Henry the Fifth and the Baby King

a.d. 1399.

HENRY the Fourth was the Black Prince's nephew, and he came to be king of England. His son was Henry the Fifth, the greatest of the Plantagenet kings. When he was a young man, and only Prince of Wales, he was very wild and fond of games and jokes. They used to call him Harry Madcap.

Once, when he got into some trouble or other, his father, who was ill, sent for him, and he went at once in a fine dress that he had had made for a fancy dress party. It was of light blue satin with odd puckers in the sleeves, and at every pucker the tailor had left a little bit of blue thread and a tag like a needle. The king was very angry with the prince for daring to come into the royal presence in such a silly coat. Then Prince Harry said—

"Dear father, as soon as I heard that you wanted me, I was in such a hurry to come to you that I had no time to even think of my coat, much less change it."

And so the king forgave him.

Another time one of his servants got into trouble and was taken before the Chief Judge Sir William Gascoyne. The Prince went directly to the Court where the judge was and said[43]—

"Lord Judge, this is my servant, and you must let him go, for I am the king's son."

"No," said the judge, "I sit here in the place of the king himself, to do justice to all his subjects, and were this man the Prince of Wales himself, instead of being his servant, he should be punished in that he has offended against the law."

The prince was so angry that he actually forgot himself so far as to strike Sir William Gascoyne. The good judge did not hesitate a minute.

"You have insulted the king himself," he said, "in my person, since I sit here in his place to do justice. The common folks who offend against the law offend merely against the king; but you, young man, are a double traitor to your king and your father."

And he sent the prince to prison.

Henry begged the good judge's pardon afterwards, and when he came to the throne he thanked him for having behaved so justly and wisely, and gave him great honour because he had not been afraid to do his duty without respect of rank, and Henry behaved to the judge like a good son to a good father.

No king of England was ever more wise or brave or just than Henry the Fifth; and even now he is remembered with affection. One of Shakespeare's most splendid plays is written about him, and, when you have once read that, you will always remember and love Henry the Fifth as all Englishmen should do.

a.d. 1413.

At the very beginning of his reign the wars with France began again. The king sent to France and claimed some lands that had belonged to Edward the Third; and the young prince of France sent back the message—"There is nothing in France that can be won with a dance or a song. You cannot get dukedoms in France by playing and feasting, and the prince sends you something that will suit you better than lands in France. He has sent you a barrel of tennis balls, and bids you play with them and let serious matters be." Then King Henry was very angry, and said—"We thank him for his present.

When we have matched our rackets to these balls,

We will in France, by God's grace, play a set

Shall strike his father's crown into the hazard.

Before I was King of England I was wild and merry because I knew not how great and solemn a state waited for me. I have played in my youth like a common man because I was only Prince of Wales; but now that I am King of England I will rise up with so full of glory that I will dazzle all the eyes of France."

King explains

Henry sailed over to France and besieged a town called Harfleur. He spoke to the soldiers before they attacked the town.

"Break down the wall and go through," he said, "or close the wall up with our English dead.

Bend every spirit

To his full height. On, on, you noblest English,

Whose blood is fetched from fathers of war proof.

Be copy now to men of grosser blood

And teach them how to war. And you, good yeomen,

Whose limbs were made in England, let us swear

That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt not;

Cry God for Harry, England and Saint George."

The Englishmen answered nobly to his appeal, and Harfleur was taken.

Then the English advanced to a place called Agincourt, a name fated to be linked with splendid glory for ever in the hearts of all English folk. The French had a very large army, and the English soldiers were tired with their long march. Many of them were ill and many were hungry; but they loved the king, and for his sake, and for[45] the sake of their country, they were brave in spite of hunger and cold. Though they were in a strange country and many times outnumbered by their foes, they kept up a brave heart as Englishmen have done, thank God, many's the good time, all the world over. So few were they that the Earl of Westmoreland said, just before the battle,—

"Oh, that we now had here

But one ten thousand of those men in England

That do no work to-day!"

The king came in just as he was saying this, and said—

"No, if we are marked to die, we are enough for our country to lose. If we are to live, the fewer there are of us the greater share of honour. I do not covet gold or feasting, or fine garments, but honour I do covet. Wish not another man from England. I would not lose the honour of this fight by sharing it with more men than are here, and if any among our soldiers has no desire to fight, let him go. He shall have a passport and money to take him away. I should be ashamed to die in such a man's company. We need not wish for men from England. It is the men in England who will envy us when they hear of the great crown of honour and glory that we have won this day. This is Saint Crispin's day. Every man who fights on this day will remember it and be honoured to the last hour of his life. Crispin's day shall ne'er go by from this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be remembered,

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers,

For he to-day that sheds his blood with me

Shall be my brother, be he ne'er so vile.

And gentlemen in England now abed

Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,

And hold their manhood cheap while any speaks

That fought with us upon St. Crispin's day."

Lying down

Lord Salisbury came in as the king was saying this. "The French are in battle order," he said, "and ready to charge upon our men."[46]

"All things are ready," said the king quietly, "if our minds are ready."

"Perish the man whose mind is backward now," said Westmoreland.

"You wish no more for men from England then," said the king smiling.

And Westmoreland, inspired with courage and confidence by the king's brave speech, answered—"I would to God, my king, that you and I alone without more help might fight this battle out to-day."

"Why, now you have unwished five thousand men," said the king laughing, "and that pleases me more than to wish us one more. God be with you all."

a.d. 1415.

So they went into battle tired as they were. The brave English let loose such a shower of arrows that, as at Creçy, the white feathers of the arrows filled the air like snow, and the French fled before them.

The Earl of Suffolk was wounded, and as he lay dying, the Duke of York, his great friend, wounded to death, dragged himself to Suffolk's side and took him by the beard and kissed his wounds, and cried aloud—

"Tarry, dear Cousin Suffolk,

My soul shall keep thine company to heaven.

Tarry, sweet soul, for mine, then fly abreast,

As in this glorious and well-foughten field

We kept together in our chivalry."

Lying abed with baby king

Then he turned to the king's uncle, the Duke of Exeter, and took his hand and said: "Dear my lord, commend my service to my sovereign."

Then he put his two arms round Suffolk's neck, and the two friends died together. But the battle was won.[47]

Peace was made with France, and to seal the peace Henry married the French princess, Katherine. A little son was born to them at Windsor, and was called Henry of Windsor, Prince of Wales; he was afterwards Henry the Sixth. When Henry the Fifth knew he was going to die, he called his brothers together and gave them good advice about ruling England and France, and begged them to take great care of his little son. Henry the Sixth was not a year old when his father died, and he was crowned at once.

One of the finest English poems we have, was written about the Battle of Agincourt.