

**THE STAR SERIES.
OLIVIA RALEIGH**

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The Star Series. Olivia Raleigh by W. W. Follett Sygne

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W. W. FOLLETT SYNGE

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BY

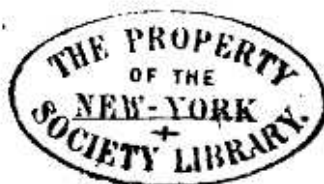
W. W. FOLLETT SYNGE.

Captain. He did seek the love of fair Olivia.

Viola. What's she?

Captain. A virtuous lady.

TWELFTH NIGHT.



PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1877.

Co

F

TO

MISS AUCHMUTY

THIS VOLUME

IS VERY AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

I TAKE pleasure in the opportunity offered me by the publishers of this novel to say one word by way of introduction. Certainly, in these days, when sensational stories are so greedily devoured by young and old, there should be nothing more warmly welcomed by all who wish to see our light literature purified of mere sensation than such a story as we have here. I think no one can begin it and leave it unfinished. It is like a clear, pure breath of English air, and one longs at the end to know still more of the heroine, of Aunt Pen, and good Father Jem. Only an English gentleman, in the true sense of the word, can give us such a tale of English life as this, which I now most heartily commend to all who desire that a work of fiction should have some finer effect than the feverish excitement of an hour.

ANNIS LEE WISTER.

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OLIVIA RALEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

PHILIP, MAJOR, AND MERCHANT.

"He had been bred in the army, and the name of a soldier sounded in his ears like the name of a friend."—TRISTRAM SHANDY.

PLAYFORD is rather a picturesque country town. It is a parliamentary borough. It is the capital of a county. It has the ruins of an ancient castle in its suburbs. But the castle was dismantled very early in English history, and the traditions connected with it are singularly scanty and uninteresting. It was a ruin long before Cromwell's time, or doubtless he would have made it one; for the Playford people have ever been stanch and somewhat stiff-necked in their loyalty. Even now they have a pretty conceit of feudalism about them which gives a not unpleasant Old-World flavor to the place in these days of universal education, when Jack is as good as his master, if not a little better.

It is not clear that even during the Wars of the Roses Playford Castle was either garrisoned or stormed by Yorkist or Lancastrian. Almost the only fact known about it is that it was at one time the abode, voluntary or enforced, of the most unwarlike of our

early kings. The castle looked out on a pretty wavy country of low hills and broad downs. The lazy Play softly plashed its granite walls; and very likely poor harassed Henry the Third, taking an easy canter over Skerrow Common, or baiting for trout or carp in the reedy river, was much happier than ever he felt at Westminster or Oxford, sneered at by the nobles, bullied by the bishops, and slighted by the people, who scarcely vouchsafed an obeisance to the peevish monarch, ambling ungracefully along on his quiet palfrey, while they would throw up their caps and rend the air with plaudits for the brother-in-law whom he both feared and hated, the mighty Simon de Montfort, as he stalked through their streets on his gigantic war-horse.

It is very likely, however, that Olivia Raleigh, who lived almost next door to the castle, seldom thought of so unromantic a person as Henry the Third in connection with the old ruin. And as Miss Yonge's charming story had not then been written, the young lady's chief knowledge of the great Earl of Leicester was probably derived from the touching old ballad of the "Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green," which she would sing to her uncles of a summer evening as they sat in their easy-chairs at each end of the drawing-room balcony at Castle Terrace. As she warbled the quaint old cadences, she would look out dreamily across the smooth waters of the Play at the gray twilight slowly veiling the ruined chapel of St. Agatha and the purple hills beyond, and conjure out of their misty indistinctness a bright background of romance and beauty for the central figures of her song.

Uncle Silas specially loved to hear the ballads which his sister, Olivia's mother, used to sing in the same old

J. G. V. B.

balcony many weary years ago, while his father sat and listened as he sat and listened now.

The father of Silas and Oliver Fletcher had in early life been a soldier; and it was thought by his superiors that the young captain and brevet-major had shown on many occasions a clearness of judgment and a professional foresight which, combined with the less uncommon quality of daring courage, could hardly fail to win for him rank, favor, and distinction. But when, to use the words of his Irish servant, "the peace broke out," and the army was in consequence reduced, the chances of promotion for a captain with but scanty family interest were very wofully small. Young Fletcher's private means were even smaller; and as he had married for love when quartered at Kinsale as a subaltern, and as he was now the father of two children, there seemed nothing for him but to act on the sensible advice of a kindly kinsman. That advice was to sell his commission, and to enter into partnership with his cousin, as timber merchant and shipbuilder in his native town of Playford.

The Fletchers had been of gentle blood from time immemorial. True, they had belonged to the smaller gentry. They had never possessed much land. It is not clear that any of them had ever sat in Parliament, or even held the commission of the peace. But on the oldest tombstones in Playford churchyard they were ever carefully described as *generosi*, or *armigeri*; and the half-dozen hideous mural disfigurements to the family in the church itself gave to the deceased Fletchers of the last century their unquestioned title of "esquire."

The Fletchers were proud of pointing out to their friends a passage in Ponsford's "Compleat Survey of Edenshire," published in 1587, wherein it is averred