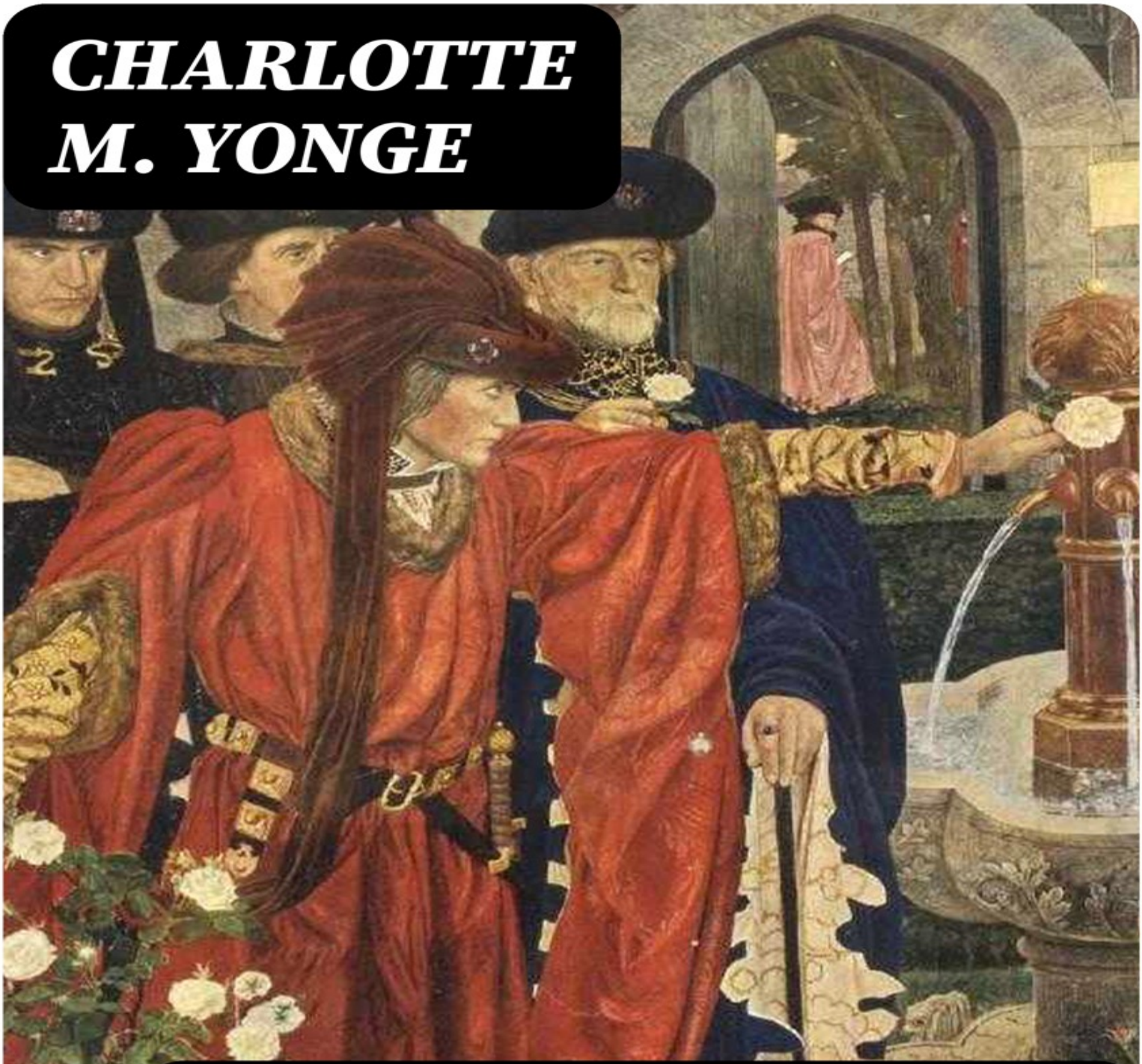
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE



GRISLY GRISELL; OR, THE LAIDLY LADY OF WHITBURN: A TALE OF THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Charlotte M. Yonge

Grisly Grisell; Or, The Laidly Lady of Whitburn: A Tale of the Wars of the Roses

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CHAPTER I
AN EXPLOSION

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

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

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

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

By the time the gentle but stately Countess had reached the place, all the grown-up persons of the establishment—knights, squires, grooms, scullions, and females of every degree—had thronged round them, but parted at her approach, though one of the knights said, "Nay, Lady Countess, 'tis no sight for you. The poor little maid is dead, or nigh upon it."

