

imagination from Fairyland. With flowers did he garland his Cathedral for the coming of his dark eyed Rose of Provence. Yes, Notre Dame was very fine, so, years after, the old folk would agree, all that was said of it by those who had been to Paris was no doubt true, but they smiled mysteriously, those quiet old people, and remembered *their* cathedral and how it once blossomed so richly for the coming of a Prince Charming to meet his lovely lady from Provence. Even the grey-walled houses of the town had seemed alive that day, awakened to a happy almost super-sensible life. For did not the solemn Cathedral herself call upon all to be merry? So flowers, tapestries and banners were displayed from the houses and gay gallants and ladies, richly dressed, went joyfully about the town with laughter and with songs. Then, in the evening, when the torches and candles flared about the town, it seemed as though a kind of Alladin's cave were here with the blue star-gemmed sky for its vaulting. The wings of a bird in that summertime in France would have allowed you to see two great processions converging on Sens, each made beautiful as a dream with all the arts of pageantry and minstrelsy. All the world loves a lover and the birds sang all the way as Louis rode to Sens. The butterflies fluttering to the flowers, and blossoms, drifting on the soft wind of the summer, were but so many favours dropped for him. For had not Giles of Flagéac been sent by Blanche of Castile, in the autumn of 1233, on a *very* responsible mission indeed—a private visit to the castle of the Count of Provence? Had he not brought back great accounts of the loveliness of Marguerite, of how both the religious and secular education of this maiden of some fifteen summers fitted her well to become the Queen of France, in one of the most brilliant periods of that country's history? "Beautiful in appearance," Flagéac reported, "but still more beautiful in manners and piety." Early in 1234 Peter, Archbishop of Bourges, had been commanded to go to Provence and formally to demand the hand of Marguerite for Louis the Ninth of France, that pattern of chivalry, a very parfyte gentyl knyght indeed.

Politics, so say the history books, undoubtedly played a principal part in influencing Blanche of Castile to seek a wife for her eldest son among the daughters of Raymond de Bérenger, Comte de Provence. Not only had the reports of her emissaries proved all that could be desired, but she had persuaded Raymond, and with no undue difficulty either, to promise that his daughter would be richly dowered. Whether that dowry was ever paid in full is quite another matter! Blanche was a great statesman, a great mother too, as the history of the childhood of Louis bears testimony. Now he was in his twentieth year and all had gone well with her plans in Provence; she was determined that splendour, luxury and all the brilliance it was conceivable to connect with such an event should lend magnificence to the marriage of Louis of France. So much for Blanche. As for the young king—well, he may be forgiven if, as he rode through his kingdom under those summer skies, his heart was lighter than surely the heart of "a Monk King" should be, even when he rides to gather—truly a princely guerdon—an exquisite Rose of Provence. The citizens of Sens came out with minstrelsy and song to meet their splendid young King with the kind eyes and the pleasant smile and, if we can credit a stone portraiture of his time, a head like a young Greek god; so tall of stature was he too—so straight in the saddle! The sunlight gleamed on his rich apparel and made his sword and jewels glitter, but most of all it shone upon his yellow hair until—it sounds prophetic—his countenance appeared as if surrounded with a halo of living gold. As he passed along the highways the peasants whispered that surely no earthly knight passed by. Was it St. Michael himself who rode to the flower-decked church of Sens? And Louis as he journeyed

thought of the gifts he was bringing to his bride, of how they would please her, of what he would say. He brought with him a beautiful new jewelled crown for the head of his Queen, he had had a "golden bonnet" (a priceless heirloom of the Queens of France) remodelled for her, a goblet, also of gold, he brought from which she would drink at their wedding feast, and he carried a ring within the circlet of which were written three words that epitomised King Louis' conception of what life meant for him—"God, France and Marguerite." Old Giles of Flagéac and Peter the Archbishop had, all unconsciously, woven in with Louis' vows of service to God and to France, a dream. And so the King, one of the greatest patrons of the goldsmith's art, had sought out a workman, skilled in this art, and he bade him make a ring for the lady of his dreams. Cunningly the goldsmith had wrought into the little ring for the finger of Marguerite the words that the King commanded. So Louis rode for Sens with his gifts, the sun on his golden hair and his mind filled with the ideals that he kept alight to the last, to be blazoned for all time on the annals of kingship. A pattern they are to which the most Christian King Louis and Marcus Aurelius the Stoic, of all who have sat in "the great white light that beats about a throne," alone have come near to attaining. The adoration which the former inspired is expressed in the words of William of Chartres: "His good deeds lit up and warmed the whole realm like the rays of the sun." "Elegantly made in face and figure," writes another, "he was singled out by the noblest gifts of man." "The finest knight that ever was seen," says his Seneschal and biographer Joinville.

But we have strayed from that day in summertime, some six hundred and ninety-nine years ago, when this Prince Charming of the yellow locks came to meet his beautiful, dark-haired princess at Sens. She rides out of Provence, this maiden, with a procession of knights and nobles of France and Provence, with her minstrels and trumpeters and, by her side, the venerable Archbishop of Sens. Would that some chronicler had given us the scene of the meeting of the King and his fifteen-year-old bride. But history is silent even as to the date of their wedding, although there is little doubt that it must have been celebrated on the 27th of May, for on the 28th the Queen's crowning took place with great solemnity. She wore a beautiful gown of cloth of gold, tight to below the waist and then falling in graceful drapery to her feet. It had long flowing sleeves embroidered with ermine; under the fine new crown lovely jewels were wreathed into the Queen's dark hair. After the crowning the King gave a splendid feast; the Members of the Royal House of France sat under a great canopy while the finest minstrelsy in the land made music for the feast. But, when the banquet is over, this day of celebration takes on a new and prophetic note which recurs again and again in the story of the court of the Saint. As he sits under the canopy, with his young Queen at his side, there are brought to him the sick, and principally those suffering from scrofula (i.e., King's Evil) that he may touch them, for the healing touch was still an attribute of kings. And that Louis may well perform this and other deeds of kingship he spends the three nights, succeeding his marriage, before the altar in prayer. Then, after a week of feasting, he and his Queen ride with their retinue to Paris to commence again days of feasting and tourneys.

(To be concluded.)

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