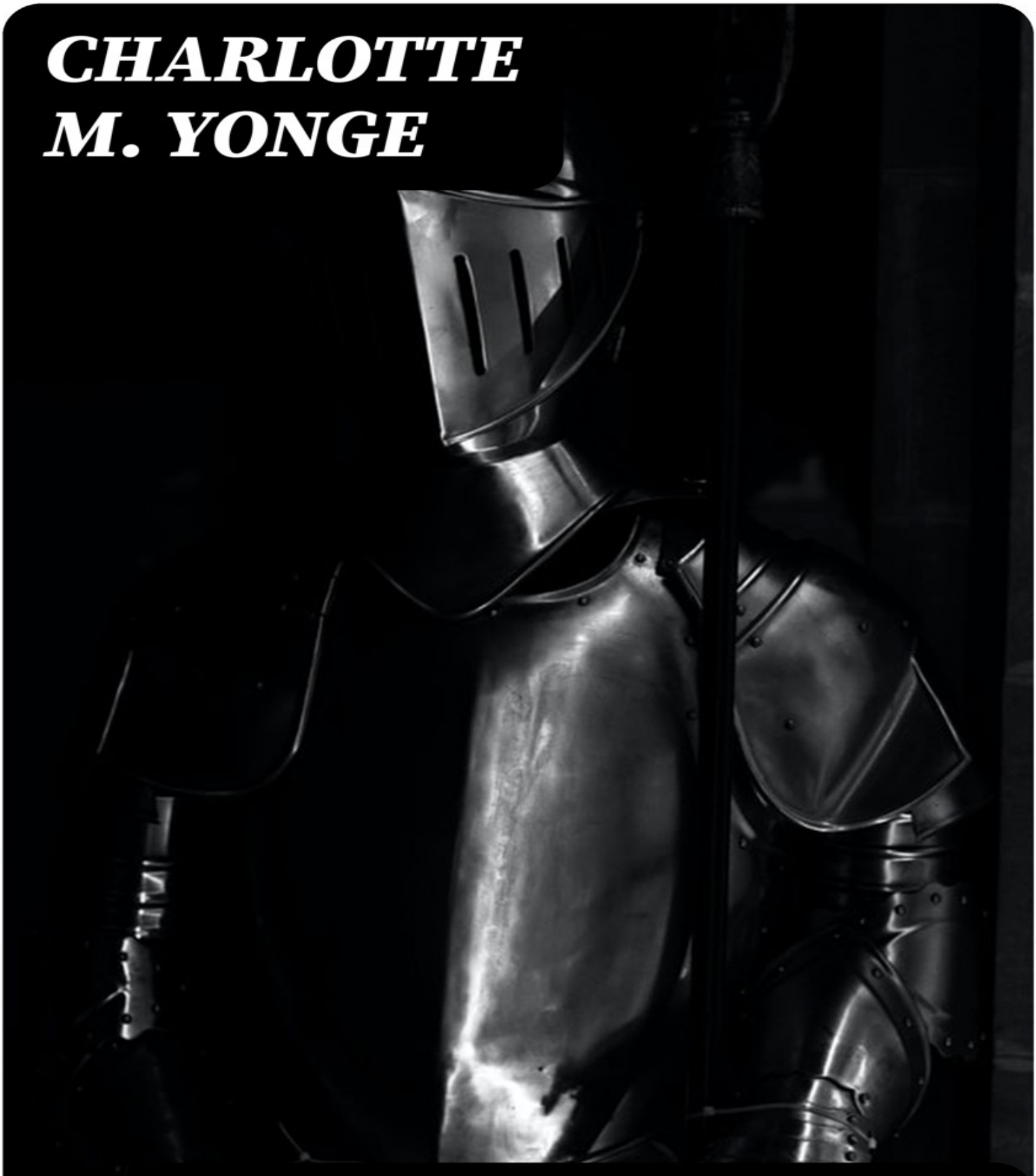
CHARLOTTE M. YONGE



THE ARMOURER'S PRENTICES

Charlotte M. Yonge

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PREFACE

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I HAVE attempted here to sketch citizen life in the early Tudor days, aided therein by Stowe's *Survey of London*, supplemented by Mr. Loftie's excellent history, and Dr. Burton's *English Merchants*.

Stowe gives a full account of the relations of apprentices to their masters; though I confess that I do not know whether Edmund Burgess could have become a citizen of York after serving an apprenticeship in London. Evil May Day is closely described in Hall's *Chronicle*. The ballad, said to be by Churchill, a contemporary, does not agree with it in all respects; but the story-teller may surely have license to follow whatever is most suitable to the purpose. The sermon is exactly as given by Hall, who is also responsible for the description of the King's sports and of the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Ardres. Knight's admirable *Pictorial History of England* tells of Barlow, the archer, dubbed by Henry VIII. the King of Shoreditch.