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

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

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

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

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

The crowd parted enough for her to make way to where a girl of about ten was lying prostrate and bleeding with her head on a woman’s lap.

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

“Worse with Hodge Smith for letting him touch his irons.”

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

The Countess, again ordering peace, reached the girl, whose moans showed that she was still alive, and between the barber-surgeon and the porter’s wife she was lifted up, and carried to a bed, the Countess Alice keeping close to

her, though the “Mother of the Maidens,” who was a somewhat helpless personage, hung back, declaring that the sight of the wounds made her swoon. There were terrible wounds upon the face and neck, which seemed to be almost bared of skin. The lady, who had been bred to some knowledge of surgical skill, together with the barber-surgeon, did their best to allay the agony with applications of sweet oil. Perhaps if they had had more of what was then considered skill, it might have been worse for her.

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

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

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

There was a move at the entrance of the lady, and her husband rose, came forward, and as he gave her the

courteous kiss of greeting, demanded, “What is all this coil? Is the little wench dead?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Is this true, Leonard?” demanded the Earl again, amazed at the frantic proceeding, and Leonard muttered “Aye,” vouchsafing no more, and looking black as thunder at a fair, handsome boy who pressed to his side and said, “Uncle,” doffing his cap, “so please you, my lord, the barrels had just been brought in upon Hob Carter’s wain, and Leonard said they ought to have the Lord Earl’s arms on

them. So he took a bar of hot iron from the forge to mark the saltire on them, and thereupon there was this burst of smoke and flame, and the maid, who was leaning over, prying into his doings, had the brunt thereof."

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

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

Next, Lord Salisbury's severity fell upon Hob the carter and Hodge the smith, for leaving such perilous wares unwatched in the court-yard. Servants were not dismissed for carelessness in those days, but soundly flogged, a punishment considered suitable to the "blackguard" at any age, even under the mildest rule. The gunner, being somewhat higher in position, and not in charge at the moment, was not called to account, but the next question was, how the "Mother of the Maids"—the gouvernante in charge of the numerous damsels who formed the train of the Lady of Salisbury, and were under education and training—could have permitted her maidens to stray into the regions appropriated to the yeomen and archers, and others of the meiné, where they certainly had no business.

It appeared that the good and portly lady had last seen the girls in the gardens “a playing at the ball” with some of the pages, and that there, on a sunny garden seat, slumber had prevented her from discovering the absence of the younger part of the bevy. The demure elder damsels deposed that, at the sound of wains coming into the court, the boys had rushed off, and the younger girls had followed them, whether with or without warning was not made clear. Poor little Grisell’s condition might have been considered a sufficient warning, nevertheless the two companions in her misdemeanour were condemned to a whipping, to enforce on them a lesson of maidenliness; and though the Mother of the Maids could not partake of the flagellation, she remained under her lord’s and lady’s grave displeasure, and probably would have to submit to a severe penance from the priest for her carelessness. Yet, as she observed, Mistress Grisell was a North Country maid, never couthly or conformable, but like a boy, who would moreover always be after Leonard Copeland, whether he would or no.

It was the more unfortunate, as Lord Salisbury lamented to his wife, because the Copelands were devoted to the Somerset faction; and the King had been labouring to reconcile them to the Dacres, and to bring about a contract of marriage between these two unfortunate children, but he feared that whatever he could do, there would only be additional feud and bitterness, though it was clear that the mishap was accidental. The Lord of Whitburn himself was in Ireland with the Duke of York, while his lady was in attendance on the young Queen, and it was judged right and seemly to despatch to her a courier with the tidings of

her daughter’s disaster, although in point of fact, where a house could number sons, damsels were not thought of great value, except as the means of being allied with other houses. A message was also sent to Sir William Copeland that his son had been the death of the daughter of Whitburn; for poor little Grisell lay moaning in a state of much fever and great suffering, so that the Lady Salisbury could not look at her, nor hear her sighs and sobs without tears, and the barber-surgeon, unaccustomed to the effects of gunpowder, had little or no hope of her life.

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

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

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

“I reck not,” growled Leonard.

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

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

“Yea, is not she contracted to thee?”

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

“They would never hang thee.”

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

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

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

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

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

And meanwhile poor Grisell was trying to frame with her torn and flayed cheeks and lips, “O lady, lady, visit it not on him! Let not Leonard be punished. It was my fault for getting into his way when I should have been in the garden. Dear Madge, canst thou speak for him?”

Madge was Edmund’s sister, Margaret of York, who stood trembling and crying by Grisell’s bed.

CHAPTER II
THE BROKEN MATCH

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> The Earl of Salisbury, called Prudence.
> *Contemporary Poem*.

