

THE HISTORY OF FAIR

ROSAMOND,

THE BEAUTIFUL MISTRESS OF
KING HENRY THE SECOND.

HER BIRTH, & EDUCATION
AT THE NUNNERY OF GODSTOW.
AND HER DEATH.



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AND HIS DEATH

AS THE MURDERER OF KING

JAMES VI AND I

KING HENRY THE SECOND

THE SEVENTH PART OF

WODWARD

THE HISTORY OF KING

THE HISTORY OF

FAIR ROSAMOND.

ROSAMOND daughter of Walter Lord Clifford, was born in the year 1134; her father was a nobleman of high reputation and wealth, and brought up his daughter in a style befitting his rank.

Fair Rosamond was born at the time when the skirmishes between Matilda (Queen of Henry I.) and king Stephen, kept all England in a ferment. Henry, son of Matilda, and afterwards Henry II., was educated at Oxford, and in its vicinity was his boyhood past. It is now impossible to ascertain the exact time when he first beheld Rosamond, but she must have been very young, for it is recorded that he had seen her in 1149, when Rosamond was a boarder at Godstow Nunnery.

The nunnery at Godstow was founded by Lady Ida, of Winchester, who became abbess of the establishment; she attached a church to it, and dedicated the

same to the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist; which was opened in 1138. Rosamond could not have been more than ten or eleven years of age when she was received into this holy house; the regulations of which were by no means so strict as those of most religious establishments. Stow records, that the females of the nunnery "were wont to appear at the fair, if they list, and would go to Medley, and other places of diversion."

At Medley, a large building between Godstow and Oxford, according to tradition, the young and ardent Henry first saw our heroine, when he was but fifteen, and herself only twelve years of age. Young, handsome and accomplished, ere the world had taught his breast one lesson of guilt, ere society had planted weeds in the pure soul of nature—he saw the gentle girl: too young for love, they felt an interest for each other; and she would wander from the precincts of Godstow, to meet the truant prince who strayed from his tutor at Oxford, to pass an hour with the lovely Rosamond.

When Henry attained sixteen, he was called from his studies and his pleasures, to assert his claim to the crown, at the sword's point. The field of battle, the

cares of a new life, the honour that he sought, engrossed the mind of Henry; he had little leisure to devote to softer thoughts; a reflection on the pleasant moments passed with Rosamond, would however intrude itself, but he only gave a sigh for his early hours, and buried his grief in the bustle of warlike preparations. In the meantime Rosamond, had expanded into womanhood; she was now seventeen; her person was tall, and exquisitely proportioned; her hair, which was of a light golden colour, flowed in such profusion, that it seemed as if nature had designed it for a garb, for it reached even to her feet; her face was exquisite; her eyes dark, and formed a fine contrast to her skin which was beautifully fair, and of a transparent hue.

When Henry had laid aside his armour, secure of ultimately wielding the sceptre, his thoughts reverted to the companion of his boyish rambles. He soon quitted the south of England for the metropolis, and from thence bent his course to Oxford. He retraced every step of his boyhood; he reached the tree upon whose trunk he had fondly carved the name of his enchanter;—he looked upon the name that was indelibly engrav-

on upon his heart, and all the passion of his boyhood gushed over his soul. She whom he loved, was at this time at the manor of her father, and Henry did not wish to encounter Lord Clifford; he waited, therefore, for a chance of meeting her, in her rambles.

Whilst Henry was wandering near the nunnery of Godstow, the mansion of Lord Clifford was the scene of festivity and merriment, for Baron Fitzwarren, a young nobleman of riches and noble birth, came as a suitor to our heroine. The Baron was the son of one of the earliest projectors of the Crusade; and he inherited his father's fame and valour. His gigantic person, his courteous manners, caused him to be observed of all. A finer or a braver youth never raised a lance.

"I would willingly," said he, addressing Lord Clifford, "awhile lay by my sword; and taste of the joys of peace, of home, and lead thy beauteous daughter to grace the halls my father left me; but my good Lord she turns an icy ear to my warmest vows, and seems to woo the cloister.

"My noble Lord," replied the father, "the maid who yields at once is lightly gained and scarcely worth the conquest,

my daughter, doubt not, good lord, when time has weaned her fears, she'll greet your love with love as pure, as warm as you could wish it."

