumes, except by letting them escape through the unglazed windows, and through an opening in the roof called the louvre. The wall fireplace was gradually introduced into houses when repairs or alterations were made to meet the changing needs of the times....

After the hall, or main living room, the chief bedroom was

the next most important room in the house.... The chief article of furniture was the bed. Often this took up a great part of the room, for beds had large wooden frames, with a high back from which projected a canopy frame.... Then there was a mattress, probably of wool or straw, which rested on cross-ropes slung to the frame work. A pair of sheets and two blankets, besides a headsheet, were provided as a covering, and top of all was a coverlet. There were side curtains hanging down from the soler which could be drawn at night to keep out the draughts. Most inventories of a later date [than 1425] include feather beds as well as the ordinary mattresses.... Dame Elizabeth Browne left to her heirs no less than seven feather beds, most of them being described as "over-worn." The canopy and the side curtains were often of tapestry or some other rich material. The Pastons used blue buckram and worsted for this purpose, while at Caister Castle there were sets of tapestry for a bed showing "a lady crowned, and a great roll about her head, the first letter N." Another canopy there was made of tapestry, with a fringe of red, green and white silk, and a tester of the same colours. The coverlets to the beds were often very gorgeous. Sir John Fastolf had a silk coverlet lined with buckram, another made of green and blue silk, and a third of pale green and white, with leaves of gold....

Besides these large well furnished beds, there were often smaller beds which could be pushed out of the way in the day-time. These were known as truckle beds, from the truckles or small castors on which they stood, which enabled them to be run underneath the bed at will. The personal servants of the rich lay on these, generally at the foot of the big bed.... Apart from the bed, there was sometimes a chair or two, or some stools in the room. Many contemporary illustrations, however, show both men and women sitting on the bed as if no other seat were available. One chamber at Caister had in it a chair, a jointstool, and four cushions of red say; but probably few rooms were as well furnished as this. Most of them had a large chest or hutch standing at the foot of the bed, which served as a seat. Often these chests

were of considerable beauty, for they were carved, or sometimes painted in bright colours. In these were kept clothes, documents and a miscellany of belongings; for these chests were almost the only place in the house where things could be stored out of harm's way....

The walls of these bed-chambers were also covered with tapestries or hangings of some kind, similar to those used in the living room. Often sweet-smelling boughs and plants were hung about the room to sweeten the air. From occasional references, it would appear that a few people used carpets or matting on the floor of their rooms, but usually rushes were still used. The stone floor of the hall, or the uncovered floor of the bedroom made some kind of covering a necessity; and the cheapness of rushes, combined with their warmth, made them very acceptable. Often these rushes were allowed to remain so long without being changed that they became offensive. Erasmus, when writing to Wolsey's physician, says the rushes in houses are "only occasionally removed, and then so imperfectly that the bottom layer is left sometimes for 20 years, harbouring... abominations not fit to be mentioned."

The other furniture of a well-equipped bedroom may be soon described. No such things as chests-of-drawers, or wash-stands, or dressing-tables seem to have been at all common. An ewer and a basin of pewter, or laten, was kept in the bedroom, or near by; and the top of a chest or a table, if there happened to be one in the room, no doubt served as wash-stand and dressing-table in one.

The following inventory of the things in Sir J. Fastolf's bedchamber will give a summary view of the furniture and fittings which surrounded the rich.

In primus, a featherbed. Item, a mattrass of fine blue.
Item, a bolster. Item, two blankets of fustian.
Item, a pair of sheets. Item, one stitched (coverlet?).
Item, one set of Arras hangings for the bed. Item, one canopy.
Item, one supporting framework.
Item, one covering.
Item, three curtains of green worsted.

Item, one piece of tapestry to throw over a seat, etc.
Item, three pieces of green worsted for "hanging" (round the wall).
Item, one cupboard cloth.
Item, two standing andirons. Item, one pair of tongs.
Item, one pair of bellows. Item, one staff (to beat the feather-bed).
Item, one little pallet. Item, two blankets.
Item, one pair of sheets. Item, one coverlet.
Item, six white cushions. Item, one folding (*i.e.* trestle) table.
Item, one long chair.
Item, one hanging candlestick of laten. Item, two little bells*.

To a young girl fresh from surroundings such as these, the amenities of life which she found in London must have been beyond her wildest dreams. Even to the author of the *Italian Relation* who, as a member of the household of the Milanese Ambassador, must have been accustomed to a fairly high standard of comfort, it appeared that the

Londoners live comfortably.... It [London] abounds with every article of luxury, as well as with the necessaries of life: but the most remarkable thing in London, is the wonderful quantity of wrought silver. I do not allude to that in private houses, though the landlord of the house in which the Milanese ambassador lived, had plate to the amount of 100 crowns, but to the shops of London. In one single street, named the Strand, leading to St Paul's, there are fifty-two goldsmiths' shops, so rich and full of silver vessels, great and small, that in all the shops in Milan, Rome, Venice and Florence put together, I do not think there would be found so many of the magnificence that are to be seen in London. And these vessels are all either salt cellars, or drinking cups, or basins to hold water for the hands; for they eat off that fine tin which is little inferior to silver (pewter). These great riches of London are not occasioned by its inhabitants being

* H. S. Bennett, *op. cit.* pp. 91–6.

noblemen or gentlemen; being all, on the contrary, persons of low degree and artificers who have congregated there from all parts of the island, and from Flanders, and from every other place.... Still, the citizens of London are thought quite as highly of there, as the Venetian gentlemen are at Venice*.

