

NYE'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

A Light Dissertation on the Knights Errant.

THE EARLY HARDWARE TRADE.

Age of Chivalry Was Poor For Business. Shirts of Mail Were Worn Without Change—Jousting In Feudal Times. Scotchmen Couldn't Take a Joke.

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CHAPTER X.

The age of chivalry, which yielded such good material to the poet and romancer, was no doubt essential to the growth of civilization, but it must have been an unhappy period for legitimate business. How could trade, commerce or even the professions, arts or sciences flourish while the entire population spread itself over the bleaching boards day after day to watch the process of "jousting" while the corn was "in the grass" and everybody's notes went to protest?

Then came the days of knight errantry, when parties in mailable iron clothing and shirts of mail—which were



A COOLNESS BETWEEN THE KING AND THE ARCHBISHOP.

worn without change—rode up and down the country seeking for maids in distress. A pretty maid in those days who lived on the main road could put on her riding habit, go to the window up stairs, shed a tear, wave her kerchief in the air and in half an hour have the front lawn full of knights errant tramping over the peony beds and nastur oil plants.

In this way a new reward from day to day during the "errant" season might be expected. Scarcely would the fair maid reach her destination and get her wraps hung up when a rattle of gravel on the window would attract her attention, and outside she would see, with swelling heart, another knight errant, who crooked his Russia iron elbow and murmured, "Maid, may I have the pleasure of this escape with you?"

"But I do not recognize you, sir," she would straightway make reply, and well she might, for with his steel shod countenance and corrugated iron clothes he was generally so thoroughly incog, that his crest, on a new shield freshly painted and gilded and bearing a motto, was his only introduction. Imagine a sweet girl who for years had been under the eagle eye of a middleweight chaperon suddenly spying in the moonlight a disguised man under the window on horseback in the act of asking her to join him for a few weeks at his shooting box in the swamp. Then, if you please, imagine her asking for his card, whereupon he exposes the side of his new to shield, on which is painted in large old English letters a Latin motto meaning, "It is the early bird that catches the worm," with bird rampant, worn on a field uncutivated.

Then, seating herself behind the knight, she must escape for days and even weeks, one escape seeming to call for another, as it were. Thus, however, the expense of a wedding was saved, and the knight with the biggest chest measurement generally got the heiress with the upper sherd hair.

He was a crest on his helmet adorned with a woman's face given him by lady admittance, so that the crest of a popular young knight often looked like a slump at the Bon Marche.

The most peculiar condition required for every knight errant was the "light of arms," which consisted in keeping a long about waist in some gaudy spot—a hundred and so forth—over the armholes was about to assume.

A tournament was a sort of refined equine game, light with 100 ounce javelins, and in the fall and autumn knights, riding in each other's direction, put as best as possible, with unmerciful desire to push one's adversary off his horse, which meant death, because no man could ever climb a horse in full armor without a feudal dagger to assist him.

The victor was entitled to the horse and armor of the vanquished, which made the castle's park of a successful knight resemble the convalescent ward of the Old Horse's home.

The courtier also contributed the prevailing court of those times, and the plaintiff, calling upon God to defend the case, charged upon the defendant with a charge which took away the breath of his adversary. This of course was only applicable to certain cases and could not be used in trials for divorce,

breach of promise, etc.

The tournament was practically the forerunner of the duel. In each case the parties in effect turned the matter over to Omnipotence, but still the man who had his back to the sun and knew how to handle firearms and cutlery generally felt the most comfortable.

Gentlemen who were not engaged in combat, but who attended to the grocery business during the Norman period, wore a short velvet cloak, trimmed with fur, over a doublet and hose. The shoes were pointed, as were the remarks made by the irate parent, and generally the shoes and remarks accompanied each other when a young tradesman sought the hand of the daughter, while she had looked forward to a 200 mile ride on the crupper of a knight errant without stopping for food or water.

In those days also the fool made no effort to disguise his folly by going to congress or fussing with the currency, but wore a uniform which designated his calling and saved time in estimating his value.