In the gardens of the mansion, Lady Clifford contrived to leave her lovely daughter with the young Baron. She rose to follow her mother, but with a gentle force, he detained her.

"Fly me not, sweet Rosamond," he cried, "for I have much to tell you: come, sit ye down fair lady, and listen to me."

"My father will chide my stay—my mother too—"

"They will not chide but gladden at your staying; Oh! I have much to say, but that my speech grows lack whene'er I gaze upon thee, maiden."

"I pray, my Lord, you will disclose at once what is of such import to be uttered," cried Rosamond.

"Need I speak then, gentle lady? do not mine eyes speak for me?—I love you, Rosamond.—I come to lay my riches, and my trophies at thy feet and ask thy hand."

"Alas! my Lord, I am but a silly maid, unworthy of the honours that you proffer."

"Oh! say you'll be propitious to me!"

“Indeed, my Lord,” cried Rosamond, “I cannot.”

“Oh! tell me—ease me of my hopes or fears at once—has any other love enthroned itself in thy fair breast?—or can it be, it yet is cold to passion?”

“Of love I yet have thought not,” answered Rosamond.

“Say, you do not hate me.”

“I never hated any earthly thing; and little cause have I to hate my father’s friend,” cried Rosamond.

“May I then hope?” eagerly exclaimed Fitzwarren.

“All that in duty I should do, I will; and your lordship will believe, that I am not insensible to the honour that you proffer me.”

Lord Fitzwarren found her answers even more evasive than he anticipated, and bowing respectfully left her, to communicate to her father his hopes.

That very evening Rosamond wandered with her maid from the castle, musing upon her early days, and tasking her mind to compliance with the wishes of her parents, when a rustling in the bushes beside her aroused her from her reverie. In an instant, a youth, clad in a green hunting tunic, leaped over the

brambles that divided them; she looked upon him for a moment; it was her former lover, who stood beside her; the young, the handsome Henry, now expanded into manhood. Words could ill convey the emotions of either bosom;—there he stood, her own, her darling boy;—the first being of her own age for whom she felt a care. The days of childhood, and its joys, crowded on her memory, as she gazed upon every feature time had ripened into manly beauty. When she last beheld him, he was a fine youth, with health upon his cheek, and truth upon his tongue. War and toil had thrown a darker hue over his countenance, but time had given a sweeter cadence to his voice: the generous boy had become the flattering lover.

Henry urged her flight; but Rosamond's sense of duty revolted at the idea. "Shall I fly," she cried, "from my parents, to whom I owe a thousand times more than my utmost gratitude can ever repay! oh! do not urge me to it!"

"Gentle, lovely Rosamond," replied the prince, "they can but wish thy happiness—in my arms you will be happy."

"Why not at once reveal to my father your love?" cried Rosamond.

“That is at present, impossible. Till Stephen’s death, I am but the dependant of a party, promise me, at least, my Rosamond, that you will have no other, and I will wait till happier hours may come to make thee mine.”

“By every star above us !” cried Rosamond, “I vow that, if I am not thine, I never will be another’s.”

Rosamond, pressed to the throbbing breast of Henry, had uttered this vow ere she had time to reflect that she had thus sworn to frustrate the intentions of her father. The lovers parted.

Lord Clifford urged the suit of his noble friend, and Rosamond at length peremptorily refused him. Wonder gave place to rage in the bosom of her father, and he punished his disobedient child by confinement to his castle. She had no means of communicating to Henry her situation, and the agony of restraint was increased by the conviction, that her lover awaited her coming at the usual spot, and must be torn with surmises as to the cause of her absence.

Henry, however, judged that their meetings had been discovered; but, emboldened by love, he, at midnight approached the castle, and bribing the sen-

tinel and Rosamond's maid, he crossed the moat, and placed himself beneath the lattice of Rosamond's chamber. The maid true to her promise brought her mistress to the window, and left her there, gazing on the brightness above her, when the moonbeams fell upon the figure of her lover. Breathless with pleasure and alarm, she gazed upon him—"Fly!" at length she exclaimed; "dangers await you."

"I defy all danger for one glance of thine eye—once accent from thy tongue, the only bliss left me on earth."

"Oh! do not talk of bliss—the guard if they perceive, will surely destroy thee."

"Say that you love me still, and I will fly," replied the prince.

