



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

IN THE DAYS OF  
WILLIAM  
THE CONQUEROR

Eva March Tappan

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# In the Days of William the Conqueror

*by*

EVA MARCH TAPPAN





# CONTENTS

1.	That Which He Would Have	1
2.	The Banquet at Rouen	12
3.	From Castle to Cottage	23
4.	Robert the Pilgrim	36
5.	The Little Duke	47
6.	Guest or Prisoner?	60
7.	“William Knows How”	71
8.	A Visit to England	85
9.	What He Has He Holds	97
10.	A Voice from the Cliff	110
11.	Promise or Prison?	122
12.	On Board the “Mora”	136
13.	“England Is Mine”	148
14.	“Will You Yield?”	160
15.	A Stern Rule	173
16.	The Last Year	185



## THAT WHICH HE WOULD HAVE

“Come to the window, Ermenoldus. See how the country stretches out,—fields and vineyards and corn land! There’s no richer ground in the whole duchy of Normandy.”

“You and Duke Richard rule it together, do you not, my lord?”

“No. We hold it together after a fashion, but he rules. I am his vassal. Hiesmes is mine, and this goodly castle of Falaise ought to go with it.”

“Was the duke your father’s favorite, my lord?”

“Doesn’t it look like it, when he left me only Hiesmes and then cut off the best part of it for Richard?”

“Could it have been suggested to him, my lord?”

“You mean, did Richard tell him to do it,” said Count Robert bluntly. “Who knows what one man has said to another? Richard was with him from morning till night. My father called him a ‘good youth.’ I suppose I was a bad one,” and the young man laughed recklessly. “Anyway, Richard is Duke of Normandy, and I am only the Count of the Hiesmois; and here I am in the village of Falaise that ought to be mine, collecting taxes that ought to be mine, and putting them safely away for my brother in the treasure-room of the castle that ought to be mine.”

“This castle seems to be of good strength, my lord. The walls are thick and heavy. It would not be easy to batter them down. It stands at the very edge of the cliff, and the cliff falls down sheer to the valley. No one could approach on that side.”

“No; it’s a strong castle, but I have none that could not be captured in a day. Come to the window again, Ermenoldus. See what a mass of rook the castle is built on, and how it juts out over the valley! Across the Ante is that other great, jagged precipice. You’re a wizard, Ermenoldus; I verily believe you are. Couldn’t you build me a castle on Mount Mirat yonder that would be as strong as this?”

I’m not enough of a wizard to give you a castle, my lord,” said Ermenoldus; “and yet, there’s more than one way,” he half whispered. Count Robert did not hear the whisper, for he had turned again to the narrow window.

“If those girls are as pretty as they are graceful and merry,” he said, “they would be well worth seeing. Ermenoldus, will you call some one to get my horse? or, if you stamp three times on the stone under your feet, won’t the horse come of its own accord, all saddled and bridled?”

“You think too highly of the little that I have learned,” said Ermenoldus.

“I’m not sure, though,” said the count laughing, “but you are in league with the fiend himself and know all that there is to be known. Whence do you come and whither do you go? You appear and then you disappear, and all I know is that you are gone.”

“Never did I go faster than you will go to gaze upon the pretty maidens washing linen on the banks of the stream,” said Ermenoldus; “only I beg you, my lord, don’t ride down over the cliff in your haste. All my magic could not save you then;” but Count Robert was already at the gate, and the next minute he was galloping down the rough, rocky way that led to the foot of the cliff.

The linen had been spread out on the grass to dry and to whiten in the hot sun, and the young girls were frolicking in the ripples of the little stream, laughing and splashing water at one



another. One had bent down a green bough and held it in front of her face to protect it.

“By my faith!” said Count Robert to himself, “if that maiden’s face is as fair as her little feet are white, she’s prettier than all the high-born dames at my brother’s castle.” Just then the maiden let go the green branch and it sprang up above her head.

“Let’s dance,” she said, “not splash water at one another like children.”

“That’s a fairer face than I ever saw before,” thought the count, as he stopped his horse, and hidden by the trees, gazed at the young girls in their playful imitation of the village dance, their white feet now twinkling in the green grass on the river’s brink, and now splashing rainbow drops around them.

“See how high the sun is,” said one of the girls. “The linen is dry, and we must go home.”

“I’m tired. I’m going to rest awhile here under the trees before I go,” said the maiden of the green branch.

“But the sun is almost overhead,” said one girl. “Won’t your mother beat you if you do not come?”

