
The Lady and the Priest

Maberly Catherine Charlotte

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Author: Maberly Catherine Charlotte

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THE

LADY AND THE PRIEST.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY MRS. MABERLY,

AUTHOR OF

"EMILY," "LEONTINE," "MELANTHE," "FASHION," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



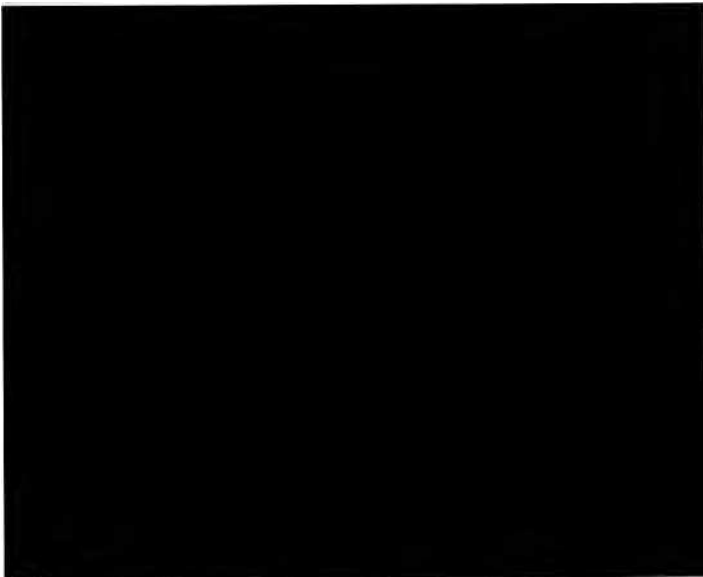
LONDON:
COLBURN AND CO., PUBLISHERS,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1851.

249. w. 188.



LONDON :
PRINTED BY WILLIAM TYLER,
BOLT-COURT.





TO

THE BEING

MOST DEAR TO HER UPON EARTH,

THIS BOOK

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

spoken in England in the twelfth century, inasmuch as few readers would readily understand the old Norman French then used by the upper class, and still fewer would be able to comprehend the Saxon of the common people. In reference to the time of Henry the Second, the old diction of Chaucer would be almost as great an anachronism as the phrases of our own day. It follows therefore, that, should any writer desire to represent imaginary conversations of so remote an epoch as that of the present tale, he must necessarily do so in the manner of a translator, and deliver the words of his *dramatis personæ* in current modes of speech. It is for this reason that in my simple tale of the trials and sorrows of "Fair Rosamond" I have told every thing in my own words, and the knights and the ladies at least speak a language intelligible to all.

THE AUTHOR.

MANCHESTER-SQUARE,
July, 1851.



THE
LADY AND THE PRIEST.

CHAPTER I.

THOSE who are accustomed to look on England only as she now is—highly cultivated, well regulated, and peacefully flourishing—may not readily picture to themselves the very different aspect she once wore. Since the period chosen for this tale, seven centuries have nearly passed away ; and with each lie buried many relics

of barbarism, and many delusions of ignorance ; while civilization, with rapid strides, has changed the character of the people no less thoroughly than the appearance of the country. From the date of the Conquest this change had visibly begun. The stronghold of the Saxon gave place to the castle of the Norman, but the numerous grants of land made by William to his followers, were not to be wrested from the original possessors, and maintained, without a struggle. Each landholder became a chief, and hastily fortified himself in the centre of his possessions. On every height arose castles, walled and defended, as though about to stand a siege ; no busy village clustered at its foot, but all—retainer, and craftsman, and soldier, gathered closely within the walls, for no safety was to be found without.

In the reign of Stephen, no fewer than one hundred and thirteen castles had been built, besides innumerable churches and abbeys. Everywhere, indeed, the architectural taste of the new lords of the country began to show itself. Small houses, or country places, did not exist : a middle

class seemed wanting, for the feudal laws compelled every man to take up arms; and between the common soldier and the knight, no intermediate station could be found. There were not hands enough to cultivate the land. The constant warfare in which the country was engaged,—whether from the wars of succession, the eternal inroads of the Welsh, or the madness of the crusades, just then at its height,—nearly drained England of its peasantry, and its beautiful bosom was as a barren sand. From height to height, lordly castles frowned over desolate valley and plain; the husbandman was idle, or else practising with cross-bow and spear; the women worked in the fields; the harvest was scanty, and every article of clothing or food excessively dear. There were scarcely any roads, and very few bridges. The forests, in their wild neglect, stretched for miles over hill and dale, giving shelter to outlaw and robber, and the only means of communication was by persons travelling on horseback or on foot; and even such intercourse was irregular, each town, whether large or small, seeming to be contented to

dwelt within itself, happy if it might do so without molestation.

Such parts of the country as were remote from towns or villages, presented a lamentable picture of disorder and neglect: whole tracts of land were uncultivated, for the heart of the occupier often failed him; and while pillage and plunder were rife in the kingdom, toiling industry had little inducement to lay up what might in a moment be carried off to supply some castle, whose owner was a stranger to the soil. Farming was consequently at its lowest ebb, and the whole face of the country impressed the beholder with pity and apprehension.

In the midst of this desolation, one feature presented a most remarkable contrast to the rest; the abbey lands were as an oasis in the desert of England. Wherever the grey walls of a religious house showed themselves, the adjacent country gave tokens, not only of the hand of man, but of the respect which the church generally, though not always, contrived to exact from the lawless and turbulent characters around. The crops of the holy fathers were permitted to ripen in