Historic Winchester describes both St. Elizabeth College and the Archer Monks of Hyde Abbey. The tales mentioned as told by Ambrose to Dennet are really New Forest legends.

The Moresco's Arabic Gospel and Breviary are mentioned in Lady Calcott's *History of Spain*, but she does not give her authority. Nor can I go further than Knight's *Pictorial History* for the King's adventure in the marsh. He does not say where it happened, but as in Stowe's map "Dead Man's Hole" appears in what is now Regent's Park, the marsh was probably deep enough in places for the adventure there.

Brand's *Popular Antiquities* are the authority for the nutting in St. John's Wood on Holy Cross Day. Indeed, in some country parishes I have heard that boys still think they have a license to crack nuts at church on the ensuing Sunday.

Seebohm's *Oxford Reformers* and the *Life of Sir Thomas More*, written by William Roper, are my other authorities, though I touched somewhat unwillingly on ground already lighted up by Miss Manning in her *Household of Sir Thomas More*.

Galt's *Life of Cardinal Wolsey* afforded the description of his household taken from his faithful Cavendish, and likewise the story of Patch the Fool. In fact, a large portion of the whole book was built on that anecdote.

I mention all this because I have so often been asked my authorities in historical tales, that I think people prefer to have what the French appropriately call *pièces justificatives*.

C. M. YONGE.

August 1*st*, 1884

CHAPTER I.
THE VERDURER'S LODGE

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"Give me the poor allottery my father left me by testament, with that I will go buy me fortunes."

"Get you with him, you old dog."

As You Like It.

THE officials of the New Forest have ever since the days of the Conqueror enjoyed some of the pleasantest dwellings that southern England can boast.

The home of the Birkenholt family was not one of the least delightful. It stood at the foot of a rising ground, on which grew a grove of magnificent beeches, their large silvery boles rising majestically like columns into a lofty vaulting of branches, covered above with tender green foliage. Here and there the shade beneath was broken by the gilding of a ray of sunshine on a lower twig, or on a white trunk, but the floor of the vast arcades was almost entirely of the russet brown of the fallen leaves, save where a fern or holly bush made a spot of green. At the foot of the slope lay a stretch of pasture ground, some parts covered by "lady-smocks, all silver white," with the course of the little stream through the midst indicated by a perfect golden river of shining kingcups interspersed with ferns. Beyond lay tracts of brown heath and brilliant gorse and broom, which stretched for miles and miles along the flats, while the dry ground was covered with holly brake, and here and there

woods of oak and beech made a sea of verdure, purpling in the distance.

Cultivation was not attempted, but hardy little ponies, cows, goats, sheep, and pigs were feeding, and picking their way about in the marshy mead below, and a small garden of pot-herbs, inclosed by a strong fence of timber, lay on the sunny side of a spacious rambling forest lodge, only one story high, built of solid timber and roofed with shingle. It was not without strong pretensions to beauty, as well as to picturesqueness, for the posts of the door, the architecture of the deep porch, the frames of the latticed windows, and the verge boards were all richly carved in grotesque devices. Over the door was the royal shield, between a pair of magnificent antlers, the spoils of a deer reported to have been slain by King Edward IV., as was denoted by the “glorious sun of York” carved beneath the shield.

In the background among the trees were ranges of stables and kennels, and on the grass-plat in front of the windows was a row of beehives. A tame doe lay on the little green sward, not far from a large rough deer-hound, both close friends who could be trusted at large. There was a mournful dispirited look about the hound, evidently an aged animal, for the once black muzzle was touched with grey, and there was a film over one of the keen beautiful eyes, which opened eagerly as he pricked his ears and lifted his head at the rattle of the door latch. Then, as two boys came out, he rose, and with a slowly waving tail, and a wistful appealing air, came and laid his head against one of the pair who had appeared in the porch. They were lads of fourteen and fifteen, clad in suits of new mourning, with the short

belted doublet, puffed hose, small ruffs and little round caps of early Tudor times. They had dark eyes and hair, and honest open faces, the younger ruddy and sunburnt, the elder thinner and more intellectual—and they were so much the same size that the advantage of age was always supposed to be on the side of Stephen, though he was really the junior by nearly a year. Both were sad and grave, and the eyes and cheeks of Stephen showed traces of recent floods of tears, though there was more settled dejection on the countenance of his brother.

“Ay, Spring,” said the lad, “’tis winter with thee now. A poor old rogue! Did the new housewife talk of a halter because he showed his teeth when her ill-nurtured brat wanted to ride on him? Nay, old Spring, thou shalt share thy master’s fortunes, changed though they be. Oh, father! father! didst thou guess how it would be with thy boys!” And throwing himself on the grass, he hid his face against the dog and sobbed.