"Oh! can you doubt it! If there be truth in all you profess, oh! fly, love, now."

Henry turned to take one parting glance and fled.

Rosamond now removed to Godstow, and put under the charge of the abbess would gain no tidings of Henry; she be-thought her therefore of her vow never, never to be another's, and now calmly meditated giving her existence to the church. Whilst thus weaning her mind

from earth, she was suddenly called to confession; she met Father Ambrose with a cheerful air, and was about to address him, when he cried, "Be pacified, good daughter; another hour the church will hear your errors—I have much to import to reveal to you—I see you here in sorrow, as yet a novice in the holy house, and my religious function bids me warn ye not to mock Heaven with a feigned love;—your thoughts stray still in earth—is it not so?"

"Alas! my Father," replied Rosamond, "such has been my weakness, but time—"

"I speak not thus to chide you. Heaven delights not in constrained vows; and there are duties, yet on earth which you may still fulfil, wherein your days may pass as holy as here—there's one has wooed thee, maiden; and I have listened to his exhortations to bear thee this." So saying, he put a scroll into her hands, and she read as follows—

"Beloved of my soul,—Remember your vow—tell me by the friar, if thou wilt be mine, and I will deliver thee. He who bears thee this doth wish us well, and may be trusted;—Your wretched lover,—HENRY."

“Tell me, Friar,” she cried, “What mean you?—what means he?”

“Maiden,” cried Father Ambrose; “He who writes you thus has won upon me, by earnest prayer to breathe his vows to you—and I proffered him my service: you have confessed to me your love—that too has swayed me: a virtuous wife is a better title, than an unblest nun!”

Scarcely knowing what she did, Rosamond took the required vow.

“’Tis well,” cried Ambrose; “Heaven knows, ’tis for its service that I venture thus; to-morrow night, when all is hushed and still, feign you a sudden cause to quite your couch, and reach the portal window, from thence a ladder slung shall give you safe to him: I shall send to guard thee?”

“My father! my mother!” exclaimed Rosamond; “what will they say?”

“Time shall content them. In the church’s name I do pronounce to thee, that less of sin is in thy flying hence than tarrying here; therefore be comforted.”

“May I not write to them, to say that I have gone, but am not yet unworthy of their care?”

“No; I forbid it. I will calm their fears. Leave all to me.”

The bigotry of the period made the injunction of a Father Confessor almost a law; and Rosamond scarcely paused to ask herself if what she purposed was wrong, secure that the sanction of the church would not be given to evil.

Father Ambrose was one of the many wretches, who make religion the cloak to villany. The moment he learnt from the confessions of Rosamond who was her lover, he sought means to communicate with Henry, and to ingratiate himself with the future Monarch, as well as with the hope of present gain, agreed to become the pander of his Prince.

The curfew had tolled, and every light was extinguished—the cottager had dashed the ashes from the wood slip that in those days supplied the place of candles—and all was silence and darkness: the solitary sound of the startled wolf-dog alone broke upon the ear, as Henry, guided by a confidant of Father Ambrose, paced the confines of Godstow Nunnery.

“Descend, and be in safety, and in bliss,” exclaimed a voice, whose lightest echo was a heart-throb to her. There was no time for pause, for thought—her foot was upon the ladder—Henry’s hand had grasped hers and she descended.

“Away, away!” he cried; “she is won, and I am happy.”

Rosamond was placed upon a leopard-skin for a pillion: her lover sprung up before her, and his faithful steed flew with them across the country; the dim haze of morn was upon every surrounding object—she knew not whither she went; one arm encircled her lover, whose heart beat beneath the gentle pressure of her hand; the rapidity with which they went rendered speech nearly impossible, and scarcely a word was breathed, till Henry halted to speak with his companion.

“Where are we?” he exclaimed.

“Right for our destination; we are ten miles from Uxbridge yet.”

The morning-star was fading before the coming day, when Henry entered Uxbridge, where he dismounted, and assisted his lovely companion from her seat.

“Here you are safe,” he cried, as he led her into a neat, though small, cottage. “You lack rest; let me lead you to a chamber. Sleep, my beloved. I will be your watch; no danger shall approach you.”

A few hours passed in a fruitless endeavour to repose, when Rosamond for-

sook her pillow, and sought her lover. The excitement of her flight had lulled her anxieties, and overwhelmed her thoughts of home; but, in the reflections that time afforded her, they came with redoubled force.