Besides the new standards of comfort and luxury in house-furnishing which the houses and shops of London must have suggested to Christian, the latest fashions in dress would no doubt be a matter of keen interest and possibly amusement to her. For at the time when she first came to London, the costume of both men and women was marked by an extravagance which, Fairholt suggests, made it

appear as if the minds of the English nobility and gentry sought relief in the invention of all that was absurd in apparel, as a counter-excitement to the feverish spirit engendered by civil war. All that was monstrous in the past was resuscitated, and its ugliness added to by the invention of the day, until ladies and gentlemen appear like mere caricatures of humanity†.

The feature in the women's dress on which all the ingenuity of the leaders of fashion was expended, was the headgear, in which the guiding principle seems to have been the combination of the maximum amount of discomfort with the minimum degree of beauty. The horned head-dresses of the previous century were still popular, and in spite of Lydgate's assurance that

Beauté wol shewe thogh hornys wer away

the "horns became exalted and shot forth more luxuriantly than ever."‡ Sometimes they were varied by immense voluminous turbans; in the latter half of the century they gradually gave place to the more

* *Italian Relation*, p. 42. † *Costume in England*, I, p. 171.
‡ *Ibid.* p. 188.

becoming tall steeple caps, set at an angle of about 45 degrees to the top of the head and sometimes reaching more than two feet in height. The heaviness of the headgear found its counterpart in dresses of a length and width which must have made them very unpractical for ordinary wear; often they were so voluminous that the superfluous fulness had to be carried over the arm. The younger women wore them cut very low, which provided a favourite object of attack for the preachers and moralists of the day. The shoes were narrow and very pointed.

At the present time the monotony of men's costume enables them to assume an air of superiority to the vagaries of fashion. The greater variety both in colour and cut which it shewed in former times had at least the advantage that they shared with women the obloquy of those pessimists who, in all ages, have regarded the extravagances of fashion as a sure sign of the imminent damnation of the human race.

A ballad written, probably, at about the time that Christian first came to London is interesting because its enumeration of the various items of dress which the writer condemns provides a detailed description of the appearance of a dandy of the day.

Ye prowd galantts hertlesse,
With your hygh cappis witlesse;
And your schort gownys thriftlesse,
Have brought this land in gret hevynesse,
With your long peked shone
Therefore your thrifte[a] is almost don;
And your longe here into your eyen
Have brought this land to gret pyne[b]*.

[a] prosperity. [b] want.

* Harl. MS., 372, quoted in Fairholt, *op. cit.* 1, p. 180.

The choice of material which the shops of London offered must have been a revelation to Christian, accustomed to the limited resources of the country, which often failed completely. Margaret Paston was largely dependent on her husband for sending her supplies for the clothing both of the family and the servants, "for there is neither good cloth nor good frieze in this town."* Or if the material required was obtainable, it was not to be had "underneath 3s the yard, at the lowest price, and yet there is not enough of one cloth and colour to serve you, and as for to be purveyed in Suffolk, it will not be purveyed not now against this time without they had had warning at Michaelmas, as I am informed."†

London housekeeping, too, must have seemed a simple matter after the problems with which Christian would have seen her mother wrestling in Norfolk. The *Paston Letters* provide plenty of evidence of the difficulty of obtaining supplies of quite ordinary domestic commodities in the neighbouring markets. More than once Margaret Paston asks her husband to send or bring her sugar from London‡, and the fact that she has been able to obtain supplies of fish for Lent is an item of news well worth reporting to him§.

Christian's first baby, destined to be the Dean of St Paul's and the founder of St Paul's School, was born in 1466. For many years after that time her life must have been an alternation of joy and bitter sorrow, for, of the eleven sons and eleven daughters born to her, John was the only one to reach manhood.

* *Paston Letters*, No. 88.
† *Ibid.* No. 306.
‡ *E.g. ibid.* No. 48.
§ *Ibid.* No. 183.

One son, Thomas, was buried in the church of New Buckenham. Perhaps Christian had taken or sent him down to her old home in the hope that the fresh breezes of Norfolk would bring health to her delicate boy. But they could not prevail against the shadow which was to darken her whole life, and the inscription on his tomb—"Hic jacet Thomas, filius Henrici Collet civis et aldermani civitatis London, qui obiit die Nativitatis Sce Maree (*sic*) 1479"—provides the only record of the date of death of any of Christian's twenty-two children, except of the Dean himself, and shews that, at the most, little Thomas could not have been more than twelve years old when he died.

If Christian's married life was chequered by sorrow for the loss of her children, there was another side to it which must have been a continual source of pride and gratification to her. Her husband, Henry Colet, was evidently not only a man of marked business capacity, but also one whose character won him the respect and confidence of his fellow citizens. In 1476 his official service to the City of London began with his appointment as alderman of the ward of Farringdon Without. In the following year he became Sheriff, and, with his colleague, was the principal figure at one of the city dinners whose solemn splendour made such a deep impression on the author of the *Italian Relation*.

A no less magnificent banquet [than that given by the Lord Mayor] is given when two other officers named *sheriffs* are appointed; to which I went, being anxious to see everything well.... At this feast I observed the infinite profusion of victuals, and of plate, which was for the most part gilt;

and amongst other things, I noticed how punctiliously they sat in their order, and the extraordinary silence of every one, insomuch that I could have imagined it one of those public repasts of the Lacedemonians that I have read of*.

To a man as interested and curious as the writer of the *Relation*, the decorous silence of the City Fathers must have seemed not only tedious but a wasted opportunity of gathering information about the country and people he was visiting.

The Lord Mayor under whom Colet served, Humphrey Heyford, was apparently a "sykley man, ffeble and weke, wherefore he had not his mind so fresshley," so that Henry Colet's term of office as Sheriff was probably a more than usually busy one†.

