

Brother Robert

By A. C. Benson

The castle of Tremontes stands in a wood of oaks, a little way off the high-road; it takes its name from the three mounds that rise in the castle yard, covered now with turf and daisies, but piled together within of stones, which cover, so the legend says, the bodies of three Danish knights killed in a skirmish long ago; the river that runs in the creek beside the castle is joined to the sea but a little below, and the tide comes up to Tremontes; when the sea is out, there are bare and evil-smelling mudbanks, with a trickle of brackish water in the midst. But at the time of which I write, the channel was deeper, and little ships with brown sails could be seen running before the wind among the meadows, to discharge their cargoes at the water-gate of the castle. It was a strong place with its leaded roofs and its tower of squared stone, very white and smooth. There was a moat all round the wall, full of waterlilies, where the golden carp could be seen basking on hot days; there was a barbican with a drawbridge, the chains of which rattled and groaned when the bridge was drawn up at sunset, and let down at sunrise; the byre came up to the castle walls on one side; on the other was a paved walk or terrace, and below, a little garden of herbs and sweet flowers; within, was a hall on the ground floor, with a kitchen and buttery; above that, a little chapel and a solar; above that again, a bower and some few bedrooms, and at the top, under the leads, a granary, to which the sacks used to be drawn up by a chain, swung from a projecting penthouse on the top. From the castle leads you could see the wide green flat, with dark patches of woodland, with lines of willows marking the streams; here and there a church tower rose from the trees; to the east a line of wolds, and to the south a glint of sea from the estuary.

Inside, the castle was a sad place enough, dreary and neglected. Marmaduke, the Lord of Tremontes, had been a great soldier in his time, but he had received a grievous wound in the head, and had been carried to Tremontes to die, and yet lingered on; his wife had long been dead, and he had but one son, a boy of ten years old, Robert by name, who was brought up roughly and evilly enough; he played with the village boys, he lived with the half-dozen greedy and idle men-at-arms who loitered in the castle, grumbling at their lack of employment, and killing the time with drinking and foolish games and gross talk. There was an old chaplain in the house, a lazy and gluttonous priest, who knew enough of his trade to mumble his mass, and no more; women there were none, except an old waiting-woman, a silent faithful soul, who loved the boy and petted him, and mourned in secret over his miserable upbringing, but who, having no store of words to tell her thoughts, could only be dumbly kind to him, and careful of his childish hurts and ailments; the boy ate and drank with the men, and aped their swaggering and blasphemous ways, which made them laugh and praise his cunning. The Lord Marmaduke had been nursed back into a sort of poor life, and sate all day in a fur gown in the solar, with a velvet cap on his head to hide his wound, which broke out afresh in the month of May, when he had been wounded; when he was in ill case, he sate silent and frowning, beating his hands on the table; when he was well he muttered to himself, and laughed at Heaven knows what cheerful thoughts, and would sing in a broken voice, fifty times on end, a verse of a foul song; and he would suddenly smite those that tended him, and laugh; sometimes he would wander into the chapel, and kneel peeping through his fingers; and sometimes he would go and stroke his armour, which lay where he had put it off, and cry. The only thing he cared for was to have his keys beside him, and he would tell them one by one, and curse if he could not tell them right. And so the days

dragged slowly by. He cared nothing for his son, who never entered the solar except for his own ends. And one of these was to steal away his father's keys, and to unlock every door in the castle; for he was inquisitive and bold; he knew the use of all the keys but one; this was a small strong key, with a head like a quatrefoil; and though he tried to fit it to every cupboard and door in the house, he could never find its place.

But one day when his father was ill and lay abed, staring at the flies on the ceiling, the boy came to the solar, and slipped in behind the dusty arras that hung round the room, making believe that he was a rabbit in its burrow; he went round with his face to the wall, feeling with his hands; and when he came to the corner of the room, the wall was colder to his touch, like iron; and feeling at the place, he seemed to discover hinges and a door. So he dived beneath the arras, and then lifted it up; and he saw that in the wall was a small iron door like a cupboard. Something in his heart held him back, but before he had time to listen to it he had opened the little door, for the keys lay on the table to his hand; and he was peering into a small dark recess of stone, which seemed, for the wail that the little door made on its hinges, not to have been opened for many years.

