

dame be liege and true, for she comes of the burly Cornish kind, and they be ever rebels in blood and bone. Even now they be one and all for that knave Warbeck, who is among them in the West.' You will guesse, dear mother, how my heart did beat. But withal, the King did drinke to me at the banquet, and did merrily call, 'Health to our Lady Mayoress, Dame Thomasine Percyvall, which now feedeth her flock in the rich pastures of our Cite of London!' And thereat they did laugh, and flect, and shout, and there was flashing of tankards and jingling of cups all down the Hall."

CHAPTER V.

THOMASINE DONAVENTURA, THE LADY MAYORESS OF LONDON.

"All worldly joys go lease
To the one joy of doing kindnesses."

Herbert.

HER history went on in serene prosperity, during twenty-five years of happy married life, in the love of her husband and the well-ordering of her home.

She had no children, but the poor, and the distant old home, became her care, and she ceaselessly provided for their needs and education.

In 1504 Sir John Percyvall died, leaving her—with the same love and trust she had elicited before, all his possessions. He seems to have been heart and soul in all her charities, and the parish records and those of the Merchant Tailors have many entries of the benefactions of both husband and wife. In the churchwardens' accounts for the parish of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City of London, the first entry which makes mention of Sir John Percyvall notes his having a chantry in that parish.

Another entry "Item receyved of the Master and Wardens of the Merchant Tailors, for the beme light of this church according to the devise of Dame Thomasine Percyvall widow, late wyf of Sir John Percyvall, Knight, deceased xxvjs. viiid."

And there are many others of the like kind, but we may not give space for them. Herbert in his histories of the Livery Companies of London, gives many particulars of the estates out of the proceeds of which the above funds (referring "to a number of other entries of charitable donations) were paid, the premises being situate in the parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth, St. Michael Cornhill, St. Martin Vintry, and St. Dionysius (or Denis) Backchurch in Fenchurch Street."

The charities left by this benevolent couple are also set forth at p. 502 of the same work.

And lastly the Stratton churchwardens' accounts for 1543 (the old text is 1513, but as Dame Thomasine Percyvall died in 1539 her death could not have been had "in mind" in that year.) The above accounts show that on the day on which my lady Percyvall's memory came round (i.e. the day on which her death was to be had in mind) prayer was to be made for the repose of her soul, and two shillings and two pence paid to two priests and for bread and ale.

There are however still to be seen in the remote and quiet village of Wike St. Marie, some five or six miles south of Bude, in the northern corner of Cornwall, the substantial remains of the good Thomasine's College and Chantry, which she founded for the instruction of the youth of her native place, and a school for the children of the poor.

The buildings are about a hundred yards east of the church (from the summit of whose grotesquely ornamented tower six and twenty parish churches may be discerned), and built into the modern wall of a cottage which

stands inside of the battlemented enclosure is a large carved granite stone (evidently one of two which formed the tympanum of a doorway) on which the letter T stands out in bold relief.

Probably it is the initial of the Christian name of our Thomasine, at any rate it is pleasant to think it may be such.

But alas! afterwards in the Parliament of the 4th of November, first of King Edward VI., 1550, all colleges, free chapels, chantries, fraternities and guilds throughout the kingdom, being dissolved and given to the King, this chantry and free school underwent with others the common downfall, and the revenues vested in the crown, from whence it passed to—now in possession thereof.

The traditions, however, concerning her are not only still numerous in the neighbourhood, but are as implicitly believed as if they were recorded in the history of England, and we have taken pains, due to our respect and reverence for her, to verify through old chronicles and parish registers the various facts of her life. In them we found the dates of events which read more like an improvised romance than a real history, and we have exactly transcribed them for the sake of those who care to know the simple facts of a beautiful legend of old times, and the real life of a very noble woman.

There are still many MS. letters of hers remaining, very interesting in the reverence and affection they express for her parents. They are so humbly worded that they seemed to us well worthy of record and remembrance in an age when deference and obedience to parents and elders is not a remarkable quality.