The inclusion of "Henry Colet, alderman of London, merchant of the Staple of Calais" in a General Pardon in 1480 must have been a source of gratification to him and his wife, but what the "offences committed by him" were, or why he should have been relieved of "all debts and accounts due from him to the King before 24 January last," does not appear, though it is evident that, for some reason, Colet had been in arrears in the payment of his taxes. It is to be hoped that the further provision "that this should not extend to any merchandise of wools, wool-fells, hides, tin and lead," did not cause him serious embarrassment.

The political events of the year 1483 appeared at first to be going to react highly favourably on the fortunes of Colet and his wife, for, when the coronation of Edward V was planned to take place in June, he was one of the fifty gentlemen who were sum-

* p. 44. † See Lupton, *Life of Dean Colet*, pp. 9–10.

moned to attend in order that the honour of knighthood might be conferred upon them.

Perhaps Colet valued this proposed honour from the King less than the marks of recognition of his services which he had already received from his fellow citizens. The distribution of titles as a means of securing political support was not unknown even in the Middle Ages, and it may well be that Christian's connection, through her brother's second marriage, with the family of the Duke of Buckingham, still at that time a staunch follower of the Duke of Gloucester, as well as Colet's own position as a prominent member of the first of the great Companies, made him, in the eyes of the Protector, a desirable recipient of public honours.

But whatever the motive in Gloucester's mind may have been, Christian Colet would have been less than human if she had not felt a glow of pride and satisfaction as she read the young King's letter of summons to her husband:

> Trusty and well-beloved, we greet you well; and by the advice of our dearest uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, Protector of this our royaume during our young age, and of the Lords of our Council, we write unto you at this time, willing and natheless charging you to prepare and furnish yourself to receive the noble order of Knighthood at our coronation; which, by God's grace, we intend shall be solemnised the 22nd day of this month at our palace of Westminster, commanding you to be here at our Tower of London, four days before our said coronation, to have communication with commissioners concerning that matter; not failing hereof in any wise, as you intend to please us, and as ye will answer.

If, however, Gloucester's object had been to secure Colet's support for his usurpation of the throne, he

was evidently unsuccessful, since Colet ultimately accepted the honour of knighthood, not from him, but from his conqueror and successor, Henry VII.

But while the Colets themselves apparently took no part in the coronation of Richard III, the occasion gave Christian an opportunity of seeing her brother William, who, as we have seen, was in attendance, either in the train of the Duke of Buckingham or in the office of butler at the King's coronation, which went with the lordship of Buckenham. Probably he stayed with his sister and brother-in-law, and brought them the latest news from Norfolk. The political situation, too, with which Knyvet was so closely in touch, must have been a topic of eager discussion, and mutual inquiry as to the real state of feeling in London and the eastern counties. Little can any of them have thought that before the end of that year the man who had come to London to honour the King, and whose prospects seemed so fair, would have turned his arms against his sovereign, and be a hunted fugitive on the Welsh border. Probably this was the last time that Christian saw her brother before the Battle of Bosworth made it safe for the survivors of Buckingham's rebellion to shew themselves, and the next two years must have brought Christian a good deal of anxiety, and possibly some unpleasantness as the sister of one of the conspirators. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to believe that she would share her brother's and husband's hostility to a man who, though history has never proved the fact, was commonly believed to have murdered his young nephews.

If the Colets found it prudent to keep themselves

out of the public eye during the reign of the usurper, the accession of Henry VII brought them once more into the sunshine of Court favour, while the year after the opening of the new dynasty saw the culmination of Sir Henry's civic career in his election as Lord Mayor of London.

With the growth of Parliamentary government, and its implied centralisation, the importance of the officials of local government has waned with the gradual shrinkage of their functions. In the fifteenth century, however, the Lord Mayor "with yn London (was) next unto the kyng in alle maner thynge,"* and took precedence even of the peers of the realm. The impression created by the pomp and splendour of his position on the mind of a foreigner may be gathered from the author of the *Italian Relation*, whose anxiety to "see every thing well," and facility in describing what he saw provide a valuable commentary on the English customs of the time as seen by an outsider.

Of these aldermen, one is elected every year by themselves, to be a magistrate named the mayor, who is in no less estimation with the Londoners, than the person of our most serene lord (the Doge) is with us, or than the Gonfaloniero at Florence; and the day on which he enters upon his office, he is obliged to give a sumptuous entertainment to all the principal people in London as well as to foreigners of distinction; and I, being one of the guests, together with your Magnificence, carefully observed every room and hall, and the court, where the company were all seated, and was of opinion, that there must have been a thousand or more persons at table. This dinner lasted four hours or more;

* Gregory's *Chronicle*. See Gairdner, *Historical Collections of a Citizen of London*, p. 222.

but it is true that the dishes were not served with that assiduity and frequency that is the custom with us in Italy; there being long pauses between each course, the company conversing the while*.

It is interesting to notice that there is no mention of the speeches which are now such an important feature of the Lord Mayor's banquet. We may hope, however, that the conversation made the banquet more entertaining for the Italian visitor than the Lacedemonian feast of the Sheriffs.

The year of Sir Henry Colet's mayoralty was marked by several events of public interest. In spite of Henry VII's decisive victory at the Battle of Bosworth, the legacy of unrest left by the quarrels and disturbances of the past century remained, and in the first year of the new reign, some of the malcontents set up a rallying point for their rebellious instincts in the person of Lambert Simnel. The insurrection did not last long, and the King shewed a nice sense of proportion in making Simnel a scullion in his kitchen, instead of condemning him to a traitor's death.

In January, 1486, the city took its part in the celebration of the union of the Houses of Lancaster and York by the marriage of Henry to Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Edward IV, and towards the end of Sir Henry's term of office still greater rejoicings welcomed the birth of an heir to the throne.

