SAINT GEORGE FOR ENGLAND

G. A. HENTY

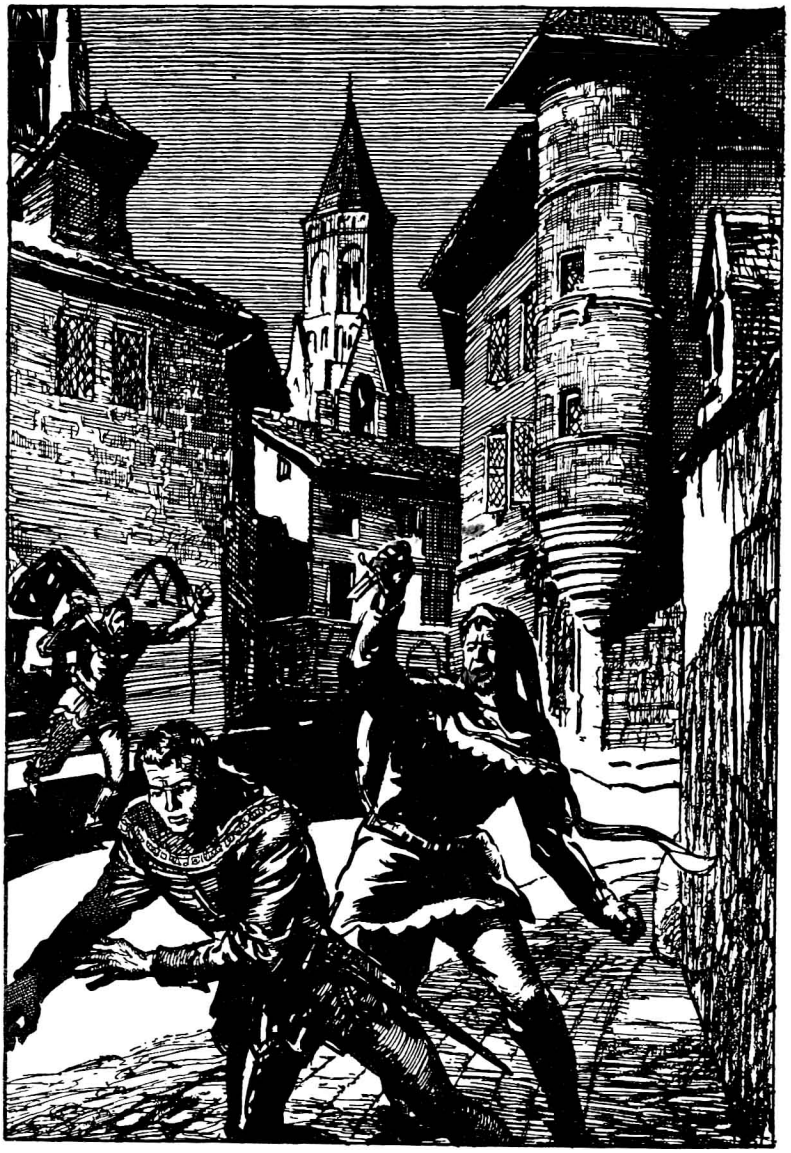
SAINT GEORGE FOR ENGLAND

Tales of Adventure by

G. A. HENTY

uniform with this edition

WINNING HIS SPURS



The dagger snapped in the hand of the striker

G. A. HENTY

★

SAINT GEORGE FOR ENGLAND

A Tale of Cressy and Poitiers

Abridged Edition

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
DEAN & SON Ltd.
41/43 Lodgate Hill LONDON EC4

Made and Printed in Great Britain by Purnell & Sons, Ltd.
Paulton (Somerset) and London

603 03045 9

PREFACE

It is sometimes said that there is no good to be obtained from tales of fighting and bloodshed,—that there is no moral to be drawn from such histories. Believe it not. War has its lessons as well as Peace. You will learn from tales like this that determination and enthusiasm can accomplish marvels, that true courage is generally accompanied by magnanimity and gentleness, and that if not in itself the very highest of virtues, it is the parent of almost all the others, since but few of them can be practised without it. The courage of our forefathers has created the greatest empire in the world around a small and in itself insignificant island; if this empire is ever lost, it will be by the cowardice of their descendants.