“Beat? What is that? No one ever beats me,” she replied indifferently. “You carry the linen home for me, and I will come when I have had my little nap. Good-by, my friends,” and she waved them a farewell as she sat on the bank with her head on her hand, half reclining on the soft green grass in the shadow of the trees.

“Well, if that isn’t Arletta!” said one young girl. “She commands us to carry home her linen for her, and we obey. We always do just what she tells us to. Listen! Now she is singing. If I stayed after the washing was done to sleep on the bank and to sing songs, I should have a sound beating, but Arletta always does what she likes.” The maidens went slowly down the valley. Arletta half closed her eyes, and sang softly to herself.

“And may I listen to the pretty song?” said a voice coming so suddenly that it seemed to be just at her ear. Arletta sprang to her feet and made a humble courtesy, and then stood still, too abashed to look up. The rider had dismounted and stood holding his hat with its long plume in one hand and the horse’s bridle in the other.

“Are you one of the maidens of Falaise?” he asked, and then smiled at the idle question, for where else could she belong?

“I’m Arletta,” she answered, looking up shyly, “and my father is Fulbert the tanner.”

“Strange that such a flower should blossom in the foul garden of a tanner,” said Robert to himself.

“Are you the great Duke Richard?” asked the maiden.

“No, I’m not,” said Robert half gloomily. “I’m nobody but Count Robert, his younger brother; and I haven’t even a strong castle to bless myself with. But you must be tired. Isn’t this washing too hard work for a girl like you?”

“Oh, no, I am strong,” she said. “All the girls come out here to wash the linen for their homes.”

“Shouldn’t you rather stay at home and have some one to wash the linen for you? When you braid your hair, you could braid in a cord of shining gold, and you could wear a silken mantle and fasten it with a golden clasp.”

“But it is only the great ladies in castles who wear silken mantles and braid gold in their hair,” said Arletta, smiling, nevertheless, at the thought of so much luxury.

“And should you like to have a young man ride up on a great black horse to see you? He would have a feather in his hat, and perhaps he would wear a gold chain, if he is only a count, and he might bring you one day a jewelled band for your hair, and another day a veil of silken tissue, or perhaps a mantle of silk or of

velvet. Should you like it?" Arletta said nothing, but her cheeks were bright red. Her eyes were bent on the ground, but when she ventured to look up for a moment, they were glittering with excitement.

"Farewell, my pretty Arletta," said he, "but it will not be many days before you will hear from me." He sprang upon his horse, kissed his hand to her gayly, and rode away, the horse's hoofs clattering on the fragments of stone in the road.

Whatever were Robert's faults, no one could accuse him of putting off what he meant to do, and it was only the next day when Fulbert came meekly from his tan-yard at the demand of the young noble.

"I have seen many a high-born maiden," said Robert without a word of explanation or preface, "and your daughter pleases me better than all of them. I would have her as the lady of the castle. Will you send her to me to-morrow?"

"The child of a tanner cannot well consort with the lord of a castle," said the father bravely, but with a trembling voice.

"And I have no castle worthy of the name," said Count Robert bitterly, "but I suppose that I may have a bride."

"The great folk have the power to take whom they will," said the tanner, his voice choking in his throat, "but I would have had my daughter wed one of her own station, and not in the castle but in the little church; and I wanted my kinsfolk and her mother's to look at her and smile upon her, and then to come to our house and rejoice that Arletta was going to her own home with the one that she had chosen."

"As you will," said the count, with pretended indifference; "but before you refuse, ask the girl herself. If she says no, I will leave her; but should she choose to say yes, you shall lose nothing by having your daughter the bride of a noble."

In the tiny inner room of the cottage stood Arletta, trembling and flushing.

“Hasten, Arletta,” said her mother, Doda. “Hasten, and put on your best robe, the gray with the blue belt. He will go. A count will not wait long for a tanner’s daughter. Tell him that you are ready—but, no; tell him that you will agree if—no, that will not do; ask him humbly if he would not rather that his bride were the daughter of a brewer than of a tanner; and tell him that if he would only give your father the gold to become a brewer, he would not be shamed that you have come from the home of a tanner.”

“But perhaps I do not wish to go to the castle,” said Arletta indifferently. “Perhaps I would rather walk to the church with all the village maidens, and have a wedding feast.”

“Arletta, why will you torment me? Hasten; I do not hear a sound. Perhaps he is already gone. One would think you had no idea how great an honor it is. Don’t you know that he can wed whom he will?”

“The one that weds me will be the one that *I* will,” said Arletta.