During this year of his mayoralty his private responsibilities were increased by his appointment as guardian to Elizabeth, Margery, and Ellen, the daughters and heirs of John Iwardby. This was no

* p. 44.

light task, for not only did he undertake the care of the girls themselves, which involved finding them suitable husbands, but also the wardship of their lands. Perhaps, in helping her husband when he turned to her for advice on their bringing up, and in sharing his responsibility for their welfare, Christian found some little consolation for the loss of her own daughters in their babyhood.

Chapter XI

AT STEPNEY

It is probable that by the time of Sir Henry's first mayoralty he had acquired his country home in Stepney, a large house called Great Place, surrounded by a moat, opposite the west end of the church. Stepney or Stebenhithe, as it was still called, was a favourite country resort of the rich merchants of London, and Sir Henry was not the first Lord Mayor to own a house in the village, for in 1299 Edward I held a parliament there in the house of Henry Waleis, Mayor of London*. Up to the beginning of the fifteenth century the manor of Stepney had been the property of the Bishop of London, and in 1292, the Bishop of the time had attempted to convert the woods which covered a large part of the estate into a game preserve. The Mayoralty Court of London, however, as the representatives of the common people, resisted the proposal, and the Bishops had to content themselves with the entertainment provided by the tournaments, which, between 1305 and 1331, were constantly held near the palace. When, after 1404, the Bishops left Stepney, the London merchants still continued to make their country homes there, and gradually more and more houses began to appear in the woods and fields. The church, which, originally an old Saxon building, had been rebuilt by St Dunstan, was again restored, and only

* Stow, *Survey of London*, I, p. 54.

the sedilia and the old font were kept. At the present time both these have almost entirely disappeared.

In spite of its character of a country resort, Stepney took a prominent part in two movements which marked the end of the fifteenth century. The development of the navy was already beginning to make the eastern reaches of the Thames re-echo to the sound of hammer and saw, and it was not long before the water's edge began to be fringed with houses and shipyards, whence were launched the ships that followed the men of Bristol in their exploration of the world.

The other sign of the times to be seen in Stepney was the enthusiasm of successive incumbents for the new learning. Richard Fox, one of the principal diplomats of Henry VII, who gave up the living in 1487 to become Bishop of Exeter, was a warm patron of the movement. John Colet himself was vicar for some time, and only resigned when he was appointed to the Deanery of St Paul's*. From 1522 to 1544 it was held by Rector Layton, whose contribution to the movement took the form of a bitter campaign against the monasteries, and a vehement demand for their suppression. The work of his vicar, Dr Heynes, was of a more constructive nature, for he went over to France to confer with Melancthon, and did his utmost to persuade him to come to England to meet the leaders of the new movement there.

John Colet's early association with the reformers must have made the question of the New Learning a familiar one in his parents' house. Whether they shared his intellectual courage, or preferred to adhere

* The date of his appointment is not known.

to the interpretation of the Scriptures supplied to them by the priests, it is difficult to say, though the impression which Christian made on Erasmus—"tantum animi robur foeminae praestitit, non eruditio, sed pietas erga Deum"—suggests that it was the practical rather than the metaphysical aspect of religion which most appealed to her. From her enrolment, too, in the brotherhood of Christ Church, Canterbury, in 1510, in order to obtain the benefit of the prayers, masses and obits which they performed, it would seem that in his denial of the efficacy of vicarious prayer, which he carried so far as to leave no provision in his will for masses for the repose of his soul, John Colet did not take his mother with him.

Although no formal description of Christian's character has come down to us, the references to her in the letters of Colet and Erasmus and other contemporaries, and the careful and considerate provisions of her will are, as it were, the strokes of a brush, outlining a figure of fine courage and gracious sympathy. The impression which she made, either personally or by reputation, on Polydore Vergil was so strong that, in relating John Colet's family history, he cannot let her name pass without adding a personal tribute in the words "a noble woman."

The affection and admiration which Erasmus felt for her, appear more than once in his correspondence with John Colet. Not only her "piety," but her "rare sincerity" seemed to him to distinguish her from other women, and when he reproaches his friend Amerbach for giving way to inordinate grief at the loss of his baby daughter, it is Christian Colet

that he sets before him as an example of self-control and resignation in sorrow.

Evidently his friendship was reciprocated, for in 1516 John Colet tells his friend that his mother is still living with him in a charming old age, and often speaks cheerfully and pleasantly of Erasmus.

In an earlier letter, also written to Erasmus, Colet describes his mother's grief for one of his servants who had died in her house, and says that she loved him as a son, and wept for his death as though he had been more than a son. This affection for those who served her is expressed in her will, in which she remembers not only her servants but all who should take part in the ceremony of her burial. But her charity does not end there, for not only do the "poure householders" of Stepney receive bequests, but also those of "the warde where I dwelled in in London....And...of great Weldon litell Weldon Kirkby Denethorpe Dene and Bulwik in the countie of Northampton and of Thirnyng in the Countie of Hunt," all villages where her husband had held property.

While there are, naturally, no records of any philanthropic work done by Christian during her life-time, we may be sure that this clause in her will came from no sudden impulse, but that it is to be taken rather as evidence that, wherever she was, the needs of the poor were always in her thoughts, and that, in providing for them after her death she was perpetuating, so far as was possible, the work of her life-time.

It was probably towards the end of the century that John Colet became vicar of Stepney, and came to

live near his parents. His advent must have brought a new element into their lives, for while Sir Henry Colet's interests were in politics and commerce, his son's pre-eminence in the intellectual movement of the day would make Stepney a centre of attraction for the leaders of progressive thought, and especially for his friends and colleagues, More, Linacre and Grocyn, the circle whose brilliant and varied qualities of mind and heart, and profound knowledge of the classics surprised Erasmus into such enthusiasm for English culture.

