

her pretty head over some ponderous Latin tome or wept sad tears over the punishments and penances imposed by Aunt Christina for each childish sin of omission or of commission.

As soon as he came to the throne Henry gave indications of his desire to placate his people. Rights and privileges, of which they had been deprived in the reign of William Rufus, were restored and it may or may not have been a matter of policy on his part to wed a princess of the old kingly line of England. Some old writers tell of his affection for his Queen but, in the perspective of history, we can hardly say that this affection was as strong as they would have had his people believe. If it did exist it cannot be said to have stood the test of time for he would appear to have treated the gentle Matilda to a certain amount of neglect and even disloyalty; still, throughout her life, he never forgot the splendour and the homage due to her as Queen of his realm and the daughter of a glorious ancestry. He was undoubtedly ambitious, astute, even cunning, but he was one of those who had a lively understanding of what a throne should be in the eyes of a people. Let his qualities as a husband have been what they may it was nevertheless a gay, irresistible and ardent suitor who went wooing to Romsey and offered his hand to an impressionable young princess who had spent the greater part of her life in the seclusion of a religious enclosure. According to the record, left by a chancellor of a king of France, Henry's court was magnificent and splendid enough; this same chronicler has referred to the gorgeous appearance of Henry's courtiers in their rich velvets and furs and to the gems that glistened

on his pages and attendants. If his account be true—and there is every reason to believe that it is no exaggeration of facts—what must have been the appearance of Henry and his retinue when he came to Romsey to offer his hand to the Lady Matilda of Scotland? What she may have felt we can only surmise. She had already refused several suitors, among them Alan of Bretagne and the Earl of Warren, one of the wealthiest and most powerful nobles in the Kingdom. Perhaps she was in love with Beauclerc. Perhaps she may have preferred to share with him the throne of England to becoming, at some future time, the Abbess of either Romsey or Wilton. Perhaps she saw,

in a marriage with Henry, a great destiny—that of uniting the blood of the Norman usurpers (for so they must have appeared to her) with the blood of the Saxon line. Such a matter meant much in those days. Blood is the carrier of the characteristics and qualities won by our ancestors and then it meant more to a people than it does to-day. We get a curious inkling of this point of view in the Faust legend which, be it remembered, comes in its first beginnings, from the earliest Middle Ages. Mephistopheles makes Faust sign his contract with his own blood for "blood is a very special fluid" and by doing this Faust hands over his individuality, his egohood if we may so express it, and thereby his will, to the devil. It was an almost instinctive desire, not merely an ambition, of kings to have children

who could carry on this "very special fluid," and doubtless both Matilda and her brothers saw, in this proposed marriage, a means of introducing into the line of occupants of the English throne, in time to come, the blood that had flowed down from Alfred the Great. Perhaps too Matilda may have had in mind the fact that, just at her own age, (she was probably twenty when she married Henry) her mother too had been faced with a somewhat similar decision, that good mother and glorious Queen whose memory she so revered, and whose story she caused to be perpetuated, by an inspiration that has served to give us a first-hand memoir of one of the greatest of British Queens. Matilda knew well that it had been her mother's wish to enter a convent and that the latter had recognised another destiny, one too that, apparently, offered greater difficulties and a harder fate than becoming the bride of the cultured and



MATILDA OF SCOTLAND, QUEEN OF HENRY I.

elegant Beauclerc. Perhaps—but why surmise? Matilda was a spirited damsel with a will which her Aunt Christina had failed to master. In the crisis, there stood on the one side the magnificent Henry offering her a place by his side on the throne of her forefathers; on the other was the fearsome Aunt Christina and perhaps—some day—the crozier of Romsey. Anyhow Henry triumphed and Matilda became "the dove of the newly signed covenant" between Normans and Saxons.

Then began what came to be known as the controversy of the veil. The Abbess Christina contended that Matilda was a professed Nun and with equal vehemence Matilda

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)