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A Reading Pageant.

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(Continued from page 9, Vol. 14.)

EPISODE VI.

Heraclius and the Keys of the Holy Sepulchre.

They sing the first English song ever written with musical notes attached : " Summer is a cuming' in."

The monks come out of the Abbey Gate. A messenger arrives and points to a strange company of Eastern folk who are seen approaching. A monk goes to fetch the Abbot, who greets the stranger.

ABBOT. Whence come ye, worthy sirs ? Your garb is strange, and methinks an Eastern sun hath tanned your cheeks, that speak of abstinence and the length of way. Ye are welcome to our humble house.

HERACLIUS. My lord Abbot, of Reading's noble house all the world knows. No land so far but has not heard of the fame of this monastic pile. In Eastern lands, e'en in the Holy City nigh the sacred sepulchre of Christ, men tell of Reading, and indeed the half was not told me. When I see these noble and majestic buildings, yon mighty minster, this gate

that breathes such welcome to the stranger, the order of your monks, this gay bright town that nestles round your walls, as children hold the gown of their good mother, I thank my God who has brought me hither, to plead my cause. The King of England tarries within your gates, methinks ?

ABBOT. 'Tis so, sir, and who is he that thus seeks audience ?

HERACLIUS. A poor servant of Christ, Heraclius, Patriarch of the Holy City, Jerusalem.

ABBOT. Here comes the King. Your message to him tell. (to King) Sire, the holy Patriarch, Heraclius, greets thee.

Heraclius bends before him and raises his hand.

KING. Right welcome, to our England, reverend Sir.
The world has heard of thee, and of thy woes,
And sorrowed with thee. Tell me, tell me, true—
Are all the tidings of yon base Saladin
His hord of savage and tumultuous men,
That surge around the dearest spot on earth—
Are all these true ?

HERACLIUS. Too true, my lord, O King, and yet not true ;
For not the half of what those fiends have done
Can e'er be told in Christian ears. If I
Could now the tale unfold, your swords, my knights,
Would flash in sunlight like a woodman's axe
To fell the murderers of pious men,
Who sought the holy shrine for pilgrimage.
And loud like thunder claps would sound your cries
For vengeance.

KNIGHTS. Ha Ha ! Revenge ! Revenge, and death to Saladin.

KING. Your story moves me, what can England do
To right these wrongs ?

HERACLIUS. England ! The land of light, where brave hearts dwell,
The land of chivalry and knightly deed,
What can not England do ? And here we come,
Through perils past o'er stormy seas and lands,
Daring the dangers of the dreadful plains
To seek your succour, sire ; no bootless quest
Do we present to mighty Henry.

KING. I know not if your tale be true, my friend.

HERACLIUS. True ! what say you, Sire ?

Where are the bodies of the holy men
That left your shores to see God's holy tomb ?
Rotting in dungeons, smoked by smouldering fires,
Hacked, wounded, tortured by those fearsome fiends.

KNIGHTS. Shame ! Shame ! revenge on Saladin.

HERACLIUS. And here we bring the relics of the shrine
The wood of Holy Cross on which Christ died,
Here is the manger throne where on Christ lay
And this the stone that angel fingers rolled
From His most holy sepulchre.

(They all kneel and worship the relics.)

And here, my lord, O King, we bear the keys
Of that most holy city, the joy of earth.
We bid thee take it and with it the crown
Of Sacred Zion. Take it, my lord, O King,
And lead these valiant men to rescue it.

(King and Knights greatly moved.)

KING. Alas ! alas ! I would—and yet—I would—
My will is strong to aid—and yet—and yet—
I may not leave these shores. How may I leave
This realm of England, girt by foes so strong
That were I gone to fight the infidel,
My people would be slain, enslaved, undone.
Or faction rise with hydra-headed maw
And soon destroy the power of England.
No, no, it cannot be. This realm God gave
To me to tend, to rule and govern well,
And I were faithless to my vows, to God,
If I desert and leave the land forlorn.
But prithee enter now, and rest awhile.
Perchance a son of mine may gladly dare
To rid thee of thy foes. I pray thee come.

Heraclius and Monks, &c., enter the Abbey.

[Exeunt Omnes.]

EPISODE VII.

*The granting of the First Charter to Reading and
the affair of the Oxford Students.*

The Oxford Students.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ—KING.

THOMAS OF READING.

DOCTOR OF OXFORD.