You ask me how I like England—If you will believe me my Robert*, I never was so delighted. I have found the climate most agreeable and healthful, and along with politeness an erudition not commonplace and trivial, but so profound and exact both in Greek and Latin, that, except for the sake of seeing it, I now scarcely care to go to Italy. In listening to Colet I seem to hear Plato, Grocyn's full-orbed sphere of knowledge who can help admiring? Than the judgment of Linacre, what can be more penetrating, more profound, more delicate? Than the disposition of Thomas More did nature ever fashion aught more gentle, more endearing, more happy? But why continue the catalogue? It is amazing how far and wide classical scholarship is flourishing here; so that if you are wise you will lose no time in returning.

* Letter to Robert Fisher in Italy, Dec. 5th, 1497.

Chapter XII

LAST YEARS

In spite of a decree that, as he had "once honourably served the office of mayor [he] should not be charged again against his will," Sir Henry Colet, in 1495, allowed himself to be elected Lord Mayor for the second time. It was an odd coincidence that this year, like that of his first term of office, should have been marked by a usurper's bid for the throne. Perkin Warbeck, who, in 1491, proclaimed himself Duke of York, was far more successful than his predecessor, Lambert Simnel, in imposing upon his contemporaries, or in persuading them that it was to their advantage to acknowledge him, and in the end he paid for the recognition he had enjoyed on Tyburn Hill.

In 1495, after abortive attempts to land in Kent and Ireland, he took refuge in Scotland, and so left the way clear for the renewal of commercial intercourse between England and Flanders, which, as Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, had been one of the first to admit him to the select circle of Royalty, had been closed for many months. A treaty was concluded, and, in accordance with the custom of the time, guarantees for its observance were asked for from some of the chief cities, under their common seal. To the consternation of the King, the Corporation of London refused to affix its seal. The matter was urgent, for the Lord Chamberlain was on the point of leaving for Calais to keep his appointment

with the Flemish signatories. At the King's command Ministers of the Crown hurried down to the Guildhall to meet the citizens and try to extort the necessary guarantee. The Corporation was adamant, and insisted upon a week's respite to give them time to put their objections in writing. For all practical purposes, this delay amounted to refusal, and in this dilemma the King appealed to the Mayor.

While Sir Henry Colet, no doubt, appreciated the flattering implication that his bond was as good as that of the Corporation of London, he may have felt some diffidence at giving a security which his colleagues had so firmly refused. If he hesitated, however, it was not for long, and the Lord Chamberlain was able to keep his appointment at Calais with Sir Henry's personal guarantee "under plegge and bonde of all my goodes present and to come" in his pocket. According to Dr Knight*, his service at this critical moment was rewarded by his exemption from the extortions of Empson and Dudley, which, in view of the temptation offered by his immense wealth, represented a notable sacrifice on the part of the avaricious King.

The expiration of Sir Henry's term of office in 1496 did not bring with it any relaxation of his activities either as a citizen or a merchant. In 1499 and 1500, and again in 1504, he was elected Mayor of the Staple of "wools, hides and woolfells, and lead" at Westminster, and his inclusion amongst the citizens and mercers of London who received a pardon for "trade offences" in 1502, shews that he was still engaged in trade on his own account.

* *Life of Dean Colet*, p. 5.

In 1500 he was one of those entrusted with the unpopular task of receiving and collecting the benevolences granted to the King, and when, in 1502, the Corporation of London was engaged in one of its periodical attempts to purify some of the unhealthy parts of London, Colet was appointed to serve on a Commission

to enquire by jury of the City of London into the stoppage of the ditch whereby the prison of the Fleet was long ago enclosed by the filth...and rubbish thrown into it, so that the dwelling place of those detained in the prison is in danger and the prisoners and others dwelling there are infected by the abominable stenches and often suffer serious diseases and languors; and the course of boats and ships to the bridges of Flete and Holburn with victuals and other goods is impeded day by day, and the reflux of the river called "Turnemyll Broke" is so stopped with sand that it can no longer run naturally to the Thames as it used to do(70).

The tendency of the Fleet to become blocked was a constant source of anxiety to the authorities. Much the same condition of affairs called forth a complaint by the Earl of Lincoln in 1307, who pointed out that "whereas in times past the course of water, running at London under Oldeborne bridge, and Fleete bridge into the Thames, had beene of such bredth and depth, that 10 or 12 ships Navies, at once with marchandises were wont to come to the foresaide bridge of Fleete, and some of them to Oldborne bridge: now the same course by filth of the Tanners and such others, was sore decaied." Although in response to the Earl's request that "the Maior of London with the shiriffs, and certain discrete Aldermen, might be appointed to view the course of the saide water, and that by the othes of good men, all

the aforesaide hinderances might bee removed," the water course was cleared, it was never brought to its former depth, and from the dignity of a river, it degenerated into a brook, "named Turnmill or Tremill Brooke because of the mills on it."*

Since that time it had been cleaned more than once, and when Stow was writing the last clearance had been made as a result of the Commission on which Colet sat, which ordered the whole course of the Fleet dike, as it was then called, to be scoured down to the Thames, to allow of a passage for boats as far as Fleet and Oldbourne Bridges, "which was a great commoditie to all the inhabitants in that part of the citie."†

It seems to have been in 1504 that John Colet was appointed Dean of St Paul's, and though there is some reason for thinking that he did not go into residence at the Deanery until May of the following year, his work in London would prevent him from spending much time in Stepney, so that for the last eighteen months of Sir Henry's life he and his wife were probably a good deal alone in their country home.