“Come, Stephen, Stephen; ’tis time to play the man! What are we to do out in the world if you weep and wail?”

“She might have let us stay for the month’s mind,” was heard from Stephen.

“Ay, and though we might be more glad to go, we might carry bitterer thoughts along with us. Better be done with it at once, say I.”

“There would still be the Forest! And I saw the moorhen sitting yester eve! And the wild ducklings are out on the pool, and the woods are full of song. Oh! Ambrose! I never knew how hard it is to part—”

“Nay, now, Steve, where be all your plots for bravery? You always meant to seek your fortune—not bide here like an acorn for ever.”

“I never thought to be thrust forth the very day of our poor father’s burial, by a shrewish town-bred vixen, and a base narrow-souled—”

“Hist! hist!” said the more prudent Ambrose.

“Let him hear who will! He cannot do worse for us than he has done! All the Forest will cry shame on him for a mean-hearted skinflint to turn his brothers from their home, ere their father and his, be cold in his grave,” cried Stephen, clenching the grass with his hands, in his passionate sense of wrong.

“That’s womanish,” said Ambrose.

“Who’ll be the woman when the time comes for drawing cold steel?” cried Stephen, sitting up.

At that moment there came through the porch a man, a few years over thirty, likewise in mourning, with a paler, sharper countenance than the brothers, and an uncomfortable pleading expression of self-justification.

“How now, lads!” he said, “what means this passion? You have taken the matter too hastily. There was no thought that ye should part till you had some purpose in view. Nay, we should be fain for Ambrose to bide on here, so he would leave his portion for me to deal with, and teach little Will his primer and accidence. You are a quiet lad, Ambrose, and can rule your tongue better than Stephen.”

“Thanks, brother John,” said Ambrose, somewhat sarcastically, “but where Stephen goes I go.”

“I would—I would have found Stephen a place among the prickers or rangers, if—” hesitated John. “In sooth, I would yet do it, if he would make it up with the housewife.”

“My father looked higher for his son than a pricker’s office,” returned Ambrose.

“That do I wot,” said John, “and therefore, ’tis for his own good that I would send him forth. His godfather, our uncle Birkenholt, he will assuredly provide for him, and set him forth—”

The door of the house was opened, and a shrewish voice cried, “Mr. Birkenholt—here, husband! You are wanted. Here’s little Kate crying to have yonder smooth pouch to stroke, and I cannot reach it for her.”

“Father set store by that otter-skin pouch, for poor Prince Arthur slew the otter,” cried Stephen. “Surely, John, you’ll not let the babes make a toy of that?”

John made a helpless gesture, and at a renewed call, went indoors.

“You are right, Ambrose,” said Stephen, “this is no place for us. Why should we tarry any longer to see everything moiled and set at nought? I have couched in the forest before, and ’tis summer time.”

“Nay,” said Ambrose, “we must make up our fardels and have our money in our pouches before we can depart. We must tarry the night, and call John to his reckoning, and so might we set forth early enough in the morning to lie at Winchester that night and take counsel with our uncle Birkenholt.”

“I would not stop short at Winchester,” said Stephen. “London for me, where uncle Randall will find us

preferment!”

“And what wilt do for Spring!”

“Take him with me, of course!” exclaimed Stephen. “What! would I leave him to be kicked and pinched by Will, and hanged belike by Mistress Maud?”

“I doubt me whether the poor old hound will brook the journey.”

“Then I’ll carry him!”

Ambrose looked at the big dog as if he thought it would be a serious undertaking, but he had known and loved Spring as his brother’s property ever since his memory began, and he scarcely felt that they could be separable for weal or woe.

The verdurers of the New Forest were of gentle blood, and their office was well-nigh hereditary. The Birkenholts had held it for many generations, and the reversion passed as a matter of course to the eldest son of the late holder, who had newly been laid in the burial ground of Beaulieu Abbey. John Birkenholt, whose mother had been of knightly lineage, had resented his father’s second marriage with the daughter of a yeoman on the verge of the Forest, suspected of a strain of gipsy blood, and had lived little at home, becoming a sort of agent at Southampton for business connected with the timber which was yearly cut in the Forest to supply material for the shipping. He had wedded the daughter of a person engaged in law business at Southampton, and had only been an occasional visitor at home, ever after the death of his stepmother. She had left these two boys, unwelcome appendages in his sight. They had obtained a certain amount of education at Beaulieu

Abbey, where a school was kept, and where Ambrose daily studied, though for the last few months Stephen had assisted his father in his forest duties.