“Oh! Henry,” she cried, “I repent me of the past: bear me back to my father; what will be his agony! what will my mother suffer! Will they not turn in their grief, and curse their child?”

“My Rosamond, my own beloved Rosamond,” cried Henry, “your happiness is my life; for I live but to promote it; your will, my law; your wish, a mandate. Rest but to-day; and by this eve, I swear to bear you where you will.”

Ere long they were again mounted. The roads to Godstow and to London were both direct, though in different directions; but as the horse was led forth at the back of the dwelling, Rosamond never noticed the direction he took, and rode contentedly on, though every step took her further from the abode of her parents.

“Whither have you carried me?” she exclaimed, as they passed over the Strand then a barren track; “and what river is that which rolls beside us? there is

no such stream around my father's dwelling."

"Be satisfied; for you are safe," cried Henry.

They passed through the gate of the city, (now Temple-Bar,) and turning to the right, were instantly amid the cloisters of the Knights Templars. In the recesses of the Temple the prince had prepared a dwelling; and thither they instantly flew. Fatigue had again subdued the gentle fair one, and her lover left her to repose. When she awoke she repeated her entreaties to be sent to her parents.

"Would you leave me, then?" cried Henry, "me who can resign the pageantry of a throne for you!—Oh! my gentle love, who breathes of sweetness to all else, be not so cold to me!"

"Call it not coldness," replied Rosamond; "by my virgin faith, the love I bear you cannot be excelled;—the blush that rises on my cheek attests it;—but oh! my Henry, my heart is heavy with my parent's woes: of them I now must think."

"Refresh thee, love," cried Henry, "and chase these thoughts:" and he

handed her the goblet, filled with the richest vintage, as he spoke.

The curfew mandate extended, even to the habitation of the prince, and every light was extinguished; the pale beams of the moon, alone, fell upon their faces as they sat—the solitude, the calmness of the hour, gave a charm to all. Henry approached, not as the conscious lover, who deemed her all his own, but as the humble suitor, who feared offending, when he came to bliss her.

“We are the victims of fate, my beloved Rosamond,” he cried; “but the time will come, when all shall be our own. When Stephen is in his grave, a sovereign’s love shall bid all sorrow cease, and England hail fair Rosamond as queen.”

‘Twas in vain that she spoke of Lord Clifford. “He will forgive the means, when he beholds the end”, cried Henry, “and bless the deed that made his daughter Empress of this Isle. Do you doubt my word?”

“Oh? no, no, no,” cried Rosamond “I have no doubts, no fears; your love I know, and I judge it by my own.”

“Then my soul’s treasure,” cried the enraptured prince, “doom not that love to such long, needless pangs—come be

my own ; to morrow's sun shall join our hands, if that be your desire—to night be mine."

Lost to a sense of all but one being, one thought, and one hope, she sank to sleep in the arms of her seducer.

Where love has fixed his throne, it takes little skill to chase away the grief of a wounded heart—the Prince renewed his vows, and Rosamond, too fond to doubt, was satisfied.

In after years, Lord Clifford discovered his daughter in the mistress of the king, but he could not wrest her from him ; and the same concealment that protected Rosamond from the fury of the queen, withheld her from the fondness of a father.

Day passed after day, and he found new pretences to delay the marriage ; and at length Rosamond gave birth to a son. The hour of travail had scarcely passed, when news of Stephen's death called Henry hence.

Days, weeks, months, passed away, and the fatal truth at length came upon her heart—she should never be the wife of Henry—another was to bear that title ! Eleanor of France, who had been divorced from her husband for infidelity, was

already betrothed, and would soon be united to the monarch of England.

Rosamond pressed her babe to her breast in mute agony when the news reached her. "Come, my Richard," she exclaimed, "come to the heart thy father's falsehood's broken!—sleep on, my boy; though thy mother sleeps no more;—slumber, my little treasure; thou art all that is left me now—the lovely relict of faded bliss, the living and beauteous pledge of a faith that is forgotten now."

At this time she received the following note from Henry:

"Stern necessity may rule the hand—
—But not the heart. I was never more
thine own than now. Do not hate me,
but believe in the unquenched love of
him whom fate has for awhile taken from
thee."
HENRY.