The clergy in those days possessed the bulk of knowledge, and had matters so continued the vacant pew would have less of a hold on people than it has today, but in some way knowledge escaped from the cloister and percolated through the other professions, so that today in England out of a good sized family the pulpit generally has to take what is left after the army, navy, politics, law and golf have had the pick.

The Normans ate two meals a day and introduced better cooking among the Saxons, who had been accustomed to eat very little except while under the influence of stimulants, and who therefore did not realize what they ate. The Normans went in more for meat victuals, and thus the names of meat, such as veal, beef, pork and mutton, are of Norman origin, while the names of the animals in a live state are calf, ox, pig and sheep, all Saxon names.

The Authors' club of England at this time consisted of Geoffrey of Monmouth and another man. They wrote their books with quill pens, and if the authorities did not like what was said the author could be made to suppress the entire edition for a week's board, or for a bumper of Rhenish wine with a touch of pepper sauce in it he would change the objectionable part by means of an eraser.

It was under these circumstances that the Plantagenets became leaders in society and added their valuable real estate in France to the English dominions. In 1154 Henry Plantagenet was thus the most powerful monarch in Europe and by wedding his son Geoffrey to the daughter of the Duke of Brittany soon scooped in that valuable property also.

He broke up the custom of issuing pickpocket and felony licenses to his nobles, seized the royal stone piles and other nests for common sneak thieves and resolved to give the people a chance to pay taxes and die natural deaths. The disorderly nobles were reduced to the ranks or sent away to institutions for inebriates, and people began to permit their daughters to go about the place unarmed.

Foreign mercenaries who had long infested the country were ordered to leave it under penalty of having their personal possessions confiscated and their own carcasses dissected and fed to the wild boars.

Henry next gave his attention to the ecclesiastic power. He chose Thomas a Becket to the vacant portfolio as archbishop of Canterbury, hoping thus to secure him as an ally, but a Becket, though accustomed to ride after a four-in-hand and assume a style equal to the king himself, suddenly became extremely devout, and austerity characterized this child of fortune, inasmuch that each day on banded knees he bathed the chapped and soiled feet of 13 beggars. Why 13 beggars should come around every morning to the archbishop's study to have their feet manicured or how that could possibly mollify an outraged God the historian does not claim to state, and, in fact, is not able to throw any light upon it at the price agreed upon for this book.

Trouble now arose between the king and the archbishop, a protracted coolness, during which the king's pew grew gray with dust, and he had to baptize and confirm his own children in addition to his other work.

The king now summoned the prelates, but they excused themselves from coming on the grounds of previous engagements. Then he summoned the nobles also and gave the prelates one more chance, which they decided to avail themselves of. Thus the "Constitutions of Clarendon" were adopted in 1164, and Becket, though he at first bolted the action of the convention, soon became reconciled and promised to fall into line, though he hated it like sin.

Then the Roman pontiff annulled the constitutions and scared Becket back again into his original position. This angered the king, who condemned his old archbishop, and he fled to France, where he had a tall time. The pope threatened to excommunicate Henry, but the latter told him to go ahead, as he did not fear excommunication, having been already twice exposed to it while young.

Finally a Becket was banished, but after six years returned, and all seemed again smooth and joyous, but Becket kept up the war indirectly against

Henry till one day he exclaimed in his



HENRY WALKING TO THE TOMB OF BECKET.

"Is there no one of my subjects who will rid me of this insolent priest?" Whereupon four loyal knights, who were doubtless of Scotch extraction, and who therefore could not take a joke, thought the king in dead earnest and actually butchered the misguided archbishop in a sickening manner before the altar. This was in 1170.

Henry, who was in France when this occurred, was thoroughly horrified and frightened, no doubt, so much so, in fact, that he agreed to make a pilgrimage barefoot to the tomb of a Becket, but even this did not place him upon a firm footing with the clergy, who paraded a Becket's assassination on all occasions and thus strengthened this opposition to the king. BILL NYE.

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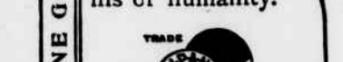
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