Perhaps Christian, realising more keenly than her busy husband that their time together must necessarily be growing short, rather grudged his continual immersion in public affairs, though she would no doubt warmly sympathise with his efforts to improve the conditions under which his fellow citizens lived. Probably, however, the phase of his activities which most appealed to her, and in which she, perhaps, was the prime mover, was the support he gave to the

* Stow, *op. cit.* I, p. 12. † *Ibid.* p. 13.

Church. At St Anthony's, his parish church in London, his munificence was commemorated by a window containing pictures of himself, his wife and ten sons and as many daughters. The accounts of St Michael's, Cornhill, refer to a gift he seems to have made of "a voyde piece of grounde in the Churche yarde to the Parson, Churchwardyns and Parisheoners," and it was probably a knowledge of his generosity in these matters that induced the University authorities at Cambridge to include him among those to whom they sent their appeal for funds for the building of Great St Mary's in 1505. What his response was we do not know. Perhaps the appeal came too late, for before the end of the year he was dead, and Christian, whose early married life had given promise of an old age surrounded by children and grandchildren, was left alone with one unmarried son.

Sir Henry was buried in his son's old church at Stepney, where he and his wife must have often sat together listening, perhaps with pride, perhaps with doubtful approval, to the son whose outspoken sermons, full of original thought and new conceptions, were even then making him an object of dislike to the reactionaries of the ecclesiastical world. By his last will, which was made, at the most, a few weeks before he died, Sir Henry left the whole of his estate, with the exception of a few legacies, to his wife and son. St Anthony's Church and St Dunstan's at Stepney each received 10*s.* to pay for masses for his soul, and another 40*s.* was left to St Dunstan's for the upkeep of the fabric.

His father's death left John Colet a rich man, and

it was probably about this time that his scheme for founding a school in the precincts of the Cathedral began to take definite shape. To Christian the plan must have offered a fresh interest in a life once more shadowed by personal loss, and it is not difficult to believe that she responded eagerly to the demands which her son made upon her sympathy and counsel. How firm a hold the school took upon her affections may be seen from the clause in her will in which she directs that on the day of her burial "the marster of the scole of poulys And the vssher and childern there come at one of the clock at after noone...and saye dirige aboute my coorse," and bequeaths "to euery childe there being present saying dirige ijd Item to the marster of the said scole of Powlys vjs viijd And to the vssher of the same iijs iiijd."

After her husband's death, Christian left Great Place, and moved into a smaller house standing within sight of the church, which was afterwards used by the masters of the school as a retreat in times of plague. Here her son seems often to have stayed with her, and brought

> many a guest to take the air,
> And pace the garden deep in curious talk.

Here, too, in 1510, came Henry Cornelius Agrippa, an ambassador from the Emperor, to devote such time as he could spare from the secret mission on which he was engaged, to studying the Epistles of St Paul under Colet. The contrast between the gay Court functions in which he was expected to take part and the quiet, austere household at Stepney must have been a strange one, and Professor Henry

Morley is probably right in suggesting that a man who spent his leisure as Agrippa did was glad when the masques and dancing were over, and he could "return to a house where time was passed in wiser occupation. There was nothing in a royal mummery to be compared for beauty with the tall, well-shapen form and spiritual face of Agrippa's host, one of the handsomest as well as best men in the land. As for the dean's mother, Dame Christian, who lived with him, surely she was more royal than the King."*

The *Letters and Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII* for 1509 contain an announcement of a General Pardon to a large number of persons, each of whom is mentioned by name†. The misdemeanour for which the pardon was granted is not stated, but as both "Lady Christian," widow of Sir Henry Colet, and her son were amongst those who benefited, it may be assumed that the offences were not very serious, and probably only technical.

In 1519 came the crowning tragedy of her life. It must have been bitter indeed to Christian to find that she, a woman of over seventy, with her life's work done, was to be left to mourn even her last surviving son, cut off in the full vigour of his manhood, almost before he could feel certain that the School to which he had given his time, his thought and his wealth was built on a firm and lasting foundation.

If Erasmus, away in Flanders, who had not seen

* Prof. H. Morley, *The Life of Henry Cornelius Agrippa*, I, p. 233.

† Ed. by Brewer. The following note occurs with reference to this pardon. "Every possible variation of name and designation of the parties is given, but no reason for the pardon is specified."

him for several years, could write of his death as "so bitter to me that the loss of no one for the last thirty years has affected me more," what must it have meant to the mother whose constant companion he had been, and to whom his career and good works must have been the chief interest of her life! Those who have come after can realise that his early death probably saved Colet from the martyrdom which his friend Thomas More had to undergo, but his mother was denied even that painful consolation.

Four more years of life were to be hers, years of loneliness, though cheered sometimes, perhaps, by visits from her son's friends, of boys from his School, or of "a stranger from foreign parts" who, returning home with the fruits of scholarship, brought to her the tribute of gratitude which he could not pay to the friend whose generosity had placed them within his reach.

As she sat alone, dreaming of the wonderful discoveries of new lands and strange peoples, and of old treasuries of thought and knowledge which her lifetime had revealed to a dazed and startled world, and of the new and higher ideals of life and learning that her son and his friends had set up, perhaps she came dimly to perceive something of what they would mean for a world weary of the turbulence and degradation of the Middle Ages, and waiting unconsciously for a fresh inspiration. Did she perhaps realise, too, that she herself, as the wife of a civic officer, and the mother of one of the leading figures in the New Learning, formed, as it were, a link between the past and the future? In the age that was dying one of the main factors in the life of the nation,

which was a conglomerate of separate townships rather than a homogeneous community, had been the power and importance of the city corporations; in the age that was coming to birth learning and culture, stimulated by the widening of the world's geographical and intellectual horizons, were making a fresh start in their uphill fight with barbarism.