At no period of her history did England stand so high in the eyes of Europe as in the time whose events are recorded in this volume. A chivalrous king and an even more chivalrous prince had infected the whole people with their martial spirit, and the result was that their armies were for a time invincible, and the most astonishing successes were gained against numbers which would appear overwhelming. The victories of Cressy and Poitiers may be to some extent accounted for by superior generalship and discipline on the part of the conquerors; but this will not account for the great naval victory over the Spanish fleet off the coast of Sussex, a victory even more surprising and won against greater odds than was that gained, in the same waters centuries later, over the Spanish Armada. The historical facts of the story are all drawn from Froissart and other contemporary historians, as collated and compared by Mr. James in his carefully written history. They may therefore be relied upon as accurate in every important particular.

G. A. HENTY

CONTENTS

I

A WAYFARER

IT WAS a bitterly cold night in the month of November, 1330. The rain was pouring heavily, when a woman, with a child in her arms, entered the little village of Southwark. She had evidently come from a distance, for her dress was travel-stained and muddy. She tottered rather than walked, and when, upon her arrival at the gateway on the southern side of London Bridge, she found that the hour was past and the gates closed for the night, she leant against the wall with a faint groan of exhaustion and disappointment.

After remaining, as if in doubt, for some time, she feebly made her way into the village. Here were many houses of entertainment, for travellers like herself often arrived too late to enter the gates, and had to abide outside for the night. Moreover, house rent was dear within the walls of the crowded city, and many, whose business brought them to town, found it cheaper to take up their abode in the quiet hostels of Southwark rather than to stay in the more expensive inns within the walls. The lights came out brightly from many of the casements, with sounds of boisterous songs and laughter. The woman passed these without a pause. Presently she stopped before a cottage, from which a feeble light alone showed that it was tenanted.

She knocked at the door. It was opened by a pleasant-faced man of some thirty years old.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I am a wayfarer," the woman answered feebly. "Can'st take me and my child in for the night?"

"You have made a mistake," the man said; "this is no inn. Further up the road there are plenty of places where you can find such accommodation as you lack."

"I have passed them," the woman said, "but all seemed full of roisterers. I am wet and weary, and my strength is nigh spent. I can pay thee, good fellow, and I pray you as a Christian to let me

come in and sleep before your fire for the night. When the gates are open in the morning I will go; for I have a friend within the city who will, methinks, receive me."

The tone of voice, and the addressing of himself as good fellow, at once convinced the man that the woman before him was no common wayfarer.

"Come in," he said; "Geoffrey Ward is not a man to shut his doors in a woman's face on a night like this, nor does he need payment for such small hospitality. Come hither, Madge!" he shouted; and at his voice a woman came down from the upper chamber. "Sister," he said; "this is a wayfarer who needs shelter for the night; she is wet and weary. Do you take her up to your room and lend her some dry clothing; then make her a cup of warm posset, which she needs sorely. I will fetch an armful of fresh rushes from the shed and strew them here: I will sleep in the smithy. Quick, girl," he said sharply; "she is fainting with cold and fatigue." And as he spoke he caught the woman as she was about to fall, and laid her gently on the ground. "She is of better station than she seems," he said to his sister; "like enough some poor lady whose husband has taken part in the troubles; but that is no business of ours. Quick, Madge, and get these wet things off her; she is soaked to the skin. I will go round to the Green Dragon and will fetch a cup of warm cordial, which I warrant me will put fresh life into her."

So saying, he took down his flat cap from its peg on the wall and went out, while his sister at once proceeded to remove the drenched garments and to rub the cold hands of the guest until she recovered consciousness. When Geoffrey Ward returned, the woman was sitting in a settle by the fireside, dressed in a warm woollen garment belonging to his sister. Madge had thrown fresh wood on the fire, which was blazing brightly now. The woman drank the steaming beverage which her host brought with him. The colour came faintly again into her cheeks.