“You are a proud, undutiful girl,” said Doda. “Pull those folds more on the shoulders, and draw the girdle to the right. There, I hear his voice again. He has not gone.”

“No, he has not gone,” said Arletta, with a peculiar little smile, and she went forward slowly, till she stood in the opening between the two rooms. The soft gray garment hung in long folds from her shoulders, and was confined at the waist by a blue belt. Her cheeks were red, and her eyes shone.

“Go to him. Tell him you are sorry you have kept him so long,” whispered Doda, twitching her daughter’s robe, for she had crept up softly behind the girl. But Arletta did not take even a single

step through the opening. She stood with one foot drawn back, as if she might disappear in a moment. So beautiful she was that Robert bent on one knee before her, and kissed her hand as if she had been some maiden of high degree.

“The next time that I see you, shall it be in the castle? Will you come to me, Arletta?”

“Say yes,” whispered her mother, and even Fulbert had begun to realize that this was a great opportunity, and to fear lest the wayward damsel should refuse so lordly a suitor.

“Will you come, Arletta?” asked the count gently, looking eagerly into her eyes.

“Yes, I will come,” said Arletta, with slow graciousness, and with a touch of condescension in manner that would have seemed to belong to a princess rather than to a simple maiden of the people. The count slipped about her neck a slender gold chain with a pearl in every link.

“That is to hold you fast,” he said. “The castle is a grim and dreary place; but I know where there is a little door that leads to a chamber the thickness of the wall. It is dark and gloomy now, but people who are wise in using colors shall paint the walls with blue and gold and vermilion. The hangings shall be of silk, and every day the straw on the floor shall be bright with fresh flowers; and there shall you abide, and, tanner’s daughter as you are, you shall be treated as if you were a king’s daughter.”

“Tell him you are grateful,” whispered Doda anxiously, but Arletta only smiled slightly, with the air of one conferring a favor. The count sprang upon his great black horse, and went his way to the castle.

As he dropped his bridle into the hands of a servant, he asked:—

“And where is Ermenoldus?”

"Truly, my lord, I do not know," said the man. "He was here, and then he was not here, and when he was here he said, 'Tell my lord there is a message from me,' and then he was not here."

"Folly! no man could leave the castle unless the gate was opened for him. If you are telling me false, I'll have you thrown from the top of the cliff."

"Indeed, my lord, it is true," said the servant earnestly. "He was here, and then he was not here, and he said there was a message for you that you could read only in the glow of the fire."

"I believe the man is in league with the fiend," said Robert to himself. "To leave me just when I wanted him most!"

That night, when the count went to his bed, there lay on his pillow a scroll, closely tied with a golden cord that was wrought into an intricacy of many twists and coils. Impatiently he struggled with the knot.

"There's surely magic about it," he said, "and I have heard that if one cuts a magic knot, the wizardry will all turn against him," so he pulled and turned and twisted the golden thread, until all of a sudden it seemed to fly apart of its own accord under his fingers. Apparently nothing was written on the scroll, but as he held it half fearfully before the fire in the castle hall, there came out, letter by letter, a message. He read it slowly, for he was more used to reading the faces of men than lettering on parchment. It was this:—

"When one holds that which he would have, let him see to him see to it that he hold it fast."

"Indeed I will," he said under his breath. "Arletta is mine, and the workmen shall work as never before, and if the little room in the tower is not ready in two days, some one shall go into the dungeon."

No one was thrown into the dungeon, for on the second day

the little chamber in the wall was as bright and cheery as a place could be that had but a single window, and that a tiny one. However, people thought more of safety than of sunlight in those days, and the smallness of the opening was looked upon as an advantage. The frowning vaulting of the gray stonework that made the top of the room was hidden by a light blue coloring, half veiled by a graceful scrollwork of gold. All about the little window the stone was stained a deep, rich vermilion, and the walls were hung with heavy silken tapestries of a clear, sunny yellow. The floor was strewn with the softest of straw, and over it were sprinkled fresh roses from which the pages had removed every thorn. With precious stones—cut from the count's mantle of state—hung here and there on the walls, the little room flashed when the door was thrown open as if it was full of humming-birds.

All was ready, and Robert sent a chamberlain for Arletta. Behold, he returned without the village maiden!

