

ANNE ASKEW, "THE FAIR GOSPELLER."

BY JOHN KNIFE.

LONDON gave to Anne Askew the name of "The Fair GosPELLER," for men admired her rare beauty while they scoffed or wondered at this young gentlewoman's zeal for religion.

Undoubtedly she was one of the great souls of the Reformation, and justice has not been done to her influence upon her contemporaries, and the intense public indignation which was roused, not in London alone, but in the country, when the cruel manner of her martyrdom was known.

"She was a sacramentary and by the law worthy of the death she suffered," Bishop Gardiner wrote to Protector Somerset in 1549, complaining of the Winchester folk who flourished copies of her "Journal" under the episcopal nose. And Parsons the Jesuit, late in the reign of Elizabeth, made a savage attack upon Anne's memory, calling her "A gadabout!" He expresses his amazement that she should be taken for a saint.

THE ASKEWS, STALLINGBOROUGH MANOR.

Anne Askew was born in the Fen Country in 1521. The record is lost, but we know her age at her death. The name is derived from Ayscough of Yorkshire, who married a rich Lincolnshire heiress. Anne's father, Sir William, was an ambitious man who had been knighted by King Henry the Eighth in France. He had two sons and three daughters. Francis, the eldest son, married Elizabeth, heiress of the Haunsard, of Walworth and South Kelsey. Martha, the eldest daughter, was betrothed as a child to the boy Thomas, only son and heir of Squire Kyme, of Kelsey.

Then his plans "went agley." Martha "died on him," as the Irish say, and what was more, after he had paid down the half of her dowry. He had still to provide for Anne, Jane, and Edward.

THE BETROTHAL.

As far as we can tell, this is how it was settled. For his younger son Sir William planned a grand Court career. He wanted money badly for Edward and requested Mr. Kyme to refund that half-dowry. Thrifty Squire Kyme civilly declined; son Thomas had been disappointed of his promised bride. Sir William kept his temper and invited the Kymes to Stallingborough Manor. He sent for his pretty second daughter Anne. She was then probably about sixteen, and in the flower of her girlhood. Since we know the taste of those times, she would be very fair, a dainty little blonde with the dazzling soft complexion of the damp Fenland air. She was lively and had a witty tongue. Thomas seems to have been of a sullen, taciturn nature. While the two Lincolnshire squires bargained, Anne would try dutifully to entertain the heavy, lumpish youth.

The bargain was struck. Son Thomas should accept Anne with

the remainder of the dowry of the defunct Martha. And Sir William proudly informed daughter Anne that she would be the Lady of the Manor of Kelsey.

Perhaps the sullen eyes of Thomas Kyme gleamed at the sight of Anne's dismay. She avowed later that she had detested Kyme. From what we know of her, the soft slip of a girl strongly objected. In the eyes of all around her and of contemporary opinion her conduct would be considered shocking and unfilial. Sir William would swear roundly from a vocabulary enriched in the wars. Squire Kyme would lift brows and stare at the "unnatural wench." That would be all. Her consent was not necessary. The two Kymes would ride home to Kelsey and leave Anne to parental discipline. She was helpless in the eyes of society and the law. She was a chattel, the property of her father, until he gave her to her husband. There is no mention of her mother, and she seems to have been too young and innocent for a lover's protection.

I think that Sir William would decide to ignore her refusal. The Marriage Contract would be duly signed by the respective fathers and the Betrothal announced.

But there seems to have been a respite. The marriage was probably not before 1538-9, and Kyme's father is not mentioned again. He may have died in the interval. Jane, the younger sister, was married to Sir George Saint Paul, and a position was found for Edward in Archbishop Cranmer's household.

THE MARRIAGE.

Meanwhile Anne developed from a girl into a woman of amazing beauty. Kyme demanded his bride, and a reluctant consent was wrung from her, "to save the money" as the chronicler bluntly puts it. I think that she yielded for the sake of Edward, who seems to have been her favourite brother. Sir William had obtained the promise of the coveted Court preferment, at the next vacancy.

The marriage of the eldest surviving daughter of the proud Askews would be celebrated with pomp and Nuptial Mass in the midst of a crowd of relatives and neighbours in the familiar parish church. Her nature was fearless and generous, her manners gentle and winning, little Mistress Askew would go through it bravely, but I think her hand trembled when Kyme put the ring on her finger and the priest declared them man and wife.

She had the satisfaction of knowing that her self-sacrifice secured her brother's good fortune. In December, 1539, Edward went to Court with a letter of recommendation from Cranmer to Cromwell, Earl of Essex. Cranmer writes significantly: he says that "this bearer, Edward Askew my servant, son unto Sir William Askew, Knight, is by some nobleman preferred unto the room of one of these new spears in the court which because it is done without my knowledge and his" . . . we see that Sir William did not consult Edward's wishes . . . and what is more significant Cranmer in his request continues thus: "I shall beseech you, my Lord, inasmuch as I have no friend to sue unto me for me and mine, but only unto

your lordship" . . . the Archbishop was out of favour with the King . . . "assuring your lordship that he, the young man is of a very gentle nature, right forward and of good activity, so that I think he shall be meet to furnish such a room and to do to the King's Majesty diligent and faithful service."

The letter is from Forde Manor, where Cranmer was living in retirement and disgrace for his strong opposition to the Bloody Statute. Sir William, the opportunist, promptly removed son Edward from Cranmer, who is evidently grieved that he was not informed beforehand.

The unhappy marriage of Anne was to be the turning-point in both lives. They were to meet each other at Court a few years later.

MARRIED LIFE AT KELSEY MANOR. CONVERSION.

According to Gairdner, Anne had been brought up a Catholic and "highly educated." Her life at Kelsey was dreary enough, but as Lady of the Manor she would have the manifold occupations of a Tudor châtelaine. Kyme seems to have let her go her own way so long as it did not interfere with his. There was no love lost on either side. About 1540 there came the sudden change which was to transform first the inward and then the outward life. Anne had ridden to Lincoln and visited the Cathedral, probably as a devout Catholic to worship the reserved Host, or to pray at some shrine. She saw the crowd of eager, curious folk who pressed round the new marvel of the Great Chained Bible, which, by Royal Command, had just been set up.

She went forward, listened, and took her turn in reading it.

When Anne returned home her mind was full of the wonderful words which brought their own message of hope and consolation. She made frequent visits to Lincoln and read from the Bible each day. She questioned eagerly the Cathedral clergy, and was amazed at their cold, reluctant replies, their ignorance of the sacred Text, and she recorded later that they could not answer her on certain texts. They, for their part, resented her questions, which turned into arguments in which they were worsted by her keen wit. Anne became a mother about the same time and she resolved to procure a copy of the Book. There was in Lincoln a strong local branch of the famous society called "The Christian Brethren." They were the descendants of the Lollards, and most likely one of them had observed the fair Madam Kyme's deep interest in the Cathedral Bible. It must have been from some such source that she obtained her books—the New Testament in Tyndale's Translation and John Frith's celebrated "Treatise on the Sacrament." The dullness of Kelsey was brightened by her baby and her books. We cannot appreciate what it meant to our Tudor forefathers when for the *first* time in their lives they read the words of the Gospels. But the fact that those who did so were nicknamed "Gospellers" shows how their belief centred in the sublime doctrine of the Reformers, "Justification by Faith."

Lonely and neglected by her husband, Anne gave her heart unreservedly to a Personal Saviour. In her "Journal" she refers

to Christ as "My Lord and Master." It was not very long before her devotion was sharply tested. The Kelsey household seem to have loved their mistress, for they gathered together daily to listen while she read to them from her New Testament. Kyme paid no heed until after the birth of the second child, when he began to bully her.

THE FIRST MENACE.

The high-spirited girl who had been bartered in the Matrimonial Market was now the eager disciple of a proscribed Faith. We may admit in justice to Kyme that he had married her as a Catholic and that the zeal of the newly converted can be a trial to their friends. But he had married an unwilling bride, and only a mean man would have taken advantage of Martha's death to withhold the dowry. He showed himself now in the odious light of a bigot. He appears to have been one of those dull, suspicious men who are capable of sudden acts of cruelty from brooding over injuries. The heavy Lincolnshire squire hated ideas of progress or enlightenment and resented his wife's superior learning. If he had behaved with sense and forbearance, the domestic differences might not have become acute. Anne was gentle and a dutiful wife. But she was not affectionate, and Kyme was growing tired of her. One Sunday in the Parish Church at the High Mass Anne took the step which startled the neighbourhood. Men said openly that young Madam Kyme did not bow down at the Elevation nor genuflect to the Pyx.

It was the personal ordeal of the Reformers that they must appear profane and irreligious in the eyes of their friends.

Kyme's rage may be imagined. The priest also complained formally of Madam's behaviour, and he applied the terrible word "Heresy" to her conduct at the Mass. Kyme consented to play the part of a spy. We read next that he and some other man, probably his body-servant, "listened to her prayers at her chamber-door. They soon obtained a conviction both of her piety and heterodoxy."

But she was a knight's daughter and privileged by statute to read the Bible in English. So far there was no valid ground for a citation before the Quest. But Anne was vehemently suspected, and the local clergy waited the occasion to attack her as a known heretic. Even Kyme hesitated.

DRIVEN FROM HOME.

The Statute of the Six Articles had been passed in 1539, but it was so abused by certain of the bishops that it could not be then enforced. No less than five hundred persons were arrested in London alone and released by the Privy Council by the curious expedient of allowing the prisoners to go bail for each other! But in 1543 a Mitigating Statute was passed, which forbade secret accusations by requiring the oaths of twelve men, allowed the accused trial by jury, with challenge of juries, and required presentment to be made within twelve months from the date of offence. But a dangerous exception was made to such arrest by sworn Indictment; and as this concerns

Anne, I quote the clause : " Unless it be by virtue and authority of one sufficient and lawful warrant or precept from one of the King's Majesty's Honourable Council or from two of the Justices or Commissioners aforesaid, whereof one of them to be a lay person."

The same year, 1543, Tyndale's New Testament was banned by statute and the writings of Frith. Under these two statutes the priests of Lincoln and Kelsey warned Kyme that his wife would be cited for heresy. Anne denied Transubstantiation and refused to go to Confession. They had been married some five years and the elder child was about four years old. She was a woman of deep affections and warm-hearted disposition. Kyme consulted his director and was advised to put his wife to the test. Would she obey the Church and the Law or renounce her home? It must have been a terrible choice for a mother's heart. We do not know if Anne was allowed any time for decision. We know that she refused to recant, while her spirit flashed out humanly in the words recorded in her replies. She said that if he drove her forth Kyme was then no more her husband. She would sue him at law for cruelty and appeal for the custody of her children.

Kyme mocked at the threat, for he knew the strength of his position. " And he violently drove her out " (Fuller).

LIFE IN LONDON. ANNE, "THE FAIR GOSPELLER." 1544-5.

It is pleasant to read that Anne was accompanied by her faithful woman. Her father seems to have been dead, and Sir Francis was a strong Catholic who that year was made High Sheriff of Lincolnshire. She must have obtained money, and I think that she would go first to Norton Disney, especially if the tradition is correct that Kyme turned her out at night. Jane, her only sister, had been widowed early and free to marry the man of her choice, Richard Disney, who was well inclined to the Reformers. He would hardly refuse hospitality to his wife's sister, and Jane was rich enough to supply Anne with funds for her present needs. Probably Disney advised her to go to London for legal advice, and he would provide his kinswoman with an escort, perhaps ride with her to Lincoln. There they would find a company of merchants or gentlefolk travelling to the Town, or some noble with retainers.

Anne arrived safely and found a quiet lodging " over against the Temple." We notice that she established herself near the Inns of Court. Now we come to the first indication of a romance. There was practising in Gray's Inn, one Edward Britain, barrister-at-law, of whom as the chivalrous " Cousin Britain " of her " Journal " we read much. It is practically certain that Anne consulted him on her suit against Kyme. She came to London, the passionate young mother who was longing for her divorce as the means of obtaining her children. She had lavished upon them the wealth of her loving soul. We can imagine how Britain would receive the fair ardent girl who came to him, wounded and indignant by Kyme's ill-treatment, and naïvely citing for argument Saint Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians !

The Tudor lawyer would gently explain the law of the land to her and show her that divorce was impossible. But, moved by her wrongs, Britain could advise her to present a petition to the Crown for the dissolution of her forced marriage. Certainly the grounds on which it was based show a legal mind. Anne's union with Kyme was open to the same objection as Henry's first two marriages; she had married her deceased sister's affianced husband, while the pre-contract between Martha and Kyme invalidated his marriage with a blood relation, the pre-contract being a legal bond, as had been maintained in the case of Anne Boleyn and Northumberland. Armed with the petition Anne went to Whitehall and asked to see Lieutenant Askew. He seems to have received her kindly and presented his sister to Lady Denny, wife of the Treasurer of the Household, one of the Queen's ladies. The Reforming Party were prominent at Court and Queen Katharine Parr welcomed young Madam Askew warmly and ranked her among her gentlewomen, which gave her the Entrée. Anne found congenial friends in the Royal Circle, which included Lady Anne Stanhope, Countess of Hertford, the Marchioness of Dorset, Henry's niece, and the lively, witty Duchess Katharine of Suffolk. In a short time Anne became a general favourite and the Queen called her "friend."

She continued to live in her modest Temple lodging and regularly attended with her maid the preaching at Paul's Cross, and listened to Master Porter, the Bible-Reader in the Crypt. She did not escape gossip and calumny. One "Wadloe, a cursitor of Chancery hot in his religion, got himself lodged at the next house to her." He spied and listened and was astonished that she prayed aloud for hours after midnight. Wadloe grew ashamed of his base suspicions and told Sir Lionel Throgmorton that she was "the devoutest and godliest woman that ever he knew."

FIRST ARREST. MARCH, 1545.

The Queen would speak to the King on behalf of her favourite, but Henry was no longer interested in divorces and pre-contracts. He allowed his Kate to enjoy her friend's company, but he refused her petition.

Suddenly Anne was arrested, probably at her Temple lodging, and cited before the Quest, or Inquisition appointed by the Statute. The details are not given, but as she refused steadfastly to bow the knee to the Pyx, her conduct in Saint Paul's would attract public comment.

She was taken to Sadler's Hall, Cheapside, and brought before Christopher Dare, Commissioner for Heresy, and charged formally in general terms with having broken the Statute of the Six Articles.

(To be continued.)