"I thank you, indeed," she said, "for your kindness. Had you not taken me in I think I should have died at your door, for indeed I could go no further; and though I hold not to life, yet would I fain live until I have delivered my boy into the hands of those who will be kind to him, and this will, I trust, be to-morrow."

"Say nought about it," Geoffrey answered; "Madge and I are right glad to have been of service to you. It would be a poor world indeed if one could not give a corner of one's fireside to a fellow-creature on such a night as this, especially when that fellow-creature is a woman with a child. Poor little chap! he looks right well and sturdy, and seems to have taken no ill from his journey."

"Truly, he is well and sturdy," the mother said, looking at him proudly; "indeed I have been almost wishing to-day that he were lighter by a few pounds, for in truth I am not used to carry him far, and his weight has sorely tried me. His name is Walter, and I trust," she added, looking at the powerful figure of her host, "that he will grow up as straight and as stalwart as yourself." The child, who was about three years old, was indeed an exceeding fine little fellow, as he sat, in one scanty garment, in his mother's lap, gazing with round eyes at the blazing fire; and the smith thought how pretty a picture the child and mother made. She was a fair, gentle-looking girl some two-and-twenty years old, and it was easy enough to see now from her delicate features and soft shapely hands that she had never been accustomed to toil.

"And now," the smith said, "I will e'en say good-night. The hour is late, and I shall be having the watch coming along to know why I keep a fire so long after the curfew. Should you be a stranger in the city, I will gladly act as your guide in the morning to the friends whom you seek, that is, should they be known to me; but if not, we shall doubtless find them without difficulty."

So saying, the smith retired to his bed of rushes in the smithy, and soon afterwards the tired visitor, with her baby, lay down on the rushes in front of the fire, for in those days none of the working or artisan class used beds, which were not indeed, for centuries afterwards, in usage by the common people.

In the morning Geoffrey Ward found that his guest desired to find one Giles Fletcher, a maker of bows.

"I know him well," the smith said. "There are many who do a larger business, and hold their heads higher; but Giles Fletcher is well esteemed as a good workman, whose wares can be depended upon. It is often said of him that did he take less pains he would thrive more; but he handles each bow that he makes as if he loved it, and finishes and polishes each with his own hand. Therefore he doeth not so much trade as those who are less particular with

their wares, for he hath to charge a high price to be able to live. But none who have ever bought his bows have regretted the silver which they cost. Many and many a gross of arrow-heads have I sold him, and he is well-nigh as particular in their make as he is over the spring and temper of his own bows. Many a friendly wrangle have I had with him over their weight and finish, and it is not many who find fault with my handiwork, though I say it myself; and now, madam, I am at your service."

During the night the wayfarer's clothes had been dried. The cloak was of rough quality, such as might have been used by a peasant woman; but the rest, though of sombre colour, were of good material and fashion. Seeing that her kind entertainers would be hurt by the offer of money, the lady contented herself with thanking Madge warmly, and saying that she hoped to come across the bridge one day with Dame Fletcher; then, under the guidance of Geoffrey, who insisted on carrying the boy, she set out from the smith's cottage. They passed under the outer gate and across the bridge, which later on was covered with a double line of houses and shops, but was now a narrow structure. Over the gateway across the river, upon pikes, were a number of heads and human limbs. The lady shuddered as she looked up.

"It is an ugly sight," the smith said, "and I can see no warrant for such exposure of the dead. There are the heads of Wallace, of three of Robert Bruce's brothers, and of many other valiant Scotsmen who fought against the king's grandfather some twenty years back. But after all they fought for their country, just as Harold and our ancestors against the Normans under William, and I think it a foul shame that men who have done no other harm should be beheaded, still less that their heads and limbs should be stuck up there gibbering at all passers-by. There are over a score of them, and every fresh trouble adds to their number; but pardon me," he said suddenly as a sob from the figure by his side called his attention from the heads on the top of the gateway, "I am rough and heedless in speech, as my sister Madge does often tell me, and it may well be that I have said something which wounded you."