"She would not come with me," he explained. "She said she would not come to the castle as a serving maid, she would come as the bride of a great lord; and she bade me return, if you were of the same mind, with an escort of palfreys well caparisoned, and with a due attendance. 'I do not go to the castle to beg,' she said—and O my lord, she looked like a queen when she said it—I go of my own will, and as the free maiden daughter of a gallant man. I will not creep up hill with a single chamberlain as my escort. If I am worth having, I am worth sending for in proper state. Then, too, the count has sent me no finely woven robe and no silken mantle. I have nothing save what is the gift of my father. Would he have me come to him wearing the gift of a tanner, or would he have me wear nothing at all but the little chain of gold and pearls?' Then she turned away, and I saw her no more." The count laughed.

"I like her the better for it," said he. "And now do you make up an escort as you would for the daughter of a duke. Carry her the handsomest tunic and mantle to be found in the castle. Choose the best palfreys, and have them as well groomed and as handsomely caparisoned as for a queen. Let twenty men-at-arms go with you, and see to it that you delay not in going. As for the coming, the fair Arletta will choose her own pace."

The little procession went forth and made its way along the rocky road to the home of the tanner. Robert watched it eagerly as it carne slowly up the hill. At the castle gate there was a halt.

"Throw the gates open wide," he heard a low, clear voice say. "I am not an uninvited guest. I come here at the wish of the count and of my own free will."

"Let him see to it that he hold it fast," said Robert, "and that I will," and he hastened to welcome the fair Arletta.

Month after month passed away, but the charm of the tanner's daughter for the young count did not grow less. Whether she met him in her plain gray gown, with the playful humility of a village maiden, or in the rich robes of the lady of the castle, to whom all must do honor, and with a pride and haughtiness equal to that of the count's aristocratic grandfather, Richard the Fearless, she was equally fascinating to Count Robert. His brother's interests were forgotten. Of his own he took no heed. It began to be whispered that he would not willingly depart from the castle of Falaise.

Now Normandy and the districts round about were swarming with people, too many for even so fertile a country to nourish. The land had been divided and subdivided until the share of a man would no longer support those who were in helpless dependence upon him. There was restlessness everywhere. The women of the household must abide at home; nowhere else was there protection or safety. The fathers of families must struggle on as



best they could; but the young men were held back by no question of fear, bound by no demands of any who were dependent upon them. From one domain to another they wandered, ready to throw themselves vehemently into whatever cause might come to hand. They were any man's soldiers if he would pay them well. They would follow the sound of the tinkling silver wherever it might lead.

The country about was full of such men, and at the first whisper of the count's unwillingness to leave Falaise, they hastened to the castle. The weapon lay at Robert's hand. Would he use it? One of the boldest of the young soldiers made his way to the count.

"Here we are," he said, "and here are our weapons. Can you make use of us and of them? We will fight for you bravely and faithfully."

## THE BANQUET AT ROUEN

**G**ive a child a knife and its first thought is to cut. So it was with the count. Here he was in a castle that ought to be his. Its walls were solid, its keep was massy. Men who were eager to fight under his banner were pressing upon him. What should hinder him from holding fast to his own?

“I wish Ermenoldus was here,” he thought. Then his mind wandered back to the last time that he had seen the wizard, as he called him, and more than half in earnest.

“We were talking about the castle and its thick walls and the great precipice below it,” he thought, “and then he disappeared and left me the mysterious message that I could read only in the glow of the fire.” Ever since the strange guest had departed, Robert had carried the little scroll in his bosom. He drew it out and read it anew. Another interpretation flashed upon him.

“The castle of Falaise is that which I ‘would have,’ “ he said aloud. “ ‘Let him see to it that he hold it fast.’ That will I do. Brother or demon, duke or king, let them come on. Here is my castle—*my* castle—and here are bold fighters, and up there in the little room in the thickness of the wall is as beautiful a lady to fight for as ever sat on a royal throne. Here I am and here will I remain.” In an hour the castle was in commotion. There was a great polishing of shields and spears. Armor that had grown rusty in the time of quiet, so unusual in those stormy days, was rubbed

and strengthened and its breaks repaired. The forges blazed night and day. War-horses were to be shod. Arrowheads were to be made. Swords were to be sharpened to a keen edge that would cut through head and helmet at a blow. Axes were ground, and the helve of each was carefully tested, for on its strength might depend a fighter's chance of life or the defence of the castle gate.

In the midst of all the eager preparations, a man appeared at the gate. He was muddy. His shoes were in fragments, and his clothes were torn to rags by the thick briars through which he had forced his way; but when he spoke, men listened as if their lives hung upon his words. The words were few, they were only these:—

“Duke Richard and a great force are coming through the forest at the other side of the town.”