Death had come suddenly to break up the household in the early spring of 1515, and John Birkenholt had returned as if to a patrimony, bringing his wife and children with him. The funeral ceremonies had been conducted at Beaulieu Abbey on the extensive scale of the sixteenth century, the requiem, the feast, and the dole, all taking place there, leaving the Forest lodge in its ordinary quiet.

It had always been understood that on their father's death the two younger sons must make their own way in the world; but he had hoped to live until they were a little older, when he might himself have started them in life, or expressed his wishes respecting them to their elder brother. As it was, however, there was no commendation of them, nothing but a strip of parchment, drawn up by one of the monks of Beaulieu, leaving each of them twenty crowns, with a few small jewels and properties left by their own mother, while everything else went to their brother.

There might have been some jealousy excited by the estimation in which Stephen's efficiency—boy as he was—was evidently held by the plain-spoken underlings of the verdurer; and this added to Mistress Birkenholt's dislike to the presence of her husband's half-brothers, whom she regarded as interlopers without a right to exist. Matters were brought to a climax by old Spring's resentment at being roughly teased by her spoilt children. He had done nothing worse than growl and show his teeth, but the town-bred dame had taken alarm, and half in terror, half in spite,

had insisted on his instant execution, since he was too old to be valuable. Stephen, who loved the dog only less than he loved his brother Ambrose, had come to high words with her; and the end of the altercation had been that she had declared that she would suffer no great lubbers of the half-blood to devour her children’s inheritance, and teach them ill manners, and that go they must, and that instantly. John had muttered a little about “not so fast, dame,” and “for very shame,” but she had turned on him, and rated him with a violence that demonstrated who was ruler in the house, and took away all disposition to tarry long under the new dynasty.

The boys possessed two uncles, one on each side of the house. Their father’s elder brother had been a man-at-arms, having preferred a stirring life to the Forest, and had fought in the last surges of the Wars of the Roses. Having become disabled and infirm, he had taken advantage of a corrody, or right of maintenance, as being of kin to a benefactor of Hyde Abbey at Winchester, to which Birkenholt some generations back had presented a few roods of land, in right of which, one descendant at a time might be maintained in the Abbey. Intelligence of his brother’s death had been sent to Richard Birkenholt, but answer had been returned that he was too evil-disposed with the gout to attend the burial.

The other uncle, Harry Randall, had disappeared from the country under a cloud connected with the king’s deer, leaving behind him the reputation of a careless, thriftless, jovial fellow, the best company in all the Forest, and capable of doing every one’s work save his own.

The two brothers, who were about seven and six years old at the time of his flight, had a lively recollection of his charms as a playmate, and of their mother’s grief for him, and refusal to believe any ill of her Hal. Rumours had come of his attainment to vague and unknown greatness at court, under the patronage of the Lord Archbishop of York, which the Verdurer laughed to scorn, though his wife gave credit to them. Gifts had come from time to time, passed through a succession of servants and officials of the king, such as a coral and silver rosary, a jewelled bodkin, an agate carved with St. Catherine, an ivory pouncet box with a pierced gold coin as the lid; but no letter with them, as indeed Hal Randall had never been induced to learn to read or write. Master Birkenholt looked doubtfully at the tokens and hoped Hal had come honestly by them; but his wife had thoroughly imbued her sons with the belief that Uncle Hal was shining in his proper sphere, where he was better appreciated than at home. Thus their one plan was to go to London to find Uncle Hal, who was sure to put Stephen on the road to fortune, and enable Ambrose to become a great scholar, his favourite ambition.

His gifts would, as Ambrose observed, serve them as tokens, and with the purpose of claiming them, they re-entered the hall, a long low room, with a handsome open roof, and walls tapestried with dressed skins, interspersed with antlers, hung with weapons of the chase. At one end of the hall was a small polished barrel, always replenished with beer, at the other a hearth with a wood fire constantly burning, and there was a table running the whole length of the room; at one end of this was laid a cloth, with a few

trenchers on it, and horn cups, surrounding a barley loaf and a cheese, this meagre irregular supper being considered as a sufficient supplement to the funeral baked meats which had abounded at Beaulieu. John Birkenholt sat at the table with a trencher and horn before him, uneasily using his knife to crumble, rather than cut, his bread. His wife, a thin, pale, shrewish-looking woman, was warming her child's feet at the fire, before putting him to bed, and an old woman sat spinning and nodding on a settle at a little distance.

"Brother," said Stephen, "we have thought on what you said. We will put our stuff together, and if you will count us out our portions, we will be afoot by sunrise to-morrow."

"Nay, nay, lad, I said not there was such haste; did I, mistress housewife?"—(she snorted); "only that thou art a well-grown lusty fellow, and 'tis time thou wentest forth. For thee, Ambrose, thou wottest I made thee a fair offer of bed and board."

