

CHAPTER LIII
HENRY V OF MONMOUTH
THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

When Prince Hal came to the throne in 1413 A.D., he gave up all his wild ways and tried to rule as a wise king should. Judge Gascoigne was much afraid that he would suffer now for having sent the Prince to prison.¹ But Henry had a noble mind. He knew that the judge had only done what was right. So after he became king, Henry treated Judge Gascoigne as a friend, and when he gave up his judgeship it was because he was a very old man. "Still be my judge," he said, "and if I should ever have a son who does wrong, I hope you will punish him as you did me."

*Therefore still bear the balance and the sword:
And I do wish your honours may increase,
Till you do live to see a son of mine
Offend you, and obey you, as I did.
So shall I live to speak my father's words—
'Happy am I, that have a man so bold,
That dares do justice on my proper son;
And no less happy, having such a son,
That would deliver up his greatness so
Into the hands of justice.'*

Henry came peacefully to the throne, but he had no better right to it than his father had. There were many people who could not forget that, and it was not long before plots were formed. But Henry put down these plots, and then he thought of fighting with France. You remember how Edward III. had claimed to be King of France as well as King of England, and how he did indeed conquer a great part of France. But at the end of his reign, and during the reigns of Richard II. and Henry IV., all that he had conquered had again been lost. Of the many French lands which had at one time belonged to England, only the town of Calais remained. Henry V. made up his mind to try to win back these lands. He thought that if the plots against him became too strong, and he were driven from the throne of England, he could then still be King of France.

The eldest son of the King of France was called the Dauphin, just as the eldest son of the King of England is always called the Prince of Wales. At this time the King of France was mad, so the Dauphin ruled. When he heard that Henry V. was coming to fight against him he sent a present of some tennis balls. "Tell the English king," he said to his messenger, "that he is too young and foolish to claim dukedoms here. It will be better for him to amuse himself at home with these balls." Henry laughed when he received the present and sent back this message:—

"And tell the pleasant prince, this mock of his
Hath turned his balls to gun stones."

Henry gathered his army and, landing in France, laid siege to the town of Harfleur. The town held out bravely for a long time, and, when at last it fell, the English army was so worn out, so many of them had been killed and wounded, that they were not strong enough to fight any more. Yet Henry did not want to return to England having only taken one French town. He resolved to march from Harfleur to Calais, and sail home from there. He would show the French that the English were not afraid of them. So the army left Harfleur and, day after day, ragged, hungry, and worn, they marched along the weary way towards Calais. Day

¹ See previous chapter.

after day passed, but no French soldiers ever came in sight, till one evening, when they had gone about half the long journey, the enemy appeared. Even then, weary and worn though the English were, the French did not think themselves strong enough to attack, and fell back before them. But about forty miles from Calais Henry found the French army right across his path. If Calais was to be reached, the French must be beaten. And Calais had to be reached, as it was the only way home, and Henry's men were utterly weary and almost starving.

On the morning of the battle, Henry rode along the lines, cheering his poor tired soldiers. He had a gold crown upon his helmet, and the coat which he wore over his armour was embroidered with the leopards of England and the lilies of France, for already he called himself King of France and England. As Henry rode along he heard one of his nobles say, "I would that some of the thousands of warriors, who lie idle this day in England, were here to aid us."

"Nay, replied the King, "I would not have one man more. If we win, the greater is the glory God gives to us. If we die, the less is the loss to England."

When Henry had ridden all along the lines, he got off his horse and took his place among his soldiers, with the royal standard waving over him. The fight began, and a terrible fight it was. It seemed as if it were the story of Crecy and Poitiers over again. The French had an army ten times greater than that of the English; many of the English, too, were sick and ill, weary, ragged and half fed, and yet they won the battle. When it was over, Henry, riding across the field, met one of the French heralds. "To whom does the victory belong?" he asked.

"To you, sire," replied the man.

"Nay," said the King, "but to God. We English made not this great slaughter. What fortress is that?" he added, "for it is fitting that the battle should have a name."

"That is the castle of Agincourt, sire," replied the herald.

"Then Agincourt shall this battle be called," said Henry. And by that name we know it.

This was one of the greatest battles ever fought between the French and English but, although the English won, the army was too worn out to do more, and so they went home to England. But Henry soon gathered another army, and returned to France. There was more fighting till at last, five years later, peace was made, and Henry married Catherine, the daughter of the French king. It was arranged that King Charles who, you remember, was mad, should keep the title of king while he lived, but that Henry should rule, and that when Charles died, Henry should be King of France. But about two years after this, Henry himself died. He was only thirty-four and had reigned but ten years. He was a wise king and ruled well, yet his great battles are what we hear most of in his reign, and they brought suffering and sorrow to many of his people. Still his people loved him, and their grief at his death was great.

*Henry the fifth, too famous to live long,
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth,
England ne'er had a king until his time.
Virtue he had deserving to command:
His brandished sword did blind men with his beams:
His arms spread wider than a dragon's wings:
His sparkling eyes replete with wrathful fire
More dazzled and drove back his enemies,*

*Than mid-day sun fierce bent against their faces.
What should I say? His deeds exceed all speech.
He neer lift up his hand but conquerèd.*