Robert's first thought was of the security of the fair bride whom he had taken from the home of her father. In general, the keep of a castle was the safest place in a siege, but in this instance, when a duke was trying to regain possession of his own, then, however much he might be forced to injure the castle, he would do no needless damage to the peasants living on his land. The best place for Arletta was in her father's house, and there she was carried with as much of form and ceremony as the hasty departure would permit.

Hardly had the castle gate been closed upon the return of the men who had acted as her escort, when the glitter of the spears of Richard's soldiers was seen in the distance. Nearer and nearer they came. First rode the standard-bearer and the guards of the standard. Then came the duke himself, with flashing helmet and shield and coat of mail, his armorial bearings blazoned on even the trappings of his horse. The coat of mail was in one piece, and was shaped like a tunic, falling to the knees, and protect-

ing his arms down to the wrists. His legs were guarded by wide thongs of leather crossed and recrossed. To the broad belt that fell across his shoulder hung a dirk and a short, stout sword. His shield was oblong, rounded at the top and narrowing to a point at the bottom. That there should be no little crevice where an unfriendly lance might enter, his coat of mail had a kind of hood, also of mail, that covered the back of his head to the helmet, and shielded his cheeks. He carried a lance, and from its head waved the gonfalon, or pennant, around which his men were to rally at the call of their lord.

The knights who accompanied Richard were armed and equipped in much the same way, save that their accoutrements were less rich, and not always as complete. Around each knight were grouped his own vassals, whom he was required to arm and mount and lead in the service of the duke.

No coat of mail had the men of low degree. That belonged to the knights, and every one knew that a man of humble birth could never be worthy of being made a knight. They were allowed to wear a stuffed tunic that afforded some little protection, and under it they might have a sort of breastplate of leather. They carried a round shield. Their weapons were the lance, the battle-axe, the bow, the sling, even clubs and flails and maces, and staves with prongs. They were permitted to carry a sword, but it must be long and slender—not short and thick like that of the nobles. Together with these vassals were many of the same eager, restless adventurers that had entered the service of Robert.

Up the winding road came the troops of Richard, closer and closer to the castle. Robert's men stood on the wall hurling down great stones, firing deadly arrows, and thrusting back with their long lances the foremost men in the ranks of the duke. The contest was the more bitter in that the foes were brothers. Wild shouts

arose from both sides—of rage from one and defiance from the other. Richard's arbalests, unwieldy machines for hurling great stones, drove Robert's men down from the walls; or rather their dead bodies were dragged down by their fellow-fighters to make room for other men. The outer walls were captured, and there was a pause.

Robert's men were few, and there was no way to make good his losses; while Richard's followers had been more in number at first, and additions had been continually coming up. The walls of the donjon were thick and heavy, but the art of using stone as a material for castle-building was in its infancy, and there were weaknesses in the structure of which a determined assailant might take advantage. After the moment's rest, Richard's men were rousing themselves for a final attack, and this, Robert knew, could hardly fail to be successful. He stood with grim, set face, and around him gathered his fighters, watching him, and ready to obey the least indication of his wishes.

"It is of no use. The castle must yield," said Robert gloomily.

"True, my lord," said a grave voice behind him.

"Ermenoldus! wizard that you are, give me your aid. How came you here?"

"I wish I was a wizard, my lord," said Ermenoldus sadly. "I would run the risk of the flame and the fagot if I could help you, for I have done you nothing but harm when I meant to work you good."

"But how came you here?"

"By no wizardry, my lord. There is a tiny crevice under a jutting rock which is hidden by bushes. A slender man like me can easily make his way up the crack, for it is scarcely more than that. A sudden twist, a writhing through a little gap between the foundation rocks, and I am in your fortress. It was as well that

your servants should think it witchcraft. Unrevealed knowledge is unshared power.”

“Is there no hope, Ermenoldus?”

“None, my lord. To save yourself from death—no, perhaps not death, that is easy—but from a life in the lowest depths of the castle dungeon, you must yield. Take down your standard. Put up the white flag and sue for peace. Make what terms you can, but yield.”

The white flag was put up, and in the gloomy keep of the castle, red and slippery with the blood of slaughtered men, the two brothers debated again the question of the heritage—Richard calmly, as with the manner of a man who did but claim his own; Robert gloomily, but with a certain ready meekness that might have made those who knew him best question whether all his thoughts were made clear by his words. The end of the discussion was this: Robert might have the district of the Hiesmois, and hold it free from his brother’s interference, but the castle of Falaise must still belong to Richard.