In the cupboard, which had no shelves, lay some dark objects.

The boy took out the largest, looping the arras up over the little door; it was a rudely made spiked crown or coronet of iron, with odd devices chased upon it; the boy replaced it and drew out the next; this was a rusted iron dagger with torn leather on the hilt. The boy did not care for this—there were many better in the castle armoury. There seemed to be nothing else in the cupboard. But feeling with his hand in the dark corners, he drew out a stone about the size of a hen's egg. This he thought he would take, so he locked the cupboard, let the arras fall, and stood awhile to consider. On the arras opposite him, over the door, was the figure of a man embroidered in green tunic and leggings with a hat drawn over his face and with a finger laid on his lip, as though he had cause to be silent, or to wish others so. The man had a forked beard and a kind of secret smile, as if he mocked the onlooker; and he seemed unpleasantly natural to the boy, as though he divined his thought. He was half minded to put the stone back; but the secrecy of the thing pleased him. Moreover as he held the stone to the light, it seemed half transparent, and sent out a dull red gleam.

So the boy put the stone in his pouch, and soon loved it exceedingly, and desired to keep it with him. He often thrust it in secret places inside and outside the castle, in holes in a hollow cider tree, or chinks of the wall, and it pleased him when he lay in bed on windy rainy nights, to think of the stone lying snug and warm in its small house. Soon he began to attribute a kind of virtue to the thing; he thought that events went better when he had it with him; and he named it in his mind *The Wound*, because it seemed to him like the red and jewelled wound in the side of the figure of Our Saviour that hung in coloured glass over the chapel altar.

One day he had a terrible shock; he was lying on the terrace, spinning the stone, and watching the little whirling gleams of red light it made on the flags, when a man-at-arms stole upon him, and in wantonness seized the stone, and flung it far into the moat, where it fell with a splash. The boy was angry and smote the man upon the face with all his might, and was sorely beaten for it—for they had no respect for the heir, and indeed there was no one to whom he could complain—but he held his peace; and a week after the stone was restored to him in a way that seemed miraculous; for they ran the water of the moat off, to mend the sluice, so that the water-lilies sank in tangles to the bottom and the carp flapped in the mud; but the boy found the stone lying on the pavement of the sluice.

But the fancy for the stone soon came to an end, as a boy's fancies will; and he carried it with him, or put it into one of his hiding-places and thought no more of *The Wound*.

Suddenly the peaceful, idle and evil life came to a close. One day he had heard the tinkle of the sacring bell in the chapel, and had slipped in and found the priest at mass—the boy had a curious love for the mass; he liked to see the quaint movements of the priest in his embroidered robe, and a sort of peace settled upon his spirit—and this day he knelt near the screen and sniffed the incense, when he heard a sound behind him, and turning, saw a man booted and cloaked as though from a journey, standing in the door with a paper in his hand, beckoning him. Even as he rose and went out, it came into his mind that this was in some way a summons for him; the letter was from his mother's brother, the Lord Ralph of Parbury, a noble knight; he had been long away fighting in many wars, but on his return heard tell of the illness of Marmaduke, and wrote to bid him send his son to him, and he would train him for a soldier. They had great ado to read the letter, and there was much putting of heads together over it; but the messenger knew the purport, and the boy made up his mind to go, for he felt, he had said to himself, like one of the silly and lazy carp sweltering in the castle moat; so he dressed himself in his best and went. The men-at-arms were sorry to see their playmate go, though they had done him little but evil; and the old priest, half in tears, brought a small book and gave it to the boy; the old nurse clung to him and cried bitterly; but the boy felt nothing but a kind of shame at the thought how glad he was to go; indeed he would hardly have gone to wish farewell to his father, who was in one of his fits, and lay muttering on his bed; but the boy went, and, the door being ajar, he looked in and saw him, pale and fat, gibbering at his fingers, and almost hated him. And so he mounted and rode away, on a hot still summer afternoon, and was glad to see the castle tower sink down among the oaks, as they rode by green tracks and open heaths, little by little into the unknown land to the south.