"That is," called out the wife, "if thou wilt make a fair scholar of little Will. 'Tis a mighty good offer. There are not many who would let their child be taught by a mere stripling like thee!"

"Nay," said Ambrose, who could not bring himself to thank her, "I go with Stephen, mistress; I would mend my scholarship ere I teach."

"As you please," said Mistress Maud, shrugging her shoulders, "only never say that a fair offer was not made to you."

"And," said Stephen, "so please you, brother John, hand us over our portions, and the jewels as bequeathed to us, and we will be gone."

“Portions, quotha?” returned John. “Boy, they be not due to you till you be come to years of discretion.”

The brothers looked at one another, and Stephen said, “Nay, now, brother, I know not how that may be, but I do know that you cannot drive us from our father’s house without maintenance, and detain what belongs to us.”

And Ambrose muttered something about “my Lord of Beaulieu.”

“Look you, now,” said John, “did I ever speak of driving you from home without maintenance? Hath not Ambrose had his choice of staying here, and Stephen of waiting till some office be found for him? As for putting forty crowns into the hands of striplings like you, it were mere throwing it to the robbers.”

“That being so,” said Ambrose turning to Stephen, “we will to Beaulieu, and see what counsel my lord will give us.”

“Yea, do, like the vipers ye are, and embroil us with my Lord of Beaulieu,” cried Maud from the fire.

“See,” said John, in his more caressing fashion, “it is not well to carry family tales to strangers, and—and—”

He was disconcerted by a laugh from the old nurse, “Ho! John Birkenholt, thou wast ever a lad of smooth tongue, but an thou, or madam here, think that thy brothers can be put forth from thy father’s door without their due before the good man be cold in his grave, and the Forest not ring with it, thou art mightily out in thy reckoning!”

“Peace, thou old hag; what matter is’t of thine?” began Mistress Maud, but again came the harsh laugh. “Matter of mine! Why, whose matter should it be but mine, that have nursed all three of the lads, ay, and their father before

them, besides four more that lie in the graveyard at Beaulieu? Rest their sweet souls! And I tell thee, Master John, an thou do not righteously by these thy brothers, thou mayst back to thy parchments at Southampton, for not a man or beast in the Forest will give thee good day."

They all felt the old woman's authority. She was able and spirited in her homely way, and more mistress of the house than Mrs. Birkenholt herself; and such were the terms of domestic service, that there was no peril of losing her place. Even Maud knew that to turn her out was an impossibility, and that she must be accepted like the loneliness, damp, and other evils of Forest life. John had been under her dominion, and proceeded to persuade her. "Good now, Nurse Joan, what have I denied these rash striplings that my father would have granted them? Wouldst thou have them carry all their portion in their hands, to be cozened of it at the first ale-house, or robbed on the next heath?"

"I would have thee do a brother's honest part, John Birkenholt. A loving part I say not. Thou wert always like a very popple for hardness, and smoothness, ay, and slipperiness. Heigh ho! But what is right by the lads, thou *shalt* do."

John cowered under her eye as he had done at six years old, and faltered, "I only seek to do them right, nurse."

Nurse Joan uttered an emphatic grunt, but Mistress Maud broke in, "They are not to hang about here in idleness, eating my poor child's substance, and teaching him ill manners."

"We would not stay here if you paid us for it," returned Stephen.

“And whither would you go?” asked John.

“To Winchester first, to seek counsel with our uncle Birkenholt. Then to London, where uncle Randall will help us to our fortunes.”

“Gipsy Hal! He is more like to help you to a halter,” sneered John, *sotto voce*, and Joan herself observed, “Their uncle at Winchester will show them better than to run after that there go-by-chance.”

However, as no one wished to keep the youths, and they were equally determined to go, an accommodation was come to at last. John was induced to give them three crowns apiece and to yield them up the five small trinkets specified, though not without some murmurs from his wife. It was no doubt safer to leave the rest of the money in his hands than to carry it with them, and he undertook that it should be forthcoming, if needed for any fit purpose, such as the purchase of an office, an apprentice’s fee, or an outfit as a squire. It was a vague promise that cost him nothing just then, and thus could be readily made, and John’s great desire was to get them away so that he could aver that they had gone by their own free will, without any hardship, for he had seen enough at his father’s obsequies to show him that the love and sympathy of all the scanty dwellers in the Forest was with them.

Nurse Joan had fought their battles, but with the sore heart of one who was parting with her darlings never to see them again. She bade them doff their suits of mourning that she might make up their fardels, as they would travel in their Lincoln-green suits. To take these she repaired to the little rough shed-like chamber where the two brothers lay for

the last time on their pallet bed, awake, and watching for her, with Spring at their feet. The poor old woman stood over them, as over the motherless nurslings whom she had tended, and she should probably never see more, but she was a woman of shrewd sense, and perceived that “with the new madam in the hall” it was better that they should be gone before worse ensued.