All was quiet and concord. The soldiers marched to Richard’s capital, Rouen, the two brothers riding together at the head of their men. A great banquet was made ready in the castle—a strange mixture of luxury and discomfort. The chairs of that day were heavy and clumsy. At family dinners people sat on stools, but at a ceremonious feast like this benches were used, and the guests huddled together as best they could. There were nutcrackers, but there were no forks. Warriors noted for their bravery were given bulls’ horns bound with rings of silver or of gold for their drinking cups, and these were filled over and over again with beer or wine. There were vegetables of many kinds, fish of all varieties, rabbits, fowl, venison, and lamb. Pork appeared in the shape of ham, sausages, black pudding, and roast. It was the most

common meat, though it was often eaten with a little fear lest it should produce leprosy.

For dessert there were baked fruits and nuts of all the kinds that could be obtained, cheese, red and white sugar-plums, and on a raised platform in the middle of the table were jellies, elaborately fashioned in the shape of a swan, heron, bittern, or peacock. The real peacock was the dish of honor, and was called the "food for the brave." It was stuffed and roasted. Its beak was gilded with gold, and sometimes its whole body was covered with silver gilt. The bird was brought in with a waving of banners, and a flourish of trumpets like that which announced the coming of some great dignitary.

The feast was elaborate, but it was served with no attempt at any special order. After orange preserves came chickens, and after lamb sausages came a delicate pie made of larks. Nuts were quite likely to appear before ham, and sweet jellies before soup.

Such a banquet as this required a kitchen of generous dimensions, and so it was that the kitchen of a noble must have great spits on which many joints of different kinds could be roasted, together with whole sheep and venison and long rows of poultry. There must be many utensils, and in the houses of men of highest rank there was a special servant to take care of the copper dishes, kettles, saucepans, and caldrons, and to see to it that they were safe and bright and shining.

The banquet hall was lighted by hanging lamps, and lamps on standards, and countless wax candles set in chandeliers and in candlesticks. The walls were hung with finely woven tapestries. Within the hall there was a barbaric sort of luxury, but in the town in which the hall of feasting stood, the pigs were still running wild in the streets.

When men began to weary of feasting, jugglers and minstrels

came in to amuse them. The minstrels sang to the music of a sort of double-barrelled flute, or recited long poems of war or adventure in doggerel rhymes. Lavish gifts were presented to them, and they went away rejoicing in generous sums of money, or clothing of scarlet or violet cloth, or in fur robes or jewels or noble horses.

The jugglers were treated equally well, and perhaps the amusements which they provided were even more generally appreciated by the guests. These jugglers performed all sorts of sleight-of-hand tricks. They boxed and they wrestled and they danced. They threw up lances and caught them by the point, or they spun naked swords over their heads and caught the flashing weapons as they fell. Then, too, they led about bears and monkeys and dogs that fought or danced together. The dogs would walk about on their hind legs, the monkeys would ride horseback, while the bears pretended to be dead and the goats played on the harp.

Hour after hour the feasting and the amusements and the rejoicing continued. Every one drank the health of every one else. Especially friendly and harmonious did the two brothers appear, who had so recently fought together as the deadliest of foes. In many a golden-bound horn of wine they pledged each other. At last the time came when men could feast no more. The words of farewell were said, and the banquet was over. Scarcely had the festival lights been extinguished when the bells began to toll for the sudden death of Richard. Robert returned to Falaise. The castle was his, and he was Duke of Normandy.

The new duke began his reign by a generosity that made his followers rejoice.

“He’s the duke for me,” said one of them jubilantly. “Duke Richard gave me one suit a year, and Duke Robert will give me two.”

“Yes,” said a second retainer, “when Arcy showed him his



sword all dented and bent in the fight and asked for another, he gave him a sword and a new coat of mail and a fine new horse and a helmet.”

“Was that what killed Arcy? Did he die of joy?”

“That is what some one said, but I think he ate too much at the feast, and they didn’t bleed him soon enough.”

“Perhaps he drank of the wrong cup by mistake,” said another, with a significant look.

“I don’t quarrel with any duke that doubles my salary,” said the first. “He is my friend who shows himself a friend, and I’ll stand by Robert the Magnificent. Richard died, to be sure; but then he might have been killed in the battle so it would have been all the same now.”

It mattered little to Robert who was pleased and who was displeased at his accession. He was duke, and he meant to rule, and that was enough. Falaise pleased him. The hunting was good, the castle was the strongest in his domain; it was the place for which he had fought, and now that it was in his hands, he meant to keep it. Moreover, in the home of a man who had once been a tanner, there was the fairest lady in the duchy. It seemed best that she should remain for a while in her father’s house. Those were stormy times, and until Robert’s position was perfectly established, she would be more safe from secret foes in the humbler home of her parents than in the castle itself, with all its mighty walls and its store of weapons.