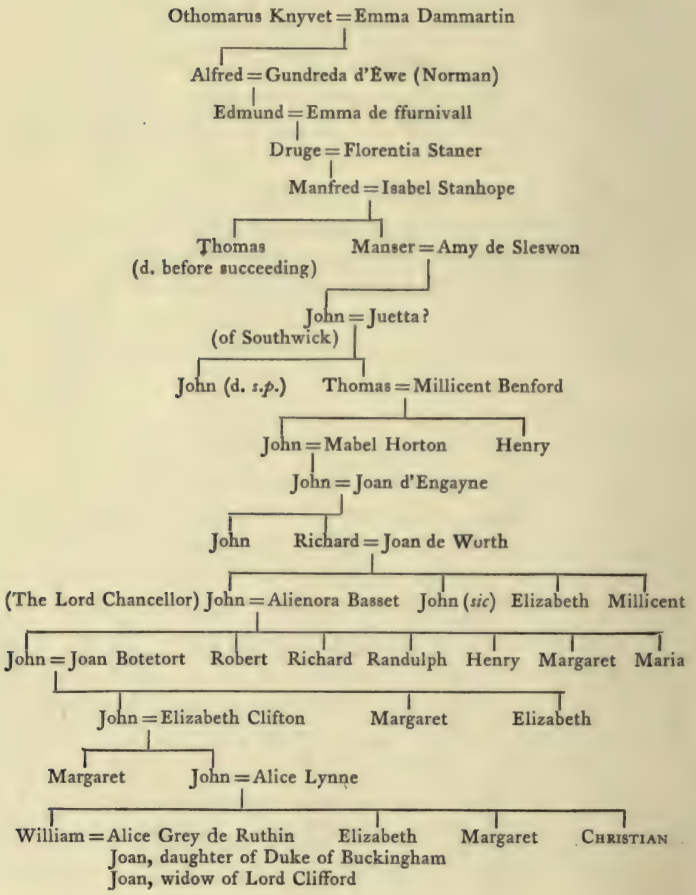
And so we leave Dame Christian, alone with her dreams, and her memories of a past which might well inspire her to bid farewell to the world with the words,

> Not few nor evil days my life hath seen
> Though I have known great sorrows in my time.
> And now I am fain to pass away in peace
> If God will but permit me to go hence.

Appendix I

THE DIRECT ANCESTORS OF CHRISTIAN KNYVET

from Harl. MS. 1074.



Appendix II

THE WILL OF DAME CHRISTIAN COLET

Extracted from the PRINCIPAL REGISTRY *of the* PROBATE DIVORCE *and* ADMIRALTY DIVISION *of the* HIGH COURT *of* JUSTICE

IN THE NAME OF GOD AMEN the xiijth day of the moneth of January the yere of our Lord God a thousande fyve hundred and xxij^{ti} And in the xiiijth yere of the reigne of King Henry the viijth I DAME CRISTIAN COLLETT Widowe being of hole mynde and good memory laude and praysing be vnto Almyghty God make and ordeyn this my present testamet and last will in maner and fourme folowing that is to sey First I recomende my soule vnto almighty God my maker and Redemer And to the glorious Virgyn his moder Saint Mary and to all the holy company of hevyn And my body to be buryed within the pishe Church of Stebenhith where as the bidy of Sir Henry Collet Knyght late my husbonde lieth buryed And that my body be buried before noone on the day that I shalbe buried And on the day befor my buriall I will that there be songe wtin the said parishe churche of Stebenhith a solemyn dirige by note for my soule and all xpen soules And on the same day at after noone before my buriall I woll that the marster of the scole of poulys And the vssher and childern there come at one of the clock at after noone on the same day and saye dirige aboute my coorse in my newe parlour where my body shalbe laide Item I geve and bequeath to euery childe there being present saying dirige ij^{d} Item to the marster of the said scole of Powlys vj^{s} viij^{d} And to the vssher of the same iij^{s} iiij^{d} And I woll that myn executours provide and ordeyn that there be fyfty poure women to bryng my body to the erthe and euery woman to bere aboute my soorse a taper of the weight of ij^{lb} Item I geve and bequeth to euery of the same women bering and holding a taper aboute my coorse a blak gowne of the value of vj^{s} viij^{d} Also I will that my said

executours provide and ordeyn my Tapers euery of them of the weight of xxv^{lb} whiche said iiij tapers I woll that iiij pore men holde them about my herse And I geve and bequeth to euery of the said pour men so holding a taper a blak gowne price x^{s} and a hatt price xx^{d} And I will that all the wax that belevith of all the said tapers aboue the wast hooly remayn to the Churche Wardeyns of the said parishe churche of Stebenhith to maynteyn the light of the Sepulcre there as longe as it woll endure Item I geve and bequeth to the high awter of the said parishe church of Stebunhith xx^{s} And to the curate for my buriall there to be had other xx^{s} Also I will that my said executours distribute and dispoase a monge the poure householders of the said pisshe of Stebunhith fyce poundes st. Item amonge the poure housholders of the warde where I dwelled in in London other v^{li} And amonge the poure housholders of great Weldon litell Weldon Kirkby Denethorp Dene and Bulwik in the countie of North^{t} and of Thirnyng in the countie of Hunt v^{li} Item I geve and bequeth to John Butler my serunt x mrcs Item I geve and bequeth to Sir John Tomson my chapleyn xl^{s} Item I geve and bequeth to Margaret Nele a gilt cupp and a ryng of golde Item I geve and bequeth to Agners Mayde my serunt x mrcs Item I geve and bequeth to William Callowe xl^{s} And all suche stuffe as I was mynded to haue lefte in my house in Stebunhith to the maister and company of mercery of London as pticulerly doth appere by a bill of parcells made of the same which said stuffe I haue hooly and freely gevyn and deluered vnto my kynsman Edmond Knevett Sergeaunt Porter to our soueraigne lord the Kyng And I woll that he shalhaue and enioye the same wtout pturbanns vexacion or agaynsaying of the said maister or feliship of mercers or of my said executours or of any of them in any maner of wise any gifte or graunt aforemade to the contrary in anywise notwtstanding And where I haue gevyn and deliuered vnto my husbands kynnesman John Collet Citezen and mcer of London certeyn stuff comprised in a bill I woll that the same John Collett shalhaue and enioye all the said stuffe and euery parte and parcell of the same according to my gifte wtout

pturbanns vexacion or agaynsaying of my said executours or of any other persone or psones in any maner of wise And I woll that my said executours doo honestly kepe and fynde wtin my said howsein Stebunhith all my serunts during the space of a moneth next ensuying my decesse The residue of all my goods moueable and vnmoueable not bequethed after my dets paid the costs of my burying doon and this my present testament and last wille in all things fulfilled hooly I geve and bequeth to mynexecutours vnderwritten they therwith to do their freewill and pleasure And of this my last wille and testament I make and ordeyn my executours marster William Garrard Clerk and Richard Greshin citezern and mercer of London Item I geve and bequeath to euery of them for their labour in that behalf iij^{li} vj^{s} viij^{d} And ouerseer of the same my said testament and last will I make and ordeyn the forsaid Edmond Knyvet And I the forsaid Cristian renounce revoke and annull all and singuler willes and testaments by me before made and all and singuler legacies and bequests to them or in any of them conteyned And all and singuler executours and ouerseers in them or in any of them And that noon will or testament to be of any effect but only this my present testament and last will IN WITNESSE whereof to this my present testament and last wille I haue sett my seall yeven the day and yere aboue rehersed.

Proved 22nd November 1523

Fos. 13. OB.
HK. 23. Botfield.

Appendix III

REFERENCES

It has been thought better to give the references to the extracts from the Patent and Close Rolls quoted and cited in the text here rather than as footnotes, where their frequent occurrence might annoy the reader.

(1) Close Rolls, June 28, 1328.
(2) Patent Rolls, June 12, 1273.
(3) *Ibid.* Apr. 26, 1286.
(4) *Ibid.* Nov. 2, 1289.
(5) *Ibid.* Aug. 20, 1295.
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(7) Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland, Feb. 23, 1301 (O.S.).
(8) Calendar of State Papers, Irish Series, Sept. 20, 1576.
(9) Close Rolls, June 26 1278.
(10) *Ibid.* 1290.
(11) Patent Rolls, June 11, 1293.
(12) *Ibid.* Mar. 6, 1302.
(13) *Ibid.* Nov. 5, 1310.
(14) Close Rolls, July 5, 1311.
(15) *Ibid.* Nov. 5, 1310.
(16) Patent Rolls, Mar. 24, 1324
(17) *Ibid.* Feb. 15, 1327.
(18) *Ibid.* Apr. 14, 1326.
(19) *Ibid.* Oct. 16, 1336.
(20) *Ibid.* July 6, 1338.
(21) *Ibid.* Apr. 6, 1340.
(22) *Ibid.* Aug. 24, 1340.
(23) *Ibid.* Dec. 19, 1340.
(24) *Ibid.* Apr. 21, 1340.
(25) *Ibid.* Aug. 4, 1341.
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(27) Patent Rolls, July 26, 1337.
(28) Close Rolls, Jan. 28, 1344.
(29) *Ibid.* June 1, 1345.
(30) Patent Rolls.
(31) *Ibid.* Feb. 2, 1350.
(32) *Ibid.* Aug. 6, 1320.
(33) *Ibid.* May 18, 1322.
(34) *Ibid.* Sept. 6, 1322.
(35) *Ibid.* May 19, 1324.
(36) Close Rolls, Dec. 31, 1325.
(37) *Ibid.* June 28, 1328.
(38) *Ibid.* Dec. 13, 1328.
(39) Patent Rolls, Nov. 20, 1388.
(40) *Ibid.* May 5, 1380.
(41) *Ibid.* Feb. 25, 1401.
(42) *Ibid.* June 28, 1381.
(43) *Ibid.* Oct. 10, 1391.
(44) *Ibid.* Mar. 8, 1382.
(45) *Ibid.* May 20, 1382.
(46) *Ibid.* July 7, 1384.
(47) *Ibid.* Feb. 5, 1392.
(48) *Ibid.* Dec. 18, 1399.
(49) *Ibid.* Sept. 8, 1403.
(50) *Ibid.* Jan. 7, 1405.
(51) *Ibid.* Apr. 1, 1405.
(52) *Ibid.* Nov. 3, 1427.
(53) *Ibid.* May 6, 1430.
(54) *Ibid.* Jan. 12, 1438.
(55) *Ibid.* June 5, 1438.
(56) *Ibid.* July 13, 1461.
(57) *Ibid.* Dec. 1, 1447.
(58) *Ibid.* Oct. 20, 1461.
(59) *Ibid.* *ibid.*
(60) *Ibid.* Dec. 8, 1461.
(61) *Ibid.* May 14, 1462.
(62) *Ibid.* Sept. 4, 1469.
(63) *Ibid.* Oct. 27, 1470.
(64) *Ibid.* July 7, 1463.
(65) *Ibid.* Apr. 20, 1465.
(66) *Ibid.* May 13, 1480
(67) *Ibid.* Mar. 11, 1481.
(68) *Ibid.* July 18, 1483.
(69) *Ibid.* Mar. 9, 1490.
(70) *Ibid.* Apr. 5, 1502.

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