She advised leaving their valuables sealed up in the hands of my Lord Abbot, but they were averse to this—for they said their uncle Randall, who had not seen them since they were little children, would not know them without some pledge.

She shook her head. “The less you deal with Hal Randall the better,” she said. “Come now, lads, be advised and go no farther than Winchester, where Master Ambrose may get all the book-learning he is ever craving for, and you, Master Steevie, may prentice yourself to some good trade.”

“Prentice!” cried Stephen, scornfully.

“Ay, ay. As good blood as thine has been prenticed,” returned Joan. “Better so than be a cut-throat sword-and-buckler fellow, ever slaying some one else or getting thyself slain—a terror to all peaceful folk. But thine uncle will see to that—a steady-minded lad always was he—was Master Dick.”

Consoling herself with this hope, the old woman rolled up their new suits with some linen into two neat knapsacks; sighing over the thought that unaccustomed fingers would deal with the shirts she had spun, bleached, and sewn. But she had confidence in “Master Dick,” and concluded that to send his nephews to him at Winchester gave a far better

chance of their being cared for, than letting them be flouted into ill-doing by their grudging brother and his wife.

CHAPTER II.
THE GRANGE OF SILKSTEDE

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"All Itchen's valley lay,
St. Catherine's breezy side and the woodlands far away,
The huge Cathedral sleeping in venerable gloom,
The modest College tower, and the bedesmen's Norman home."

LORD SELBORNE.

VERY early in the morning, even according to the habits of the time, were Stephen and Ambrose Birkenholt astir. They were full of ardour to enter on the new and unknown world beyond the Forest, and much as they loved it, any change that kept them still to their altered life would have been distasteful.

Nurse Joan, asking no questions, folded up their fardels on their backs, and packed the wallets for their day's journey with ample provision. She charged them to be good lads, to say their Pater, Credo, and Ave daily, and never omit Mass on a Sunday. They kissed her like their mother and promised heartily—and Stephen took his crossbow. They had had some hope of setting forth so early as to avoid all other human farewells, except that Ambrose wished to begin by going to Beaulieu to take leave of the Father who had been his kind master, and get his blessing and counsel. But Beaulieu was three miles out of their way, and Stephen had not the same desire, being less attached to his

schoolmaster and more afraid of hindrances being thrown in their way.

Moreover, contrary to their expectation, their elder brother came forth, and declared his intention of setting them forth on their way, bestowing a great amount of good advice, to the same purport as that of nurse Joan, namely, that they should let their uncle Richard Birkenholt find them some employment at Winchester, where they, or at least Ambrose, might even obtain admission into the famous college of St. Mary.

In fact, this excellent elder brother persuaded himself that it would be doing them an absolute wrong to keep such promising youths hidden in the Forest.

The purpose of his going thus far with them made itself evident. It was to see them past the turning to Beaulieu. No doubt he wished to tell the story in his own way, and that they should not present themselves there as orphans expelled from their father’s house. It would sound much better that he had sent them to ask counsel of their uncle at Winchester, the fit person to take charge of them. And as he represented that to go to Beaulieu would lengthen their day’s journey so much that they might hardly reach Winchester that night, while all Stephen’s wishes were to go forward, Ambrose could only send his greetings. There was another debate over Spring, who had followed his master as usual. John uttered an exclamation of vexation at perceiving it, and bade Stephen drive the dog back. “Or give me the leash to drag him. He will never follow me.”

“He goes with us,” said Stephen.

“He! Thou’lt never have the folly! The old hound is half blind and past use. No man will take thee in with him after thee.”

“Then they shall not take me in,” said Stephen. “I’ll not leave him to be hanged by thee.”

“Who spoke of hanging him!”

“Thy wife will soon, if she hath not already.”

“Thou wilt be for hanging him thyself ere thou have made a day’s journey with him on the king’s highway, which is not like these forest paths, I would have thee to know. Why, he limps already.”

“Then I’ll carry him,” said Stephen, doggedly.

“What hast thou to say to that device, Ambrose?” asked John, appealing to the elder and wiser.

But Ambrose only answered “I’ll help,” and as John had no particular desire to retain the superannuated hound, and preferred on the whole to be spared sentencing him, no more was said on the subject as they went along, until all John’s stock of good counsel had been lavished on his brothers’ impatient ears. He bade them farewell, and turned back to the lodge, and they struck away along the woodland pathway which they had been told led to Winchester, though they had never been thither, nor seen any town save Southampton and Romsey at long intervals. On they went, sometimes through beech and oak woods of noble, almost primeval, trees, but more often across tracts of holly underwood, illuminated here and there with the snowy garlands of the wild cherry, and beneath with wide spaces covered with young green bracken, whose soft irregular masses on the undulating ground had somewhat the effect

of the waves of the sea. These alternated with stretches of yellow gorse and brown heather, sheets of cotton-grass, and pools of white crowfoot, and all the vegetation of a mountain side, only that the mountain was not there.