He had lost one upon whom he had been more than a little inclined to rely—the “wizard” Ermenoldus—and in a way to make him feel the loss the more keenly. Ermenoldus had accused certain nobles of being unfaithful to Robert. One by one they challenged him to single combat. One by one they were defeated, but at last in a final duel with a forester he was slain. Sorrow,

pleasure, anxiety, triumph, contended in Robert's mind. It is no wonder that he was restless and uneasy.

"One would think that the great folks might let us sleep of nights," said a peasant woman sleepily to her husband, as she turned wearily on the heap of straw that was their bed.

"That was the duke," said her husband. "Listen! you can hear his horse's hoof-beats even now, and he must be almost up to the castle. He gallops faster than any one else."

"Why can't he do his galloping by day?" grumbled the woman. "They take our cattle, and they make us work in their fields and on their roads. If we turn around we have to pay a tax, and if we stand still, we have to pay a tax. They might let us sleep at night."

"Perhaps the duke cannot sleep either," said the peasant; and he added significantly: "It is not good to fight with one's brother. I have heard that if a man does, little demons will come at night and torment him."

"Perhaps evil spirits made him do it," said the wife making the sign of the cross; but the husband said:—

"I don't believe he is a very good man, for they say that sometimes he burns a whole armful of wax candles in a night, because he won't be in the dark."

"Well, everybody knows that wax candles ought to be given to the church," said the wife.

"A wizard used to come to see him sometimes," said the man, "and no one knew how he ever got into the castle or how he got out of it. The porter said that once when the wizard was standing close to him and the gate was shut, he looked away for just a minute, and when he turned, the wizard was gone; but when he opened the gate half an hour later, the wizard was going down the hill as free as might be, and the porter declared that when the man waved his hand, he could see a streak of fire."

“It might have been his ghost,” said the woman.

“It might *now*,” said her husband, “but he wasn’t dead then. Mayhap, though, it was his ghost that fought the— No, he was not dead then, either. They used to say that he could make a vine grow fast or slow as he would, and that if he looked at you over the right shoulder, you would have good luck, but that if he looked at you over the left shoulder, whatever you planted would die or your house would burn down or the spring would dry up or something bad would come to you. I have heard that if he said some good words over the ground, there would be a great harvest, and that if he shook his head at the moon and said something that no one could understand, any one that went out into the moonlight that night would fall down dead.”

“Duke Richard fell down dead right after the great feast, didn’t he? They say that the wizard was there.”

“No, he wasn’t there; but what happened then is why they call the duke ‘Robert the Devil.’ They say it was only Richard and the very bravest of his knights that died, and that not one of Duke Robert’s men was hurt.”

“I think it was all that wizard,” said the wife positively. “A wizard can do things if he isn’t there; and then he might have been there, even if they couldn’t see him. A wizard doesn’t have to be seen if he doesn’t choose to be. He might have looked at the wine over the left shoulder. Duke Robert is kind and good, I am sure of that, for when he was riding at full speed one day, Pierre’s little girl stood still in the road right in front of his horse. He had a right to run over her, of course, but he dashed out among those great stones just at the turn of the road and did not harm her at all. And there’s something more to tell, for instead of going down on her knees and thanking him for sparing her life, the silly little thing only opened her mouth and cried at the top of her voice.”

“Didn’t he even tell some one to beat her?”

“No, that he did not; he bent away down from the saddle—and he might have fallen off and rolled down the bank and been killed; only think of it, the duke killed for the child of a serf!—he bent down from the saddle and caught her up. The mother thought he was going to throw her down over the rocks, and she began to cry too; but he gave the child a ride on that great black horse of his, and then lifted her down and filled both her hands with red and white sugar-plums, the kind that they say great folks have at their feasts. No one in the village ever saw any before, and all the people around here have been in to see them. The child is so proud that when she plays with the other children, she is all the time saying, ‘You never rode on the great black horse’; and really her mother isn’t much better, for she says her daughter shall never marry any man who isn’t at least a freeman.”

“She will marry the one that the duke chooses, of course,” said the husband; “but she was certainly a fortunate child. Not many nobles would have let her off so easily when she was right in the road. Perhaps it was the wizard, after all, and Duke Robert had nothing to do with the wine.”

“I heard one of the knights call the duke ‘Robert the Magnificent,’ “ said the woman.

“And I heard one call him ‘Robert the Devil,’ “ said the man.