Like all noble natures, her spirit rose with her personal elevation—nor did her true and simple woman's nature change during the long years of her prosperity. It breathes and survives in every sentence of her family letters, and in her last will. It is touching to observe the dutiful loyalty with which she writes to her "Honoured Father," the old uneducated shepherd, and the "Sweet Mother," poor peasants sacred in her eyes, and addressed with the humility of a daughter though she was first of the proud city dames.

During her three marriages she had no children, and it was her singular lot to survive Sir John Percyvall, who died in 1504, for 'airty-five years in a long, lonely widowhood.

But the promise of the commandment did not fail, and all that should accompany old age—

"As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,"

was hers to the end.

Carew says, "She employed the whole residue of her life and last widowhood to works no less bountiful than charitable; namely, repairing of highways, building of bridges, endowing of maidens, relieving of prisoners, feeding and apprelling the poor."

"Among the rest, at this St. Mary Wike, she founded a chantry and free school, with fair lodgings for the school-masters, scholars and officers, and added £20 of yearly income for supporting the incident charges, wherein, as the heart of her desire was holy, so God blessed the same, with the wished success, for divers of the best gentlemen's sons of Devon and Cornwall were there virtuously trained up."

It is said that after the death of Sir John Percyvall she retired from court and city to her old parish of St. Mary Wike, and carried on her life of unweariend well-doing there to the last. She died in the year 1539 in the eighty-ninth year of her age. Her will, dated the vigil of the feast of Christmas 1510, is a singular document, for therein the feelings and impulses of her early life are recalled and condensed.

"She bequeaths large sums of money to be

laid out and invested in land for the welfare of the village borough, whereto amid all the strange vicissitudes of her life, her heart had always clung with fond and lingering regret."

She directs that a chantry with cloisters shall be built near the church of Wike St. Marie, at the discretion and under the control of her executor and cousin John Dincham the unforgotten priest. She endows it "... and provides that there shall be established therein a schole for young children born in the parochie of Wike St. Marie, and such to be always preferred as are friendless and poore. They are to be taught to read with their fescue from a boke of horn, and also to write, and both as the manner was in that country when I was young."

The well-remembered days of her girlhood appear to tinge every line of her last will dated 1510. Her very codicil is softened with a touch of her first and fondest love, for therein she gives to the priest of the church, where she will know her cousin John would serve and sing, "The silver chalice gilt, which good Master Maskelyne had devised for her behoof with a little blue flower which they do call a forget-me-not wrought in turkis (turquoise) at the bottom of the bowl, to the intent that whensoever it is used, the minister may remember her, who was once a simple shepherd-maid by the wayside of Wike St. Marie, and who was so wonderfully brought by many great changes to be Lady Mayoress of London citie before she died."

Changes? Yes, but there was no change in that heavenly spirit of humbleness and love which shone with such a glow through the veils of her earthly life. "The fierce light which beats upon" all earthly eminences only discovered the beauty of her spirit and the purity of her life. What a funeral that must have been in Wike St. Marie of the aged lady who had abandoned the great city where she had reigned as first lady once upon a time, with its grandeur, its security and its circle of friends for the poor hamlet on the moors!

We may remember that she left her native place a child of 13 years, and was more than 60 years old when she returned. Her parents must long since have been dead. The old associates of her girlhood (in all probability the Cousin John, for whose remembrance in the holiest hours of his life she had provided the little flower of loving thought so many years before) had passed away, only the descendants of her people can have remained, but they will have been fired with the zeal, which even now, after four centuries, still glows in the legends of her native place.

One can imagine the chanting procession of priests and acolytes, the waving censers and banners, and the high cross which passed along the bridge and the roads they owed to her care and love; but it is more difficult to realise the weeping train of mourning people who followed the dead hands which had only lived to bless; the dead feet which had never wearied in well-doing, and the stilled heart which had realised its greatness in sympathy with her Lord's love for the poor and wretched, and which, in its fervour of humility and charity may have found expression in the words of the old hymn: *

"The highest honours that the world can boast,

Are subjects far too low for my desire;
The brightest beams of glory are at most,

But dying sparkles of Thy living fire;
The proudest flames that earth can kindle be

But nightly glow-worms, if compared with Thee."

[THE END.]

* Francis Quarles.