The brothers looked with eyes untaught to care for beauty, but with a certain love of the home scenes, tempered by youth’s impatience for something new. The nightingales sang, the thrushes flew out before them, the wild duck and moorhen glanced on the pools. Here and there they came on the furrows left by the snout of the wild swine, and in the open tracts rose the graceful heads of the deer, but of inhabitants or travellers they scarce saw any, save when they halted at the little hamlet of Minestead, where a small alehouse was kept by one Will Purkiss, who claimed descent from the charcoal-burner who had carried William Rufus’s corpse to burial at Winchester—the one fact in history known to all New Foresters, though perhaps Ambrose and John were the only persons beyond the walls of Beaulieu who did not suppose the affair to have taken place in the last generation.

A draught of ale and a short rest were welcome as the heat of the day came on, making the old dog plod wearily on with his tongue out, so that Stephen began to consider whether he should indeed have to be his bearer—a serious matter, for the creature at full length measured nearly as much as he did. They met hardly any one, and they and Spring were alike too well known and trained, for difficulties to arise as to leading a dog through the Forest. Should they ever come to the term of the Forest? It was not easy to tell when they were really beyond it, for the ground was much

of the same kind. Only the smooth, treeless hills, where they had always been told Winchester lay, seemed more defined; and they saw no more deer, but here and there were inclosures where wheat and barley were growing, and black timbered farm-houses began to show themselves at intervals. Herd boys, as rough and unkempt as their charges, could be seen looking after little tawny cows, black-faced sheep, or spotted pigs, with curs which barked fiercely at poor weary Spring, even as their masters were more disposed to throw stones than to answer questions.

By and by, on the further side of a green valley, could be seen buildings with an encircling wall of flint and mortar faced with ruddy brick, the dark red-tiled roofs rising among walnut-trees, and an orchard in full bloom spreading into a long green field.

“Winchester must be nigh. The sun is getting low,” said Stephen.

“We will ask. The good folk will at least give us an answer,” said Ambrose wearily.

As they reached the gate, a team of plough horses was passing in led by a peasant lad, while a lay brother, with his gown tucked up, rode sideways on one, whistling. An Augustinian monk, ruddy, burly, and sunburnt, stood in the farm-yard, to receive an account of the day’s work, and doffing his cap, Ambrose asked whether Winchester were near.

“Three mile or thereaway, my good lad,” said the monk; “thou’lt see the towers an ye mount the hill. Whence art thou?” he added, looking at the two young strangers. “Scholars? The College elects not yet a while.”

“We be from the Forest, so please your reverence, and are bound for Hyde Abbey, where our uncle, Master Richard Birkenholt, dwells.”

“And oh, sir,” added Stephen, “may we crave a drop of water for our dog?”

The monk smiled as he looked at Spring, who had flung himself down to take advantage of the halt, hanging out his tongue, and panting spasmodically. “A noble beast,” he said, “of the Windsor breed, is’t not?” Then laying his hand on the graceful head, “Poor old hound, thou art o’er travelled. He is aged for such a journey, if you came from the Forest since morn. Twelve years at the least, I should say, by his muzzle.”

“Your reverence is right,” said Stephen, “he is twelve years old. He is two years younger than I am, and my father gave him to me when he was a little whelp.”

“So thou must needs take him to seek thy fortune with thee,” said the good-natured Augustinian, not knowing how truly he spoke. “Come in, my lads, here’s a drink for him. What said you was your uncle’s name?” and as Ambrose repeated it, “Birkenholt! Living on a corrody at Hyde! Ay! ay! My lads, I have a call to Winchester to-morrow, you’d best tarry the night here at Silkstede Grange, and fare forward with me.”

The tired boys were heartily glad to accept the invitation, more especially as Spring, happy as he was with the trough of water before him, seemed almost too tired to stand over it, and after the first, tried to lap, lying down. Silkstede was not a regular convent, only a grange or farm-house, presided over by one of the monks, with three or four lay

brethren under him, and a little colony of hinds, in the surrounding cottages, to cultivate the farm, and tend a few cattle and numerous sheep, the special care of the Augustinians.

Father Shoveller, as the good-natured monk who had received the travellers was called, took them into the spacious but homely chamber which served as refectory, kitchen, and hall. He called to the lay brother who was busy over the open hearth to fry a few more rashers of bacon; and after they had washed away the dust of their journey at the trough where Spring had slaked his thirst, they sat down with him to a hearty supper, which smacked more of the grange than of the monastery, spread on a large solid oak table, and washed down with good ale. The repast was shared by the lay brethren and farm servants, and also by two or three big sheep dogs, who had to be taught their manners towards Spring.

There was none of the formality that Ambrose was accustomed to at Beaulieu in the great refectory, where no one spoke, but one of the brethren read aloud some theological book from a stone pulpit in the wall. Here Brother Shoveller conversed without stint, chiefly with the brother who seemed to be a kind of bailiff, with whom he discussed the sheep that were to be taken into market the next day, and the prices to be given for them by either the college, the castle, or the butchers of Boucher Row. He however found time to talk to the two guests, and being sprung from a family in the immediate neighbourhood, he knew the verdurer’s name, and ere he was a monk, had joined in the chase in the Forest.

There was a little oratory attached to the hall, where he and the lay brethren kept the hours, to a certain degree, putting two or three services into one, on a liberal interpretation of *laborare est orare*. Ambrose's responses made their host observe as they went out, "Thou hast thy Latin pat, my son, there's the making of a scholar in thee."

Then they took their first night's rest away from home, in a small guest-chamber, with a good bed, though bare in all other respects. Brother Shoveller likewise had a cell to himself, but the lay brethren slept promiscuously among their sheep-dogs on the floor of the refectory.

All were afoot in the early morning, and Stephen and Ambrose were awakened by the tumultuous bleatings of the flock of sheep that were being driven from their fold to meet their fate at Winchester market. They heard Brother Shoveller shouting his orders to the shepherds in tones a great deal more like those of a farmer than of a monk, and they made haste to dress themselves and join him as he was muttering a morning abbreviation of his obligatory devotions in the oratory, observing that they might be in time to hear mass at one of the city churches, but the sheep might delay them, and they had best break their fast ere starting.

It was Wednesday, a day usually kept as a moderate fast, so the breakfast was of oatmeal porridge, flavoured with honey, and washed down with mead, after which Brother Shoveller mounted his mule, a sleek creature, whose long ears had an air of great contentment, and rode off, accommodating his pace to that of his young companions up a stony cart-track which soon led them to the top of a

chalk down, whence, as in a map, they could see Winchester, surrounded by its walls, lying in a hollow between the smooth green hills. At one end rose the castle, its fortifications covering its own hill, beneath, in the valley, the long, low massive Cathedral, the college buildings and tower with its pinnacles, and nearer at hand, among the trees, the Almshouse of Noble Poverty at St. Cross, beneath the round hill of St. Catherine. Churches and monastic buildings stood thickly in the town, and indeed, Brother Shoveller said, shaking his head, that there were well-nigh as many churches as folk to go to them; the place was decayed since the time he remembered when Prince Arthur was born there. Hyde Abbey he could not show them, from where they stood, as it lay further off by the river side, having been removed from the neighbourhood of the Minster, because the brethren of St. Grimbald could not agree with those of St. Swithun's belonging to the Minster, as indeed their buildings were so close together that it was hardly possible to pass between them, and their bells jangled in each other's ears.

Brother Shoveller did not seem to entertain a very high opinion of the monks of St. Grimbald, and he asked the boys whether they were expected there. "No," they said; "tidings of their father's death had been sent by one of the woodmen, and the only answer that had been returned was that Master Richard Birkenholt was ill at ease, but would have masses said for his brother's soul."

"Hem!" said the Augustinian ominously; but at that moment they came up with the sheep, and his attention was wholly absorbed by them, as he joined the lay brothers

in directing the shepherds who were driving them across the downs, steering them over the high ground towards the arched West Gate close to the royal castle. The street sloped rapidly down, and Brother Shoveller conducted his young companions between the overhanging houses, with stalls between serving as shops, till they reached the open space round the Market Cross, on the steps of which women sat with baskets of eggs, butter, and poultry, raised above the motley throng of cattle and sheep, with their dogs and drivers, the various cries of man and beast forming an incongruous accompaniment to the bells of the churches that surrounded the market-place.

Citizens' wives in hood and wimple were there, shrilly bargaining for provision for their households, squires and grooms in quest of hay for their masters' stables, purveyors seeking food for the garrison, lay brethren and sisters for their convents, and withal, the usual margin of begging friars, wandering gleemen, jugglers and pedlars, though in no great numbers, as this was only a Wednesday market-day, not a fair. Ambrose recognised one or two who made part of the crowd at Beaulieu only two days previously, when he had "seen through tears the juggler leap," and the jingling tune one of them was playing on a rebeck brought back associations of almost unbearable pain. Happily, Father Shoveller, having seen his sheep safely bestowed in a pen, bethought him of bidding the lay brother in attendance show the young gentlemen the way to Hyde Abbey, and turning up a street at right angles to the principal one, they were soon out of the throng.