"The sinking wretch," says the proverb; "catcheth at a straw;" so does the dropping heart sustain itself on the most slender hope.—There was comfort even in this scroll, and Rosamond washed it with tears of joy.

With her two babes Rosamond now passed her hours, declining any further interview with her father; but Henry at length forced himself into her presence.

—It was a dreadful moment for both. The anger that was on his brow, as he entered, faded, and shame wrote her blushes there. Indignation for an instant glowed in the face of Rosamond; but it fled, and the reproach of a pallid brow was all that greeted Henry. They gazed on one another. The gentle heart of Rosamond relented; she read her lover's anguish in his glance; and, throwing herself upon his neck, in one gush of tears, spoke her forgiveness.

The King passed his hours with Rosamond, and his frequent and long absences at length aroused the jealousy of the Queen. There were not wanting those about the court who were glad to foment dissensions; rumour followed rumour; scandal, who builds upon a breath, framed tales that reached the royal ear, and Henry's quiet was now invaded by the reiterated upbraidings of his consort; she, who, from her violence, had attained the title of the She-wolf of France, was not of a nature to brook the royal neglect with patience or humility.

Alarmed for the safety of Rosamond, for Eleanor threatened her life, Henry resolved to remove her to a distance; and the Palace of Woodstock offered a safe

asylum. But a lover's mind pictures a thousand fears; and Henry scarcely thought the massy walls of Woodstock a sufficient protection against the malice of the Queen and her emissaries. There was at that period at the court, a young Norman, named Theodore D'Agueville, who was skilled in architecture and design; and to him he committed the task of fortifying this retreat for Rosamond.—Theodore however proved false to his trust, and revealed to queen Eleanor, the secret of Rosamond's abode.

To the gardens also, D'Agueville directed his attention: bower intersected bower; grove returned itself into grove, which were so intermingled with false and real turnings and passages, that became nearly impossible to unravel the road; the mystery was, however simplified by marking the trees differently on the two sides—this mark, so minute as to escape even a close investigation, yet sufficiently distinct to strike instantly the well informd eye, was the only clue to the labyrinth.

The best refutation to the absurd story that a silken clue led to the different windings of the grove, or the apartments, is, that silk was not then in use in this country.

In this secure retreat, amidst all the blandishments that wealth could give, and love enjoy, Henry and Rosamond passed many delightful and happy hours.

Treason, however, gained such an ascendancy that it became necessary that Henry himself should quell it. Taking leave therefore of Rosamond, he prepared to depart for Normandy.

No sooner was the King beyond the sea, than Theodore D'Agueville, introduced queen Eleanor into Rosamond's apartment.

You are indeed fair! "at length cried the Queen: "goodly to the sight but foul within! Aye, look on me, strumpet! I am she, whom through life thou has been wronging.—We never met till now but I have cause to know thee."

"Speak, what is your wish?"

"Oh! Your death!" was the reply.

"Here is a dagger—here a poisoned bowl; if you dare not strike, drink, and be at peace. Nay, do not quail, or I will give the blow."

"Spare me a little yet!" cried Rosamond.

"'Tis fit I die," quoth Rosamond; "and yet I cling to life. But grant, your majesty, one moment, ere you send me to end a long account of sin in eternal torments——"

The Queen was silent and she continued
 but I was young, and not unlovely. The
 Prince proffered me his heart—his hand
 —and I believed his vows. He ruined
 me, ere you had seen him. Time passed,
 and he was wedded. I awhile withstood
 his suit, nor yielded to his wishes; but a
 mother's weakness and a mother's fears
 subdued me; to save my children, I
 became a wretch! Humbly I bend before
 you; I ask no life to revel on in sin; nor
 dare I hope, even while I implore forgive-
 ness.—But think ye, lady 'tis a bitter thing
 or rash we know not, dream not whither;
 —not for mine, but for my soul's sake,
 spare me! and I swear, I in a closter's
 walls will veil my face, far from the sight
 of him who has undone me.

The beauty, the meekness of Rosa-
 mond, won upon the heart of the Queen
 —the weapon dropped from her hand!

Rosamond made a solemn vow, never
 to see Henry more, but to enter the
 Nunnery of Godstow; and the Queen
 quitted her.

She died in the year 1191, aged 57.
 THE END.