

**A KING PLAY,  
AND EARL GERALD**

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A King Play, and Earl Gerald by Mrs. T. E. Freeman

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**MRS. T. E. FREEMAN**

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TALES FROM ENGLISH HISTORY.

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AND

EARL GERALD.

BY

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*&c.*

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## A KING PLAY.\*

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ONE fine evening, at the close of the summer of 1485, the streets of the good old city of Oxford were almost deserted on account of the sultry heat. Young collegians, grave professors, learned doctors, and portly citizens, went by scores to bathe, or amuse themselves in boats upon the river; and the thrifty dames meanwhile set open every lattice to welcome the cool current of evening air.

Only the maidens stood, or sauntered in groups before the doors, discussing all the little gossip of their neighbourhood; and parties of children chased each other in and out, and pursued their sports undisturbed, in the almost empty streets—caring nothing for the heat, not they, except that for

\* My readers, I trust, will excuse my adoption of the quaint title of "A KING PLAY," more strictly applicable to the religious dramas enacted in the Middle Ages, in churches and monasteries, at Christmas-tide, and generally representing the homage of the kings or wise men of the East at the Cradle of Bethlehem; but this title, in a *literal* signification, seemed to suit so exactly the royal episode in the life of Lambert Simnel, that I could not forbear adopting it.

the moment it secured them freer space for their amusements.

A party of bare-headed boys had got up a mimic procession, and marched to the rude music of frying-pans and cleavers, wooden drums, tin whistles, and the like; while banners of coloured kerchiefs, and fragments of old tapestry, waved over their heads.

One lad was mounted astride an immense dog, by way of courser; the animal being muzzled, and led by reins of rope at either side. The feet of the mounted hero did walking duty as he rode — what matter! he wore a battered plume upon his head, a gay scarf across his breast, and carried a tin sword, like a mace-bearer. He was evidently personating a grand dignitary to his entire satisfaction, his whole air inviting the homage and admiration of his companions.

While thus amusing themselves, their ranks were thrown into some confusion by suddenly hearing the sound of horses' hoofs upon the stone pavement, and from a cross street, there emerged four horsemen.

The two who rode foremost appeared to be a nobleman and a priest, the two who followed, were their armed retainers. These last hurried forward, as soon as they perceived some obstacle in the way of their masters, and were preparing to apply their whips for the dispersion of our little friends; but the gentlemen

at once ordered them to forbear, and return to the rear, while they themselves pulled up their horses, and laughingly desired that the procession might continue.

This little incident had considerably "fluttered the Volscians;" but the plumed hero of the day thanked the strangers, waved his sword, and then gave his orders to his retinue in a voice of authority. The discordant music recommenced, the march was resumed, and the horsemen, having paused till all had passed, emerged from the cross street and brought up the rear.

"Thus the boy apes the man, and the humble the great!" said the priest, smiling.

"Just so! but did you notice the little fellow with the feather and sword? I declare he is the very image of my young cousin of Warwick,—he might pass anywhere for a son of poor Clarence."

"Ha! do you say so! Let us ride on, and look at him again."

They did so,—but the zest of the play was now over, and the mimic procession had already broken up, for most of the boys preferred gazing after the strangers. Their little chief had dismounted from the dog, and having freed himself from the battered plume, stood wiping his hot brow with his sleeve, as he coolly returned the gaze of the horsemen.



"There is a strong likeness to the Duke of Clarence, certainly," said the priest to his companion,—"and his age, I think, must also correspond with that of little Warwick."

"Though both age and likeness were perfect, what then?" rejoined the nobleman, who was the Earl of Lincoln, nephew of Clarence, and his royal brothers Edward IV, and Richard III.

"*Something* might come of it,—something might be made of it," replied Richard Simon the priest. "We are told that young Warwick is still alive and well, in the Tower; if so, why might he not escape?—indeed a rumour is already afloat to that effect; and if he be dead, as we rather fear, yet the world knows not of it, and would believe us either way if we proclaimed aloud, 'Lo, here is he who should be your king!—here is the last scion of the house of York. Down with usurping Richmond!' If I now declared this to be the case, could you disprove it?"

"Supposing I could not, what follows?"

"This follows:—it is not you and I alone, my lord, that hate this Henry Tudor; there are many Yorkists yet remaining who smother their discontent deep in their hearts only for want of a rallying point. That boy there, if we declare him of the royal blood, may yet gather an army to our cause, and be led in a

triumphant procession somewhat different from that of to-day."

"We must think further of it," returned the earl, thoughtfully. "Meanwhile let us speak to this lad, and see what stuff he is made of. Holloa boy!—what great one did you fancy yourself, when you bestrode that dog, sword in hand, awhile since?"

"I meant no harm," said the boy, hanging his head a little. "We were playing, and I was the king."

"And would you like it if the play were earnest?" asked the earl. "Did you never hear that kings sleep on thorns?"

"I wouldn't mind the thorns; I should like it. I should like to have every one doing as I bid them."

"And what is your name, my bold little man, and where do you live?"

"My name is Lambert Simnel, honourable sir; my father lives in the High Street, and bakes all the bread for University College, and others too; and my mother—"

"Enough;—here is some money to make merry with your playmates. Go!"

The Earl of Lincoln and Richard Simon the priest, spent that night and the several following days at the Bishop's Palace, where the earl was an expected

guest. They had much conversation together upon the subject already started between them; and having formed a rough outline of their future plans, they took into their councils, cautiously, one after another of such leading gentlemen as were known to have belonged to the Yorkist party.

The extraordinary resemblance accidentally discovered between Simnel, the baker's son, and the little Earl of Warwick, son of the murdered Clarence, appeared like an omen to cheer the spirits of the fallen party, and all agreed that, with careful handling, it might be turned to their advantage, especially as the boy was gifted with natural grace of manner, and appeared to have quickness of wit, and aptitude for counterfeit representation.

One evening shortly afterwards, Simnel the baker, with his wife, children, and apprentices, were seated at a plain but substantial supper in their kitchen in the High Street, when an emphatic, though not very loud knock, was several times repeated upon the outer door.

The party looked at each other a little startled and surprised, for the hour was an unusual one for a stranger's visit; but they were honest folk, who paid their taxes and their debts, and had nothing to fear,