The years flew fast away with the Lord Ralph; and Robert learnt to be a noble knight. It was hard at first to change from the old sluggish life, when he had none but himself to please; but something caught fire within Robert's soul, and he submitted willingly and eagerly to the discipline of Parbury, which was severe. He grew up strong and straight and fearless, and worthy of fame, so that Ralph was proud of his nephew; two things alone made him anxious; Robert was, he thought, too desirous of praise, too much bent upon excelling others, though Ralph tried to make him learn that it is the doing of noble things in a noble way, for the love of the deed done, and for the honour of it, that makes a worthy knight — and not the desire to be held worthy. Moreover, Robert had but little chivalry or tenderness of spirit; he was not cruel, for he disdained it; but he was hard, and despised weakness and grace; cared not for child, or even horse or hound, and held the love of women in contempt, saying that a soldier should have no time to marry until he was old and spent; and that then it was too late. It even made Ralph sorry that Robert had no love for Tremontes or for his father, or for any of those whom he had left behind; for a knight's face, said Ralph, should be set forward in gladness, but he should look backward in love and recollection. But Robert understood nothing of such talk; or cared not; and indeed there was little to blame in him; for he was courteous and easy in peace; and he was strong and valiant and joyful in war. He made no friend, but he was admired by many and feared by some.

Then, when Robert was within a few days of twenty-five, came a messenger, an old and gross man-at-arms with rusty armour, riding on a broken horse; he was one of the merry comrades of Robert's childhood; but Robert seemed hardly to know him, though he acknowledged his greeting courteously, and stayed not to talk, but opened the letter he had brought, and read

gravely; and when he had read he said to the messenger, "So my lord is dead." And the messenger would have babbled about the end that the Lord Marmaduke had made, which indeed had been a bitter one, but Robert cut him short, and asked him a plain question or two about affairs, and frowned at his stumbling answers; and then Robert went to his uncle, and after due obeisance said, "Sir, my father, it seems, is dead, and with your leave I must ride to Tremontes and take my inheritance." And the Lord Ralph, seeing no sign of sorrow, said, "Your father was a great knight." "Ay, once," said Robert, "doubtless, but as I knew him more tree than man." And presently he took horse and rode all night to Tremontes; and when the old man-at-arms would have ridden beside him, and reminded him with a poor smile of some passages of his childhood, Robert said sourly, "Man, I hate my childhood, and will hear no word of it; and you and your fellow-knaves treated me ill; and your kindness was worse than your anger. Ride behind me."

So they rode sadly enough, until at evening, with a great red sunset glowing in the west, and smouldering behind the tree-trunks, he saw the dark tower of Tremontes looking solemnly out above the oaks. Then the man-at-arms asked humbly that he might ride forward and announce the new lord's coming; but Robert forbade him, and rode alone into the court.

He gave his horse to the man-at-arms and walked into the house; in the hall he found a drunken company and much ugly mirth. He surveyed the scene awhile in disgust, for they cried out at first for him to join them, till it came upon them who it was that looked upon them; so they stumbled to their feet and did him obeisance, and slunk out one by one upon some pretence of business, leaving him alone with the old priest, who was heavier and grosser than before. But he had his wits as well as he ever had, and would have told Robert how his father had made a blessed end, with holy oil and sacraments and all due comfort of Mother Church, but Robert cut him short; and after a lonely meal in the great hall, turned to look at such few parchments that there were in the house, and sent for the steward to see how his inheritance stood. It was a miserable tale he had to tell of neglect and thriftlessness; and Robert said very soon that he could only hope to save his estate by living poorly and giving diligence—and that he had no mind to do; so he resolved that if he could find a purchaser, he would sell the home of his fathers, and himself set out into the world he loved, to carve out a fortune, if he might, with his sword.

Among the parchments was one that was closely sealed; it bore a date before his birth; he read it at first listlessly enough, but presently he caught sight of words that made his heart beat faster. It seemed from the script that his father, as a young man, had served for awhile with a great Duke of Spain, the prince of a little kingdom, and that he had even saved his life in battle, and would have been promoted to high honour, but that he had been recalled home to take his inheritance; but the Duke, so said the writing, had given him the iron crown and dagger that the Lord of the Marches wore, and with them the great ruby of the dukedom, that was worth a king's ransom. And the parchment said that it was pledged by the Duke, by all the most sacred relics of Spain, bones of saints and wood of the True Cross, that should he or any of his heirs come before the Duke with these tokens, the Duke would promote him to chief honour.

Here then was the secret of the iron door and his father's constant fingering of the keys; and this was the plaything of his youth, *The Wound*, as he had called it. Robert bowed his head upon his hands and tried to recollect where he had thrust it last; but though he thought of a score of hiding-places where it might be, he could not remember where it certainly lay. Could he have thrown away by his childish folly a thing which would give him, if he cared to claim it, high honour and great place?—and if he cared not to claim that boon, but only sold the jewel, which was undoubtedly his own, he might be a great lord, among the wealthiest in the land.

Robert sate long in thought in the silent solar, with a candle burning beside him; once or twice his old nurse came in upon him, and longed to kiss him and clasp her child close; but he looked coldly upon her and seemed hardly to remember her.

At last the day began to brighten in the east; and Robert cast himself for awhile upon his father's bed to sleep, and slept a broken sleep. In the morning he first went to the cupboard and found the crown and dagger as he had left them; but though he searched high and low for the jewel, he could not find it in any of the secret places where he used to lay it; and at last he took the crown and dagger in despair, turned adrift the men-at-arms, and left none but the old nurse in the house. The priest asked for some gift or pension that would not leave him destitute, but Robert said, "Go to, you have lived in gluttony and sloth all the years at the expense of my estate; and now that you have nearly beggared me, you ask for more—you are near your end; live cleanly and wisely for a few years, ere you depart to your own place."

"Nay," said the priest whimpering, and with a miserable smile, "but I am old, and it is hard to change."

"So said the carp," quoth Robert with a hard smile, "when they dangled him up with a line out of the moat. Change and adventure are meet for all men. And I look that I do a good deed, when I restore a recreant shepherd to the fold." The priest went off, crying unworthy tears and cursing the new lord, to try and find a priest's office if he could; and Robert rode grimly away, back to his uncle, and told him all the tale.

His uncle sate long in thought, and then said that his resolve to sell the castle of Tremontes and the estate was, he believed, a wise one; and it should be his care to find a purchaser. "I myself," he said, "have none nearer than yourself to whom to leave my lands;" and then he advised Robert, if he would try his fortune, to take the crown and dagger, and to seek out the Duke or his heir, and to tell him the whole story, and how the precious jewel was lost.

So Robert rode away to London; and his uncle was sad to see him go so stonily and sullenly, with a mind so bent upon himself, and, it seemed, without love for a living thing; and as Robert rode he pondered; and it seemed to him a useless quest, because he thought that the giving back of the jewel was part of the terms, and that the Duke would not promote a man who brought him nothing but a memory of old deeds; and moreover, he thought that the Duke would not believe the story, but would think that he had the jewel safe at home, and wished to gain fortune in Spain, and keep the wealth as well. And as he rode into London, it seemed to him as though some wise power put it into his heart what he should do; for he rode by the sign of a maker of rich glass for church windows; and at once a thought darted into his mind; and going in, he sought out the master of the shop, and told him that he had lost a jewel from a crown, a jewel of price, and that he was ashamed that the crown should lack it; and he asked if he could make him a jewel of glass to set in its place; and he described the jewel, how large it was and how dull outside, and its fiery heart; and the craftsman smiled shrewdly and foxily, and told him to return on the third day, and he should have his will. On the third day he came again; and the craftsman, opening a box, took from it a jewel so like *The Wound*, that he thought for a moment that he must have recovered it; so he paid a mighty price for it, and set off light-hearted for Spain.

After weary wandering, and many strange adventures by sea and land, he rode one day to the Duke's palace gate. It was a great bare house of stone, within a wall, at the end of a little town. It was far larger and greater than he had dreamed; he was stayed at the gate, for he knew as yet but a few words of the language; but he had written on a parchment who he was, and that he desired to see the Duke. And presently there came out a seneschal in haste, and he was led within

honour-ably, and soon he was had into a small room, richly furnished. He was left alone, and the seneschal showed him through which door the Duke would come.

Presently a door opened, and there came in an old shrunken man, in a furred gown, very stately and noble, holding the paper in his hand. Robert did obeisance, but the Duke raised him, and spoke courteously to him in the English tongue, and desired to see his tokens.

Then Robert brought forth the crown and the dagger and the jewel, and the Duke looked at them in silence for awhile, shading his eyes. And then he praised the Lord Marmaduke very nobly, saying that he owed his life to him. And then he told Robert that he would be true to his word, and promote him to honour; but he said that first he must abide with him many days, and go in and out with his knights, and learn the Spanish tongue and the Spanish way of life; so Robert abode with him in great content, and was treated with honour by all, but especially by the Duke, who often sent for him and spoke much of former days.

Then at last there came a day when the Duke sent for him and in the presence of all his lords told them the story and passed the crown and the dagger and the jewel from hand to hand; and the lords eyed the stone curiously and handled it tenderly; and then the Duke said that the knight who could, for the sake of honour, restore a jewel that could buy a county—there was not the like of it in the world, save in the Emperor's crown—was a true knight indeed; and therefore he made Robert Lord of the Marches, put the crown on his head, and a purple robe with a cape of miniver on his shoulders, and commanded that he should be used by all as if of royal birth.

The greatness of his reward was a surprise to Robert, and he had it in his heart to tell the Duke the truth. But the lords passed before him and did obeisance, and he put the good hour aside.

Very soon Robert set out for the Castle of the Marches; and he found it a marvellous house, fit for a king, with wide lands. And there he abode for several years, and did worthily; for he was an excellent knight, and a prudent general; moreover he was just and kind; and the people feared and obeyed his rule, and lived in peace, though none loved Robert; but he made the land prosperous and great, and cleared it of robbers, and raised a mighty revenue for the Duke, who praised him and made him great presents.

One day he heard that the Duke was ill; the next a courier came in haste to summon him to the Duke's presence; he wondered at this; but went with a great retinue. He found the Duke feeble and bent, but with a bright eye; he kissed Robert, like a brother prince, and as they sate alone he opened his heart to him and told him that he had done worthily; he had none of his kin, or none fit to hold his dukedom after him; but that all he desired was that his people should be well ruled, and that he had determined that Robert should succeed him. "There will be envious and grasping hands," he said, "held out—but you are strong and wise, and the people will be content to be ruled by you," and then he showed him a paper that made him a prince in title, and that gave him the Dukedom on his own death.

Now there lived in the Duke's house a wise and learned man named Paul, an alchemist, who knew the courses of the stars and the virtues of plants, and many other secret things; and the Duke delighted much in his conversation, which was ingenious and learned. But Robert heard him vacantly, thinking that such studies were fit only for children. And Paul being old and gentle, loved not Robert, but held that the Duke trusted him overmuch. And one night, when Robert and other lords were sitting with the Duke, Paul being present, the talk turned on the virtues of gems; and Paul, as if making an effort that he had long prepared for, told the Duke of a curious liquor, an *aqua fortis*, that he had distilled, which was a marvellous thing to test the worth of gems, and would tell the true from the false; and the Duke bade him bring the liquor and show him how the spirit worked. And it seemed to Robert that, as Paul spoke, a shadowy

hand came from the darkness and clutched at his heart, enveloping him in blackness, so that he sate in a cold dream. And Paul went out, and presently returned bringing a small phial of gold—for the liquor, he said, would eat its way through any baser metal—and in the other hand a little dish of gems. Some of them, he said, were true gems, others of them less precious, and others naught but sparkling glass; and he poured a drop on each; the true gems sparkled unhurt in the clear liquid, the less precious threw off little flakes of impurity, and the glass hissed and melted in the potent venom. And Robert, contrary to his wont, came and stood, sick at heart, feeling the old man's eyes fixed on him with a steady gaze. At last Paul said, "The Prince Robert"—for the Duke had told the lords of the honour he had given him—"seems to wonder more than his wont at these simple toys and tricks; shall not the Duke let us test the great ruby, that its worth may be the better proven? perhaps too it has some small impurity to be purged away, and will shine more bravely, like a noble heart under affliction." And the Duke said, "Yes, let the ruby be brought."

So the lord that had the charge of the Duke's jewels brought a casket, and there in its place lay the great ruby, red as blood. And Robert would have spoken, but the words died upon his tongue, and he saw the shadow of the end.

Then Paul took the ruby and laid it on his dish; and as he raised the phial to pour, he looked at Robert, and said. "But perhaps it is shame to treat so great a gem so discourteously?" And the Duke being old and curious said, "Nay, but pour." But then, as Paul raised the phial, the Duke lifted his hand, and said very pleasantly, "Yet after all, I hold not the jewel my own, but the Lord Robert's, who hath so faithfully restored it to me. What will you, my lord?" he said, turning with a smile to Robert. And Robert, looking and smiling very stonily, said, in a voice that he could scarcely command, "Pour, sir, pour!" So Paul poured the liquor.

The great ruby flashed for a moment, and then a thin white steam floated up, while the gem rose in a blood-stained foam, hissing and bubbling. Then there was a silence; and then Robert put his hand to his heart and stood still; the Duke looked at him, and Paul said in his ear, "Now, Lord Robert, play the man!—I knew the secret."

Then Robert rising from his place said that he would ask the Duke's leave to speak to him in private on this matter, and the Duke, coldly but courteously, led the way into an inner room, and there Robert told him all the story. Perhaps a younger man might have been more ready to forgive; but the Duke was old; and when Robert had done the story, he sate looking so aged and broken, that a kind of pity came into Robert's mind, and crushed the pity he felt for himself. But at last the Duke spoke. "You have deceived me," he said, "and I do not know that I can even think that your story is true; you can serve me no longer, for you have done unworthily." And with that he tore the parchment across, and dropped it on the ground, and then made a gesture of dismissal; and Robert rose, hoping that the Duke would yet relent, and said at last, "May I hope that your Grace can say that you forgive me? I do not ask to be restored—but in all other things I have served you well." "No, my Lord Robert," said the Duke at last coldly and severely, "I cannot forgive; for I have trusted one who has deceived me."

So Robert went slowly out of the room through the hall; and no man spoke to him and he spoke to none. Only Paul came to join him, and looked at him awhile, and then said, "Lord Robert, I have been the means of inflicting a heavy blow upon you; but it was not I who struck, but God, to whom I think you give no allegiance." And Robert said, "Nay, Sir Paul, trouble not yourself; you have done as a faithful servant of the Duke should do to a faithless servant; I bear you no malice; as you say, it is not you who strike."

Then the old man said, "Believe me, Lord Robert, that the day will come, and I think it is not far distant, when you will be grateful to the stroke which, at the cost of grievous pain to yourself,

has revealed your soul to yourself. All men know the worst that can be known of you; the cup is emptied to the dregs; it is for you to fill it." Then he put out his hand, and Robert grasped it, and went out into the world alone. That night he sent a courier to his castle to say that he would return no more, and that all things were the Duke's; and he sent back to the Duke, by a private messenger, the crown and the dagger; and the Duke mourned over the loss of his trusty servant, but could not forgive him nor hear him spoken of.

Robert only kept for himself the sum of gold with which he had come to the Duke's court; and he travelled into France, for he knew that he would find fighting there, and took service in the army of Burgundy; he was surprised within himself to find how little he cared for the loss of his greatness; indeed he felt that a certain secret heaviness and blackness of spirit had left him, and that he was almost light-hearted; but in one of the first battles he fought in he was stricken from his horse, and trampled under foot. And they took him for tendance to a monastery near the field; and in a few weeks, when he came slowly back to life, he knew that he could fight no more.

Then indeed he fell into a great despair and darkness of spirit. It seemed as though some cruel and secret enemy had struck him blow after blow, and not content with visiting him with shame, had rent from him all that made him even wish to live. But in the monastery lived a wise old monk, with whom he had much talk, and in his weakness told him all his life and his fall. And one day the two sate together in the cloister, on a day in spring, while a bird sang very blithely in a bush that was all pricked with green points and shoots. And the old monk said, "This is a strange tale, Lord Robert, that you have told me; and the wonder grows as I think of it; but it seems to me that God has led you in a wonderful manner; He made you strong and bold and self-sufficient; and then He has taken these things from you, not gently, because you were strong to bear, but very sternly; He has led you through deep waters and yet you live; and He will set you upon the rock that is higher, so that you may serve Him yet."

And then it seemed, in a silence made beautiful by the sweet piping of the bird, that a little flower rose and blossomed in Robert's soul; he saw, in a sudden way that cannot be told in words, that he was indeed in stronger hands than his own; and there came into his mind that in following after strong things, he had missed the thing that was stronger than all—Love, that holds the world in his grasp.

So it came to pass that the Lord Robert became the thing that he had most despised—a monk. And he found here that his courage, which he had thought the strongest thing he had, was yet hardly strong enough to bear the doing of mean and sordid tasks, such as a monk must often do; but it became to him a kind of fierce pleasure to trample on himself, and to do humbly and severely all menial things. He swept the church, he dug in the garden, he fetched and carried burdens, and spared himself in nothing.

But after a time he fell ill; he missed, no doubt, the old activities of life: his days had been full of business and occupation, and though he did not look back—indeed a deep trench seemed to have been dug across his life, and he saw himself across it like a different man, and he could often hardly believe that he was the same—yet it seemed as though some spring had been broken in his spirit. He fell into long sad musings, and waters of bitterness flowed across his soul. The monks thought that he would die, he became so wan and ghostlike; but he never failed in his duty, and though his life stretched before him like a weary road, he knew that it would be long before he reached the end, and that he had many leagues yet to traverse, before the night fell cold on the hills.

Now, there was business to be done for the House in England, and Robert was sent there, the Prior hoping that the change and stir might lighten the load upon his spirit.

It happened at last that he found himself, in the course of his journeyings, not far from Tremontes. His uncle, the Lord Ralph, he heard, was dead, and his lands had gone to the nearest of his kin. He knew nothing of what had befallen Tremontes, but he made enquiries, saying that he had seen the Lord Robert in Spain; he found that there was great curiosity about him; he was plied with questions, and he was forced to speak of himself, as in a strange dream, and to hear the story of his disgrace told with many wild imaginings. It seemed that Ralph had himself undertaken the care of Tremontes, and had turned it by diligence into a rich estate, hoping, it was said, to hand it over to the Lord Robert on his return; but that as he had disappeared and made no sign, it was supposed that he had died fighting, and the Lord Ralph having died suddenly, Tremontes had passed with the rest of his estate.

Early one summer morning Robert set off across the broad green flat, and trudged to Tremontes. The country had hardly altered, and it was with a strange thrill of delight that one by one the familiar landmarks came into view; and at last he saw the castle itself over the oaks. He had learnt that there was a priest there as chaplain, a wise and sad man, to whom he bore a letter. Twenty years had passed since he saw the castle last, but it looked to his eyes no older; the hens picked and cried in the byre; the sun shone pleasantly as ever upon the lilled pool and the warm terrace. Robert felt no sadness, but a kind of hunger to be remembered, to be welcomed, to be received with loving looks. The porter led him in, up into the familiar hall, where sate a few sober men-at-arms, who rose and made a seemly obeisance; and he was presently sitting in a little parlour that opened on the chapel, talking quietly to the old priest, who seemed glad enough to have his company. Robert told him that he had known Tremontes in his youth; and after he had spoken of many indifferent things, he asked that he might withdraw for a little into the chapel, and say a silent prayer for those who were departed.

The old priest understood him and led the way; and in a moment Robert found himself seated by the little arcade, looking at the dim figure that hung in the window, where he had sate as a boy, when the messenger had come to summon him away. How it all came back to him! The years were obliterated in a flash; he put out his hand idly to the arcade, where the pillars stood out from the wall, and his fingers touched a small dusty thing that lay between a pillar and the stones. It was hardly with surprise that he raised it, and saw that he held the ruby, where he had put it in that careless hour.

Then there beat upon his mind a great wave of thought, and he saw how gentle had been the hand that led him, and how surely he had been guided; he looked into the depth of his soul, and saw the very secret counsels of God. That was an hour full of a strange and marvellous happiness, when he felt like a child leaning against a father's knee. He had no longer any repining or any questioning; but he knelt, full of a mysterious peace, resigning himself utterly into the mighty hands of the Father.

Presently the waning light warned him that the day was turning to the evening; and he came out and spoke to the priest, but with such a solemn and tranquil radiance of mien that the priest said to him, "I thought, brother, when you came to me, that you had a strange thing to tell me; but now you seem like one who has laid his very self down at the foot of the Cross." And Robert smiled and said, "I think I have."

Presently he set off; and a foolish fancy came and fluttered in his mind for a moment, that he ought not to come like a thief and steal so rich a thing away; till he reflected in himself that he had but to speak the word and the whole was his.

The old priest had told him that the Lord of Tremontes, Richard, was a just man, and ruled the estate well and bountifully; that he would have none but honest men to labour for him, and that

he was liberal and kind. Just as Robert went out of the gate he met a grave man, in rich but sober attire, riding in, who drew aside to let the monk pass and put off his hat to him. Then it came into Robert's mind to speak to him, and he said "Do I speak with the Lord Richard of Tremontes?"

"Richard of Parbury, father," said the Lord. "Tremontes is indeed held by me, but I have no lordship here. The Lord Robert of Tremontes may yet be living; we know not if he be alive or dead; and I but hold the estate for him and administer it for him; and if he returns he will find it, I believe, not worse than he left it."

Then Robert made up his mind and said, "Lord Richard, I have a message for you from the Lord Robert—but for your ears alone. I have seen him and know him. You have doubtless heard of his disgrace and his fall; and he will not return. He was but anxious to know that the estate was justly ruled and administered, and he resigns it into your hands."

Then the Lord Richard dismounted from his horse, and bade the monk enter and speak with him at large; but he would not. Then the Lord Richard said, "This is not a light matter, father a great estate, craving your pardon, cannot thus pass by word of mouth."

"And it shall not," said the monk, "the Lord Robert shall send you due quittance."

Then the Lord Richard said, "Father, he it so, then; but should the Lord Robert return and claim the estate, it is his."

Then the monk said, "He will not return; he is dead to the world." And then he added, for he saw that the Lord Richard was pondering the matter, "I that speak with you am he." Then he blessed the Lord Richard, and departed in haste—and so solemn was his face and manner, that the Lord Richard did not stay him, but went within in wonder and awe.

Then Robert returned to the monastery, with a quiet joy in his heart; and he made a quittance of the estate, and sent it secretly to the Lord Richard by a faithful hand; and when the Lord Richard came in haste to see the monk and speak with him, he had departed for Spain.

Robert journeyed many days and came at last again to the house of the Duke. And he was then admitted, and bidden to dinner; so he sate in the hall that he knew, and no man recognised him in the thin and sunburnt monk that sate and spoke so low and courteously; and afterwards he asked audience of the Duke, who still lived, but was very near his end; and when he was alone with him, he drew out the stone and said, "My lord, your faithful and loving servant has found the ruby and herewith restores it; and he asks your forgiveness, for he loves you truly;" and Robert knelt beside him, and wept, but not for bitterness of heart.

Then said the Duke, speaking low, "My son, I have need to be forgiven and not to forgive." And they had great joy together, and Robert told him all that was in his heart.

"My lord," he said, "God hath led me by a strange path into peace; He saw the evil strength of my heart, and smote me in my pride; and He made me as a little child that He might receive me; and I am His."

And it came that the Duke was sick unto death; and he sent for Robert, who abode in the city, and would have given him the stone; but Robert said with a smile that he would not have it, for he had learnt at least the meaning of one text, that the price of wisdom is above rubies. And he kissed the hand of the Duke.

And the Duke died and was buried; but of Robert's life and death I know no more; but in the High Church, near the altar, is a stone grave, on which are the words "Brother Robert," and underneath the crown of a prince. So I think he lies there, all of him that doth fade.