“I suppose the great folks have some way of knowing which is right,” said the woman, and then they went to sleep.

More than once that night did the great black horse gallop up and down the winding road between the castle and the village below the hill. More than once did the rider in his restlessness fling himself from the saddle and stride impatiently up and down in front of his stronghold. Then he would mount again and ride furiously down the hill, the hoofs of his horse striking fire on the stones in his path.

## FROM CASTLE TO COTTAGE

**I**n the village, not far from the market-place, was the home of Fulbert, made larger and more comfortable. To keep out the cold draughts, the walls were hung with tapestry, a refinement of luxury never seen before in the cottage of a peasant, so that the little house was the wonder of all the people in the vicinity. There was also a chair, a real chair; clumsy and heavy, to be sure, but there was gilt on it, and the arms were carved, and, moreover, it was the only chair in the neighborhood, and that was fame. The family sat on stools at the table, of course; but then every one knew that they could use a chair if they chose.

Doda was not at all averse to letting her friends have a glimpse of her cooking utensils, and report said that some of them were made of copper, "Just as if they were in a king's kitchen," said the admiring people. When Fulbert and his family ate their dinner, they did not use plain wooden trenchers as did their neighbors, but a kind of pottery with thick, heavy glazing. They drank from wooden cups, to be sure, but the cups were edged with a rim of silver; and most astounding luxury of all, rumor said that they actually had all the wax candles that they chose to burn.

More than one armful of them was burned on the night that Duke Robert rode so furiously up and down the long hill. By and by all was still in the cottage. The duke was quiet in the castle, but

before the sun was far above the horizon, he was again at the foot of the hill, and softly entering the door of the little house.

“Here he is, my lord, here he is,” said the old nurse, “and he’s even a lustier boy by daylight than he was by candlelight. It’s a good thing that light of a wax candle shone on him first, for bees gather wax, and so he will be rich and powerful. Here’s your boy, my lord,” and she put the baby into the arms of its father, and drew aside the curtain that separated the outer from the inner room where Arletta lay. The duke would have known what to do on a battlefield with an enemy before him and with a sword in his hand, but with his quick-witted, sparkling Arletta lying pale and weak, and in his arms the little red bundle that seemed heavier than a suit of armor, he was as helpless as any other young father who is not a duke. Arletta smiled gently, and whispered:—

“Is he not a fine boy?”

“Indeed he is,” said the duke, “and I’ll do more for him than any one thinks. But what makes him shut up his hands so tight? Is anything the matter?” he said to the nurse.

“All babies do,” said the nurse composedly, “but all babies don’t do what he did last night; for when we laid him on the straw, he clutched a handful and he held on to it, and when he was put on the bed to sleep, he kept it in his hand, he did; and that means something, it does. Everybody that’s had to do with babies knows that.”

“What does it mean?” asked Duke Robert, looking at the nurse as if she alone could speak the words of wisdom.

“This is what it means—and it isn’t myself alone that says it, for I heard my mother’s mother say it when I was no higher than *that*—that whatever thing a child does first, that will he always do; and this child will reach out and take to himself, and what

he takes he will hold, until the time comes that he will have more than any one dreams of.”

“That is the tree in your dream,” said Robert, turning to Arletta.

“Yes, and dreams mean something, too,” said the nurse, who was so elated at having the duke for a listener that she had no idea when to stop. “When the lady Arletta told me what a dream she had had, that a tree arose from her body, and its branches spread out till they shaded all Normandy, *I* knew what it meant; and *I* knew what it meant when the boy clutched the straw. He’s no common child.”

“No, he’s not,” said the duke, looking at the baby with much respect mingled with a little alarm, for it was puckering up its face to do the duke knew not what; and when the first cry came forth, the warlike noble who never fled from his foes actually dropped his son into the nurse’s arms and made his way into the open air as rapidly as possible, feeling very big and clumsy, and really trembling and glancing around him in dismay when his sword knocked against the heavy oaken chair in his hurried escape.

One week after its birth the baby was taken to the parish church to be baptized. Never before had there been such an assemblage to see the baptism of any infant. Falaise was quite an important place, not only because of its castle, but on account of its trade in leather and its manufacture of woollens. The people were not all humble peasants, some among them were well-to-do; and the country round about, rich in flocks and herds, was the home of many a prosperous vassal. The herdsmen left their flocks and the weavers their looms, the peasants willingly ran the risk of fines and penalties, and all flocked to the church to see the baptism of the child of a great noble. What would be his name?



THE BAPTISM OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR