A DREAM OF JOHN BALL.

(Continued from p. 283.)

Our men had got into their places leisurely and coolly enough, and with no lack of jesting and laughter. As we went along the hedge by the road, the leaders tore off leafy twigs from the low oak bushes therein, and set them for a rallying sign in their hats and head-pleats, and two or three of them had horns.

Well, Mr. Markham is his place, which was some fifty yards from where Jack Straw and the millmen were in the corner of the two hedges, looked to right and left of him a moment, then turned to the man on the left and said:

"Look ye, mate, when you hear our horns blow ask no more questions, but shoot straight and strong at whatso cometh towards us, till ye hear more tidings from Jack Straw or from me. Pass that word onward."

Then he looked at me, and said:

"I would they were just fifty paces higher, and they move not. Ho! Jack Straw, shall we shoot?

For the latter-named was nigh us now; he shook his head, and said nothing as he stood looking at the enemy's line.

"Fear not but they are the right folk, Jack," quoth Will Green.

"Yes, yes," said he, "but abide awhile; they could make nought of the highway, and two of their serjeants had a message from the grey goose feather. Abide, for they have not crossed the road to our right hand, and be not seen our fellows on the other side, who are now for a bushtment to them."

I looked hard at the man. He was a tall, wiry, and broad-shouldered fellow, clad in a handsome armour of bright steel that did attract attention. He wore not a hat, but over it he had a common linen smock-frock or gabardine, like our field workmen wear now or used to wear, and in his helmet he carried instead of a feather a wisp of wheaten straw. He bore a heavy axe in his hand besides the sword he was girt with, and round his neck hung a great horn for blowing. I should say that there were at least three "Jack Straws" among the fellowship of the discontented, one of whom was over in Essex.

As we waited there, every bowman, with his shaft cocked on the

...
Then we noted more movement in the enemy's line. They were surrounding the archers and archers and others spread somewhat under the three lions of which Long Gregory had told us, which were plain enough to us in the clear evening. Presently the moving line faced us, and the archers settled off as a small pace toward us, the men-at-arms holding back a little behind them. I knew now that they had been within bow-shot along, but our men were loth to shoot before their first shots would tell, like those half-dozen in the road when, as they told me afterwards, a dozen of our men-at-arms had made a show of falling on.

But now as soon as those men began to move on us directly in face, Jack Straw put his horn to his lips and blew a loud rough blast that was echoed by five or six others along the orchard hedge. Every man had his shaft cocked on the string; I watched them, and Will Green especially; he and his bow and its string seemed all of a piece, so easily by seeming did he draw the nock of the arrow to his ear. A moment, as he took his aim, and then—Oh! I understand the meaning of the arrow, with which the ancient poet sings of the god Apollo's bow, for terrible indeed was the mingled sound of the quiver beating the string and the whirring shaft as it was thrown. I was on my knees right in front of Will and saw all clearly; the archers (for no longbow men were over against our stand) had all of them bright headpieces, and stout body-armor of boiled leather with metal studs, and as they came towards us, I could see over their shoulders great wooden shields hinging at their backs. Further to our left their longbow-men had shot almost as soon as ours, and I heard seamed to hear the rush of the arrows through the apple-boughs. A man's cry therewith, but with the longbow had been before the crossbow; one of the archers fell outright, his great shield clashing down on him, and moved no more; while three others were hit and were coughing to the rear. The rest had shouldered their bows and were aiming, but I thought unenviously; and before the triggers were drawn again Will Green had cocked and loosed, and not a few others of our folk; then came the wooden hail of 'the bolts rattling through the boughs, but all overhead and no one hit.

The next time Will Green cocked his arrow he drew with a great shout, which all our fellows took up, for the archers instead of turning about in their places covered by their great shields and shining up their crossbows for a second shot, as is the custom of such soldiers, ran huddling together in front of their men-at-arms, our arrows driving through them as they ran; I saw four lying on the field dead or sore wounded.

But our archers shouted again, and kept on each plucking the arrows from the ground, and nocking and loosing swiftly but deliberately at the line before them; indeed now was the time for terrible bowmen, for as Will Green told me afterwards they always reckoned to kill with cloth or leather at five hundred yards, and they had let these cross-bowmen come nearly three hundred, and these were now all mingled and muddled, however, and the right hand and the left hand of the enemy missed each other. On a sudden a light or arrow from our right, the name of the archers' array, which stayed them somewhat; not because it was shot, but because they began to bethink them that there were many and all around them; then the road-hedge on the right seemed alive with armed men, for whatever could hold sword or staff amongst us was there; every bowman also lost our orchard hedge and he or his axe, and with a great shout, killed men, archers, and all, ran in on them; half-armed, yes, and half-naked of some; strong and stout and lithe and light withal, the wrath of battle and the hope better times lifting up their hearts till nothing could withstand them, as they mingled together, and for a minute or two was a confused clamor over which rose a clatter like the riveting of iron plates, or the noise of hammers; or the noise of the street of the coppersmiths at Florence; then the throng burst open and the steel-clad sergeants and squires and knights ran huddling and shuffling towards their horses; but some cast down their weapons and threw up their hands and cried for peace and ransom; and some stood and fought desperately and slew some till they were hammered down by many strokes, and of these were the ballistics and archers and the lawyers and their men, who could not run and hoped for no mercy.

I looked as on a picture and wondered and my mind was as strained to remember something forgotten, which yet had left its mark on it. I heard the noise of the horse hooves of the fleeing men-at-arms (the archers and archers had scattered before the last minute of the play), I heard the confused sound of laughter and rejoicing down the marsh, I heard by the evening wind lifting the lighter twigs of the trees, and far away the many noises of the quiet aires; till light and sound both began to fade from me and I saw and heard nothing.

I leapt up to my feet presently and there was Will Green before me as I had first seen him in the street with coat and hood and the gear on his girdle and his unstrung bow in his hand; his face smiling and kind again, but maybe a thought sad.

"Well?" quoth I, "What is the tale for the ballad maker?"

"As Jack Straw said it was," said he, "the end of the day and the end of the fray;" and he pointed to the brave show of the sky over the donkey's skin; "the knights fell and the sheriffs dead;" two of the lawyer kind slain alike, and one hanged, and cruel was his. To make them cruel; and three ballists knifed on the head—stout men, and so withers, that none found their brains in their skulls; and five archers and one archer slain, and a score and a half of others; one from the French was drawn from the Companions there, knowing no other craft than fighting for gold; and this is the end they are paid for. Well, brothers, saving the lawyers who knew no souls, but only parchments and deeds and titles of the same, God rest their souls!"

His fell a-musing; but I said, "And of our fellowship were any slain?"

"Two good men of the township," he said, "Hob Barner and Antony Webber, were slain outright; Hob with a shaft and Antony in the hand-play, and John Forgerty there were sore on the shoulder with a glaive; and five more men of the fellowship slain in the hand-play, and some few hurt, but not sore. And as to those slain if God give their souls rest it is well; for little rest they had on the earth belike; but for me I desire rest no more."

I thought of how much my matters were with a little hope and I