The townsfolk gather for a fair—sheep and oxen are driven about. Pedlars sell their wares, conjurers do their tricks, and acrobats ply their trade. The townsfolk, men, women and children walk about and watch the performers and buy trinkets, &c.

Some of the Abbot's servants come and demand money from the stall-holders, who are enraged and threaten them. They fetch their clubs and begin to belabour the Abbot's servants. Other servants from the abbey come to their rescue, but they are driven back into the abbey and seek refuge there. The shouts of the towns people greet the victory. The King approaches with his cavalcade. The people fall on their knees before him.

KING. What mean these wild and mad tumultuous cries
That do disturb the peace of this good town
Of Reading?

THOMAS OF READING. May't please your majesty, we be humble folk.
We have no rights save yon lord abbot gives.
Aye, so he says ! But we have hearts and hands :
We be not slaves. And yet this princely lord
Would fain deprive us of each piece we earn
By honest trading. His lewd wicked monks
E'en come into our market and demand
A silver penny here, a groat, a mark
And leave us nothing for ourselves, O King.
We want our rights our liberties. We want
Freedom to trade throughout our English land,
And Reading's sons will bless thy memory.

KING. Who art thou, my good fellow ?

THOMAS. Thomas of Reading, good my lord.

KING. What ! Thomas, who has innumerable wains
Filled with good cloth made by your Reading looms !
I met them on the road. Whose wain is this ?
"Thomas of Reading" said the teamster.
And whose is this ? "Thomas of Reading," quoth'ee.
And all the road 'twixt here and London town
Echoed the name of Thomas of Reading.
And art thou that great man ?

THOMAS. You're servant sire, a humble clothier.

KING. And there are others of this honest trade, I wot.

THOMAS. O yea, my lord, they're plentiful as crows
Twixt here and Newbury.

KING. Hark then ye men, I make ye free to trade,
To traffic freely, and this right good town
Shall have its Charter. Let it be engrossed
And signed and sealed with England's royal seal.
Where is our scrivener ?

(He is brought to the King).

Did I not bid thee to indite some deed
And grant of liberties to my faithful town ?

(Scrivener hands him the document).

Ah ! here it is.

To the good men of Reading town I grant
Freedom from county courts and hundred moot,
Freedom from tolls, complaints and pleas and dues,
And leave to buy and sell toll free throughout our land :
Let none disturb them at their peril.
There, good Thomas, take thee charge of this.

(Cries—God save the King, hurrah !)

But see ye keep the peace, good people all,
Nor vex the abbot with unlawful deeds.
And so farewell !

He retires to the abbey followed by his lords and retinue amid
the shouts of the people "God save the King, hurrah !

The business of the Fair is resumed.

A sudden shout is heard, and a bright chorus. And then a wild procession of Oxford Students comes trooping in, singing merrily :

Noster vates hic Homerus,
Dithyrambi dux Sincerus,
Pergrœcatur hodie,

Jo, Jo.

Hœc est illa bona dies,
Et vocata læta quies,
Vina Sitientibus,

Jo, Jo.

Nullus mitus nec labores,
Nulla cura nec dolores,
Sint in Readingensi, op—

Pi do.

Oppidi idi ido, oppidi, oppido
Oppidi idi ido, oppidi, ido.

Students dance and caper as they sing.

Townfolk run away affrighted.

A company of learned doctors and tutors appears.

Thomas advances to meet them.

THOMAS. We judge a man by the company he keeps ;
And yet you savour sane and reverend.
What be all these raving lunatics
That do disturb the peace of our good town ?

DOCTOR. Students of Oxford, may it please you, sire.
Doctus et verecundus, tu mercator es.

THOMAS. Nay, man, I speak no Greek.

DOCTOR. Tis Latin, sir, fresh from the fount of Oxford.

THOMAS. Methinks your lads have let the fount alone
And ta'en to stronger liquors.

DOCTOR. Forgive the lads their frolic, my good sir.

We come to your great hospitable town
Civitas resplendens et divitiarum plena,
Leaving the barren plains of Oxenford,
Because, forsooth, the dispicable men
Of that disgraceful place have scholars slain,
Hanged them like robbers, sheep or beggar folk,
Despising laws of university.
A heinous crime those rascals wrought, in truth,
And grievously shall Oxford answer it.

THOMAS. And what did those poor gentle lamkins do
To merit fate so fierce ?

DOCTOR. 'Twas but a frolic. Youth is wild and free.

THOMAS. Ah ! so it seems.

