



## ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FIFTEENTH CENTURY MAIDEN.

EXTRACT FROM AN OLD BOOK: THE REPUTED DIARY OF ELIZABETH WOODVILLE.

“MONDAY morning.—Rose at four o'clock and helped Catherine to milk the cows; Rachel, the other Dairymaid, having scalded one of her hands in so very bad a manner that I last night made a poultice for it and gave Robin a penny to get her something comfortable from the apothecary.

Six o'clock (probably breakfast time).—The Buttock of beef rather too much boiled, the Beer a little of the stalest. Mem.: to talk to the Cook about the first fault, I, to mend the second, by tapping a fresh Barrel immediately.

Seven o'clock.—Went to walk with the Lady Duchess, my mother, into the Courtyard; fed five and twenty men and women. Chid Roger severely for expressing some dissatisfaction at attending us with broken meat.

Eight o'clock.—Went into the Paddock behind the house with my maid Dorothea, and caught Thrump, the little black pony, and rode a matter of six miles without either Saddle or Bridle.

Ten o'clock.—Went to dinner. John Gray, one of our visitors, a most comely youth—but what's that to me—a virtuous maiden should be intirely under her Parents' direction. John ate but little; stole many, many tender looks at me. Said, women never would be handsome in his opinion, who were not good tempered. I hope my temper is not intolerable; nobody finds fault with it but Roger, and he is the most disorderly serving man in our Family. John Gray likes white teeth; my teeth are a pretty good colour, I think, and John, if I mistake not, is of the same opinion.

Eleven o'clock.—Rose from table; the company all desirous of walking in the Fields. John Gray would lift me over every stile, and twice he squeezed my hand with such vehemence. I cannot say I should have any objection to John Gray. He plays at Prison Base as well as any of the gentlemen in the county, is remarkably dutiful to his Parents, and never misses church on a Sunday.

Three o'clock.—Poor Farmer Robinson's house burnt down by an accidental Fire. John Gray proposed subscription among the company for the farmer's relief, and gave no less than four pounds himself to this benevolent intention. Mem.: never saw him look so comely as at that moment.

Four o'clock.—Went to Prayers.

Six o'clock.—Fed the Hogs and Poultry.

Seven o'clock.—Supper on the table, delayed to that late hour on account of Farmer Robinson's misfortunes. The Goose Pye too much baked; the Loyn of Pork almost roasted to rags.

Nine o'clock.—The company half asleep; these late hours very disagreeable. Said my Prayers a second time; John Gray disturbing my thoughts too much the first time, and fell asleep at ten; dreamed that John Gray had demanded me of my father."

Contrary to custom, the dream came true. The wooing prospered and, in due course of time, Elizabeth Woodville married John Gray. This was probably the happiest time of her life; although the cloud of civil war must have cast

a dark shadow over the home of this young husband and wife. Sir John Gray belonged to the Lancastrian faction, and fought bravely in support of this cause. At the second battle of St. Alban's he was killed, and Elizabeth, with her two little boys, returned to her father's castle. Here she was compelled to remain; for when the House of York triumphed, Bradgate, her late husband's estate, was confiscated, and she was entirely dependent upon her parents.

Elizabeth was still resident at Castle Grafton when Edward IV. first saw her. The meeting was no accident. Elizabeth was well aware that the King was hunting in the neighbourhood, and, with her two little boys, waited beneath an oak tree, trusting that the King might pass that way.

When Edward at length appeared, she came forward, and, throwing herself upon her knees before him, with a child in either hand, she pleaded that their rights might be restored. She gained her cause, winning not only the gallant King's consent, but his heart too.

The oak under which they met is still called the Queen's Oak. This became a trysting place where Edward, it is said, frequently contrived to meet the fair golden-haired widow. The courtship was carried on with caution, for the King had enemies, and even his friends were little likely to favour his union with the widow of a Lancastrian partisan.

Edward, however, was not to be daunted. He determined to marry his "dear Lady Bessee," in spite of both friends and foes. Her mother, the Duchess of Bedford, naturally favoured the marriage, which was at length solemnised in the Castle and kept for some months a profound secret.

This marriage brought little happiness to Elizabeth, who in the course of a few years suffered many a cruel change. Now exalted—the first lady in the land—now a terrified fugitive seeking, with her children, a shelter in the Sanctuary of Westminster. Here, during her husband's reverse of fortune, she would literally have starved, had it not been for the loyalty of a kindly butcher, who daily supplied meat for her table.

Fortune once more smiled upon Elizabeth, but not for long, and when King Edward died, his "Lady Bessee" was again obliged to seek refuge in Westminster. This time she was not permitted to keep her two younger boys. Richard, the cruel hunchback, took the two little princes and placed them in the Tower, whence they never returned.

In later days, when her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, was married to Henry VII., poor Lady Bessee was restored to the state and dignity befitting her rank; but she mingled no more in Court circles. The memory of past sorrows lay too heavily upon her tender heart, and she passed the few remaining years of her life in retirement. Southey's lines upon her tomb are all too true.

“Thou Elizabeth art here,  
Thou, to whom all griefs were known,  
Who wert placed upon a bier  
In happier hour than on a Throne.”