"You meant no ill," the lady replied; "it was my own thoughts and troubles which drew tears from me; say not more about it, I pray you."

They passed under the gateway, with its ghastly burden, and were soon in the crowded streets of London. High overhead the houses extended, each story advancing beyond that below it until the occupiers of the attics could well-nigh shake hands across. They soon left the more crowded streets, and turning to the right, after ten minutes walking, the smith stopped in front of a bowyer shop near Aldgate.

"This is the shop," he said, "and there is Giles Fletcher himself trying the spring and pull of one of his bows. Here I will leave you, and will one of these days return to inquire if your health has taken ought of harm by the rough buffeting of the storm of yester-even."

So saying he handed the child to its mother, and with a wave of the hand took his leave, not waiting to listen to the renewed thanks which his late guest endeavoured to give him.

The shop was open in front, a projecting penthouse sheltered it from the weather; two or three bows lay upon a wide shelf in front, and several large sheaves of arrows tied together stood by the wall. A powerful man of some forty years old was standing in the middle of the shop with a bent bow in his arm, taking aim at a spot in the wall. Through an open door three men could be seen in an inner workshop cutting and shaping the wood for bows. The bowyer looked round as his visitor entered the shop, and then, with a sudden exclamation, lowered the bow.

"Hush, Giles!" the lady exclaimed; "it is I, but name no names; it were best that none knew me here."

The craftsman closed the door of communication into the inner room. "My Lady Alice," he exclaimed in a low tone, "you here, and in such a guise?"

"Surely it is I," the lady sighed, "although sometimes I am well-nigh inclined to ask myself whether it be truly I or not, or whether this be not all a dreadful dream."

"I had heard but vaguely of your troubles," Giles Fletcher said, "but hoped that the rumours were false. Ever since the Duke of Kent was executed the air has been full of rumours. Then came news of the killing of Mortimer and of the imprisonment of the king's mother, and it was said that many who were thought to be of her party had been attacked and slain, and I heard——" and there he stopped.

"You heard rightly, good Giles, it is all true. A week after the slaying of Mortimer a band of knights and men-at-arms arrived at our castle and demanded admittance in the king's name. Sir Roland refused, for he had news that many were taking up arms, but it was useless. The castle was attacked, and after three days' fighting was taken. Roland was killed, and I was cast out with my child. Afterwards they repented that they had let me go, and searched far and wide for me; but I was hidden in the cottage of a wood-cutter. They were too busy in hunting down others whom they proclaimed to be enemies of the king, as they had wrongfully said of Roland, who had but done his duty faithfully to Queen Isabella, and was assuredly no enemy of her son, although he might well be opposed to the weak and indolent king, his father. However, when the search relaxed I borrowed the cloak of the good man's wife and set out for London, whither I have travelled on foot, believing that you and Bertha would take me in and shelter me in my great need."

"Ay, that will we willingly," Giles said. "Was not Bertha your nurse? and to whom should you come if not to her? But will it please you to mount the stairs, for Bertha will not forgive me if I keep you talking down here. What a joy it will be to her to see you again!"

So saying, Giles led the way to the apartment above. There was a scream of surprise and joy from his wife, and then Giles quietly withdrew down-stairs again, leaving the women to cry in each other's arms.

A few days later Geoffrey Ward entered the shop of Giles Fletcher.

"I have brought you twenty score of arrow-heads, Master Giles," he said. "They have been longer in hand than is usual with me, but I have been pressed. And how goes it with the lady whom I brought to your door last week?"

"But sadly, Master Ward, very sadly, as I told you when I came across to thank you again in her name and my own for your kindness to her. She was but in poor plight after her journey; poor thing, she was little accustomed to such wet and hardship, and doubtless they took all the more effect because she was low in spirit and weakened with much grieving. That night she was taken with a sort of fever, hot and cold by turns, and at times off