LITTLE Grisell Dacre did not die, though day after day she lay in a suffering condition, tenderly watched over by the Countess Alice. Her mother had been summoned from attendance on the Queen, but at first there only was returned a message that if the maid was dead she should be embalmed and sent north to be buried in the family vault, when her father would be at all charges. Moreover, that the boy should be called to account for his crime, his father being, as the Lady of Whitburn caused to be written, an evil-minded minion and fosterer of the house of Somerset, the very bane of the King and the enemies of the noble Duke of York and Earl of Warwick.

The story will be clearer if it is understood that the Earl of Salisbury was Richard Nevil, one of the large family of Nevil of Raby Castle in Westmoreland, and had obtained his title by marriage with Alice Montagu, heiress of that earldom. His youngest sister had married Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, who being descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, was considered to have a better right to the throne than the house of Lancaster, though this had never been put forward since the earlier years of Henry V.

Salisbury had several sons. The eldest had married Anne Beauchamp, and was in her right Earl of Warwick, and had

estates larger even than those of his father. He had not, however, as yet come forward, and the disputes at Court were running high between the friends of the Duke of Somerset and those of the Duke of York.

The King and Queen both were known to prefer the house of Somerset, who were the more nearly related to Henry, and the more inclined to uphold royalty, while York was considered as the champion of the people. The gentle King and the Beauforts wished for peace with France; the nation, and with them York, thought this was giving up honour, land, and plunder, and suspected the Queen, as a Frenchwoman, of truckling to the enemy. Jack Cade's rising and the murder of the Duke of Suffolk had been the outcome of this feeling. Indeed, Lord Salisbury's messenger reported the Country about London to be in so disturbed a state that it was no wonder that the Lady of Whitburn did not make the journey. She was not, as the Countess suspected, a very tender mother. Grisell's moans were far more frequently for her nurse than for her, but after some space they ceased. The child became capable of opening first one eye, then the other, and both barber and lady perceived that she was really unscathed in any vital part, and was on the way to recovery, though apparently with hopelessly injured features.

Leonard Copeland had already been released from restraint, and allowed to resume his usual place among the Earl's pages; when the warder announced that he saw two parties approaching from opposite sides of the down, one as if from Salisbury, the other from the north; and presently he reported that the former wore the family badge, a white

rosette, the latter none at all, whence it was perceived that the latter were adherents of the Beauforts of Somerset, for though the “Rose of Snow” had been already adopted by York, Somerset had in point of fact not plucked the Red Rose in the Temple gardens, nor was it as yet the badge of Lancaster.

Presently it was further reported that the Lady of Whitburn was in the fore front of the party, and the Lord of Salisbury hastened to receive her at the gates, his suite being rapidly put into some order.

She was a tall, rugged-faced North Country dame, not very smooth of speech, and she returned his salute with somewhat rough courtesy, demanding as she sprang off her horse with little aid, “Lives my wench still?”

“Yes, madam, she lives, and the leech trusts that she will yet be healed.”

“Ah! Methought you would have sent to me if aught further had befallen her. Be that as it may, no doubt you have given the malapert boy his deserts.”

“I hope I have, madam,” began the Earl. “I kept him in close ward while she was in peril of death, but—” A fresh bugle blast interrupted him, as there clattered through the resounding gate the other troop, at sight of whom the Lady of Whitburn drew herself up, redoubling her grim dignity, and turning it into indignation as a young page rushed forward to meet the newcomers, with a cry of “Father! Lord Father, come at last;” then composing himself, doffed his cap and held the stirrup, then bent a knee for his father’s blessing.

“You told me, Lord Earl, the mischievous, murderous fellow was in safe hold,” said the lady, bending her dark brows.

“While the maid was in peril,” hastily answered Salisbury. “Pardon me, madam, my Countess will attend you.”

The Countess’s high rank and great power were impressive to the Baroness of Whitburn, who bent in salutation, but almost her first words were, “Madam, you at least will not let the murderous traitors of Somerset and the Queen prevail over the loyal friends of York and the nation.”

“There is happily no murder in the case. Praise be to the saints,” said Countess Alice, “your little maid—”

“Aye, that’s what they said as to the poor good Duke Humfrey,” returned the irate lady; “but that you, madam, the good-sister of the noble York, should stand up for the enemies of him, and the friends of France, is more than a plain North Country woman like me can understand. And there—there, turning round upon the steep steps, there is my Lord Earl hand and glove with that minion fellow of Somerset, who was no doubt at the bottom of the plot! None would believe it at Raby.”

“None at Raby would believe that my lord could be lacking in courtesy to a guest,” returned Lady Salisbury with dignity, “nor that a North Country dame could expect it of him. Those who are under his roof must respect it by fitting demeanour towards one another.”

The Lady of Whitburn was quenched for the time, and the Countess asked whether she did not wish to see her daughter, leading the way to a chamber hung with tapestry, and with a great curtained bed nearly filling it up, for the

patient had been installed in one of the best guest-chambers of the Castle. Lady Whitburn was surprised, but was too proud to show herself gratified by what she thought was the due of the dignity of the Dacres. An old woman in a hood sat by the bed, where there was a heap of clothes, and a dark-haired little girl stood by the window, whence she had been describing the arrivals in the Castle court.

“Here is your mother, my poor child,” began the Lady of Salisbury, but there was no token of joy. Grisell gave a little gasp, and tried to say “Lady Mother, pardon—” but the Lady of Whitburn, at sight of the reddened half of the face which alone was as yet visible, gave a cry, “She will be a fright! You evil little baggage, thus to get yourself scarred and made hideous! Running where you ought not, I warrant!” and she put out her hand as if to shake the patient, but the Countess interposed, and her niece Margaret gave a little cry. “Grisell is still very weak and feeble! She cannot bear much; we have only just by Heaven’s grace brought her round.”

“As well she were dead as like this,” cried this untender parent. “Who is to find her a husband now? and as to a nunnery, where is one to take her without a dower such as is hard to find, with two sons to be fitly provided? I looked that in a household like this, better rule should be kept.”

“None can mourn it more than myself and the Earl,” said the gentle Countess; “but young folks can scarce be watched hour by hour.”

“The rod is all that is good for them, and I trusted to you to give it them, madam,” said Lady Whitburn. “Now, the least that can be done is to force yonder malapert lad and

his father into keeping his contract to her, since he has spoilt the market for any other.”

“Is he contracted to her?” asked the Countess.

“Not fully; but as you know yourself, lady, your lord, and the King, and all the rest, thought to heal the breach between the houses by planning a contract between their son and my daughter. He shall keep it now, at his peril.”

Grisell was cowering among her pillows, and no one knew how much she heard or understood. The Countess was glad to get Lady Whitburn out of the room, but both she and her Earl had a very trying evening, in trying to keep the peace between the two parents. Sir William Copeland was devoted to the Somerset family, of whom he held his manor; and had had a furious quarrel with the Baron of Whitburn, when both were serving in France.

The gentle King had tried to bring about a reconciliation, and had induced the two fathers to consent to a contract for the future marriage of Leonard, Copeland’s second son, to Grisell Dacre, then the only child of the Lord of Whitburn. He had also obtained that the two children should be bred up in the household of the Earl of Salisbury, by way of letting them grow up together. On the same principle the Lady of Whitburn had been made one of the attendants of Queen Margaret—but neither arrangement had been more successful than most of those of poor King Henry.

Grisell indeed considered Leonard as a sort of property of hers, but she beset him in the manner that boys are apt to resent from younger girls, and when he was thirteen, and she ten years old, there was very little affection on his side.

Moreover, the birth of two brothers had rendered Grisell's hand a far less desirable prize in the eyes of the Copelands.

To attend on the Court was penance to the North Country dame, used to a hardy rough life in her sea-side tower, with absolute rule, and no hand over her save her husband's; while the young and outspoken Queen, bred up in the graceful, poetical Court of Aix or Nancy, looked on her as no better than a barbarian, and if she did not show this openly, reporters were not wanting to tell her that the Queen called her the great northern hag, or that her rugged unwilling curtsey was said to look as if she were stooping to draw water at a well. Her husband had kept her in some restraint, but when be had gone to Ireland with the Duke of York, offences seemed to multiply upon her. The last had been that when she had tripped on her train, dropped the salver wherewith she was serving the Queen, and broken out with a loud "Lawk a daisy!" all the ladies, and Margaret herself, had gone into fits of uncontrollable laughter, and the Queen had begged her to render her exclamation into good French for her benefit.

"Madam," she had exclaimed, "if a plain woman's plain English be not good enough for you, she can have no call here!" And without further ceremony she had flown out of the royal presence.

Margaret of Anjou, naturally offended, and never politic, had sent her a message, that her attendance was no longer required. So here she was going out of her way to make a casual inquiry, from the Court at Winchester, whether that very unimportant article, her only daughter, were dead or alive.

The Earl absolutely prohibited all conversation on affairs in debate during the supper which was spread in the hall, with quite as much state as, and even greater profusion and splendour, than was to be found at Windsor, Winchester, or Westminster. All the high born sat on the dais, raised on two steps with gorgeous tapestry behind, and a canopy overhead; the Earl and Countess on chairs in the centre of the long narrow table. Lady Whitburn sat beside the Earl, Sir William Copeland by the Countess, watching with pleasure how deftly his son ran about among the pages, carrying the trenchers of food, and the cups. He entered on a conversation with the Countess, telling her of the King's interest and delight in his beautiful freshly-founded Colleges at Eton and Cambridge, how the King rode down whenever he could to see the boys, listen to them at their tasks in the cloisters, watch them at their sports in the playing fields, and join in their devotions in the Chapel—a most holy example for them.

"Ay, for such as seek to be monks and shavelings," broke in the North Country voice sarcastically.

"There are others—sons of gentlemen and esquires—lodged in houses around," said Sir William, "who are not meant for cowl or for mass-priests."

"Yea, forsooth," called Lady Whitburn across the Earl and the Countess, "what for but to make them as feckless as the priests, unfit to handle lance or sword!"

"So, lady, you think that the same hand cannot wield pen and lance," said the Earl.

"I should like to see one of your clerks on a Border foray," laughed the Dame of Dacre. "'Tis all a device of the

Frenchwoman!”

“Verily?” said the Earl, in an interrogative tone.

“Ay, to take away the strength and might of Englishmen with this clerkly lore, so that her folk may have the better of them in France; and the poor, witless King gives in to her. And so while the Beauforts rule the roast—”

Salisbury caught her up. “Ay, the roast. Will you partake of these roast partridges, madam?”

They were brought round skewered on a long spit, held by a page for the guest to help herself. Whether by her awkwardness or that of the boy, it so chanced that the bird made a sudden leap from the impalement, and deposited itself in the lap of Lady Whitburn’s scarlet kirtle! The fact was proclaimed by her loud rude cry, “A murrain on thee, thou ne’er-do-weel lad,” together with a sounding box on the ear.

“’Tis thine own greed, who dost not—”

“Leonard, be still—know thy manners,” cried both at once the Earl and Sir William, for, unfortunately, the offender was no other than Leonard Copeland, and, contrary to all the laws of pagedom, he was too angry not to argue the point. “’Twas no doing of mine! She knew not how to cut the bird.”

Answering again was a far greater fault than the first, and his father only treated it as his just desert when he was ordered off under the squire in charge to be soundly scourged, all the more sharply for his continuing to mutter, “It was her fault.”

And sore and furrowed as was his back, he continued to exclaim, when his friend Edmund of York came to condole

with him as usual in all his scrapes, “’Tis she that should have been scourged for clumsiness! A foul, uncouth Border dame! Well, one blessing at least is that now I shall never be wedded to her daughter—let the wench live or die as she lists!”

That was not by any means the opinion of the Lady of Whitburn, and no sooner was the meal ended than, in the midst of the hall, the debate began, the Lady declaring that in all honour Sir William Copeland was bound to affiance his son instantly to her poor daughter, all the more since the injuries he had inflicted to her face could never be done away with. On the other hand, Sir William Copeland was naturally far less likely to accept such a daughter-in-law, since her chances of being an heiress had ceased, and he contended that he had never absolutely accepted the contract, and that there had been no betrothal of the children.

The Earl of Salisbury could not but think that a strictly honourable man would have felt poor Grisell’s disaster inflicted by his son’s hands all the more reason for holding to the former understanding; but the loud clamours and rude language of Lady Whitburn were enough to set any one in opposition to her, and moreover, the words he said in favour of her side of the question appeared to Copeland merely spoken out of the general enmity of the Nevils to the Beauforts and all their following.

Thus, all the evening Lady Whitburn raged, and appealed to the Earl, whose support she thought cool and unfriendly, while Copeland stood sullen and silent, but determined.

“My lord,” she said, “were you a true friend to York and Raby, you would deal with this scowling fellow as we should on the Border.”

“We are not on the Border, madam,” quietly said Salisbury.

“But you are in your own Castle, and can force him to keep faith. No contract, forsooth! I hate your mincing South Country forms of law.” Then perhaps irritated by a little ironical smile which Salisbury could not suppress. “Is this your castle, or is it not? Then bring him and his lad to my poor wench’s side, and see their troth plighted, or lay him by the heels in the lowest cell in your dungeon. Then will you do good service to the King and the Duke of York, whom you talk of loving in your shilly-shally fashion.”

“Madam,” said the Earl, his grave tones coming in contrast to the shrill notes of the angry woman, “I counsel you, in the south at least, to have some respect to these same forms of law. I bid you a fair good-night. The chamberlain will marshal you.”