(Looks round at the students and laughs.)

DOCTOR. Well, well, we come to found our college here,
Pursue our studies, and a shrine to rear
For honest learning. Methinks you have a school.
Whose fame is not unknown at Oxenford.
And who can tell what fortune Time may bring ?
Perchance a college here may rise and grow
Famous as Oxford, whither men may flock
From France and Spain and Italy to boot,
To learn their grammar, rhetoric and arts.

THOMAS. Why then, good sir, thou'rt welcome, and thy lads.
But keep them in good order, mind thee well.
We want no frolics, hangings, and the like,
In this good town. So take them to the schools,
And teach them to be good God-fearing men.
That's the best learning, or else I'm a fool ;
And so farewell.

The Doctor and tutors bow—and lead off the Students. Bell-man rings his bell, and the market closes and the townsfolk disperse.

[Exeunt Omnes.]

EPISODE VIII.

Marriage of John of Gaunt with Blanche, daughter of Henry Plantagenet.

The burghers assemble to see the processions of bride and bridegroom. The mayor and burgesses stand in a prominent place to receive them.

A company of maidens bring flowers to strew the path of the bride.

John of Gaunt and his knights and friends arrive in state, and await the bride at the abbey-gate.

The bride's procession is seen in the distance. Church bells

ring and the people shout a welcome. Maidens scatter flowers as she rides along.

John of Gaunt helps her to dismount, and the procession enters the Abbey.

The monks' chanting is heard within, and the people without kneel. When the chanting ends, the bells ring out a joyous peal.

Minstrels sing a bridal song—

“Joy to the bridegroom, joy to the bride.”

Wedding rejoicings follow—games and dances. Some knights perform a tilting match, and rural old English sports fill the arena.

The bells sound again—the sports cease. The bridal procession marches out of the Abbey followed by the shouts of the populace, and the company disperse ; following the procession.

EPISODE IX.

The Fall of the Abbey.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ—ABBOT.

DR. LONDON.

CITIZEN.

The Abbey gates are closed.

Dr. London and his Commissioners are seen riding towards the Abbey door. Soldiers approach from another side stealthily and hide behind the buttresses of the gates.

He knocks loudly and demands admittance. The monks refuse to let him enter. He demands to see the Abbot, Hugh Faringdon, who at length appears.

ABBOT. What means this, Sir ? the Abbey gates are closed,
And none may enter here, save by our leave.

LONDON. We're lowly travellers on the King's highway,
And seek for lodging : methought all Abbeys gave
A cup of water to wayfaring men.

ABBOT. If such ye be, you're welcome. How may I tell
Your purpose ? The times are out of sort,
And prowling wolves surround the Church of God
And fain would ravish it. I like you not.
Your words are fair, your looks are villainous.
And by the Rood I swear ye shall not enter.

LONDON. And by the Rood I do, if Rood there be.
Ho ! ho ! proud monk, your little day is closed.
Your rule is shattered and your life nigh spent.
Here is my royal warrant from the King
To enter your old Abbey, turn out its hoards,
Frighten the ravens from their roosting place
And seize this house. It is the King's !
Soldiers advance, and scare these hooded crows ;
We'll hang them all before the day is done.

Soldiers come out of their hiding place. The monks attempt to drive them back with their staves. A fight takes place. Some of the monks are struck down, and the others are driven back, and Dr. London and Commissioners enter the Abbey.

The danger bell rings out.

The townsfolk rush from all sides and crowd around the gates, but are driven back by the soldiers.

Presently, Dr. London returns with donkeys laden with the spoils of the Abbey. A sturdy Citizen stops the way.

CITIZEN. These be fine goings on, robbin' the Church.
We hang robbers if they steals a pouch,
Or a sheep, or a ducat.
Come lads ! What be in them sacks ?

Men crowd round, and seize and open one of the sacks, and find gold chalices and plate and vestments.

CITIZEN. The goods of Holy Church, I'll nought of 'em,
Lest God's curse should fall upon my head,
Or blast these eyes, or strike my children dumb.
But as for you, vile wretch, I'll have a bout.
God gie me strength 'ith arm.

(rushes and attacks Dr. London with his staff and
beats him.)

LONDON calls out. Mercy, mercy, my good man, where are those rascally soldiers ?

The people take up the quarrel and attack the drivers and mules, until the soldiers sally forth and rescue London and his companions ; who go back to the Abbey.

(To be continued.)