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A

LEGEND OF READING ABBEY.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'THE CAMP OF REFUGE.'

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I.

It was in the year of Grace eleven hundred and thirty-seven (when the grace of God appeared to be entirely departing from the sinful and unhappy land of England), and Stephen of Blois, nephew of the deceased King Henry Beauclerc, sat upon the throne, lawfully and honestly, as some men said, but most unlawfully, according to others. And the woe I have to relate arose from this divergency of opinion, but still more from the changeableness of men's minds, which led our bishops lords, and optimates to side now with one party and now with the other, and now change sides again, to the great perplexing of the understanding of honest and simple men, to the undoing of their fortunes, and well nigh to the utter ruin of this realm, which that learned clerk and right politic King Henricus Primus had left in so flourishing and peaceful a condition.

Our great religious house of Reading (may the hand of sacrilege and the flames of war never more reach it!), founded and endowed by the Beauclerc,

ad then been newly raised on that smiling, favoured pot of earth which lies on the bank of the Kennet, ıard by the juncture of that clear and swift stream with our glorious river Thamesis; and in sooth our noble house was not wholly finished and furnished at this time; for albeit the first church, together with most of its chapels and shrines, was in a manner completed, and our great hall was roofed in, and floored and lined with oak, the lord abbat's apartment, and the lodging of the prior, and the dormitory for the brethren, and the granary and the stables for my lord abbat's horses, were yet unfinished; and, except on Sundays and the feast days of Mother Church, these parts of the abbey were filled by artisans and well-skilled workmen who had been collected from Windsor, Wallingford, Oxenford, Newbury, nay even from the right royal city of Winchester, which abounded with well-skilled masons and builders, and the capital city of London, where all the arts be most cultivated. Moreover, sundry artists we had from yond the seas, as masons and hewers of stone, ho had been sent unto us from Caen in Normandie y the defunct king, and some right skilful carvers n wood and in stone, who had been brought out of Italie by Father Michael Angelo Torpietro, a member of our house, who had quitted the glorious monastery of Mons Casinium, which had been raised and occupied by the founder of our order, the blessed Benedict himself, when he was in the flesh, in order to live among us and instruct us in humane letters and in all the rules and ordinances of our order, wherein we Anglo and Anglo-Norman monks, in verity, needed some instruction. And this Father Torpietro of happy memory had

also been enabled by the liberality of our first lord abbat to bring from the city of Pisa in Italie a right good limner, who painted such saints and Virgins upon gilded panels as had not before been seen in England, and who was now painting the chapel of our Ladie with rare and inappreciable art, as men who have eyes and understanding may see at this day. All the learned and periti do affirm that for limning and gilding our chapel of the Ladie doth excel whatever is seen in the churches of Westminster and Winchester in the south, or in the churches of York and Durham in the north, or in the churches of Wells and Exeter in the west, or in Ely and Lincoln in the east. [I speak not of the miracles performed by our relics: they are known to the world, and be at least as great as those performed by our Ladie of Walsingham.] Albeit our walls of stone and flint were not all finished in the inner part, our house was girded and guarded by ramparts of royal charters and papal bulls. Two charters had we from our founder, and one from King Stephen, confirmatory of those two. And great were the immunities and privileges contained in these charters. No scutage had we to pay; no stallage, no tolls, no tribute; no customs in fair or market, no tithing penny or two-penny, no amercements or fines or forfeitures of any kind! Our mills were free, and our fisheries and our woods and parks. No officer of the king was to exercise any right in the woods and chases of the lord abbat, albeit they were within the limits of the forests royal; but the lord abbat and the monks and their servitors were to hold and for ever enjoy the same powers and liberties in their woods and chases as the king had in his. Hence was the House of

Reading ever well stocked with the succulent meat of the buck. Too long were it to tell all that our founder Henricus did for us. At the beginning of his reign, he abolished the ancient power of abbats to make knights; yet, in order to distinguish our house, he did, by a particular clause in our charter of foundation, give unto the lord abbat of Reading and to his successors for ever, authority to make knights, whether clerks or laymen, provided only that the ceremony should be performed by the abbat in his clerical habit and capacity, and not as a layman, and that he should be careful to advance none but men of manly age and discreet judgment. Of all the royal and mitred abbeys in the land ours was chiefest after Glastonbury and St. Albans; and assuredly we have some honours and privileges which those two more ancient houses have not. I, who have taken up the pen in mine old age to record upon enduring parchment some of the passages I witnessed in my youth and ripe manhood, would not out of any unseemly vanity perpetuate my name and condition; I would lie, unnamed, among the humblest of this brotherhood who have lived or will live without praise, and have died or will die without blame; but as the world in after-time may wish to know who it was that told the story I have now in hand, and what were my opportunities of knowing the truth, it may be incumbent on me to say so much as this:— John Fitz-John of Sunning was my secular name and my designation in the world of pomps and vanities; my mother was of the Saxon, my father of the Norman race; my mother (I say a requiem for her daily) descended from a great Saxon earl, or, as some do say, prince; and my father's grand-

father, who fought at the battle of Hastings, was cup-bearer to William the Conqueror, in sort that if I could be puffed up with mundane greatness I have the wherewithal: my name in religion is Felix, of the order of St. Benedict and of the Abbey of Reading; and as a servant of the servants of the Lord, I have filled without discredit, in the course of many years, the several high offices of sub-sacrist and sacrist, refectorarius, cellarer, chamberlain, and sub-prior; and mayhap when I shall be gone hence some among this community will say that there have been worse officials than Father Felix.

In the year eleven hundred and thirty-seven I was but a youthful novice, still longing after the flesh-pots of Egypt, and mourning for the loss of the worldly liberty I had enjoyed or abused in my mother's house at Sunning, which was a goodly house near the bank of Thamesis, on a wooded hill hard by the wooden old Saxon bridge of Sunning. But I was old enough to comprehend most of the passing events; and being much favoured and indulged by the lord abbat and several of the brotherhood, I heard and saw more than the other novices, and was more frequently employed upon embassages beyond the precincts of the abbey lands. It was a common saying in the house that Felix the Sunningite, though but little given to his books within doors, was the best of boys for out-door work. By the favour of our Ladie, the love of in-door studies came upon me afterwards at that time when I was first assailed by podagra, and since that time have I not read all the forty and odd books that be in our library, and have I not made books with mine own hand, faithfully

transcribing the Confessions of St. Augustin, and the whole of the Life of St. Benedict, and missals not a few? But not to me the praise and glory, *sed nomini tuo!*

As I was born in the house at Sunning (may the sun ever shine upon that happy village, and upon the little church wherein rests the mortal part of my mother) on the eve of St. John the Evangelist, in the year of our Redemption eleven hundred and twenty, being the twentieth year of the Beauclerc's reign, I was, on the feast of St. Edbert, Bishop and Confessor, in the year eleven hundred and thirty-seven, close upon the eighteenth year of mine age.

St. Edbert's festival, falling in the flowering mouth of May, is one which my heart hath always much affected. The house had kept it right merrily; and notwithstanding the unfinished state of portions of the abbey, I do opine that our ceremonies in church and choir were that day very magnificent, and fit to be a pattern to some other houses. All labours were suspended; for he is a niggard of the worst sort that begrudgeth even his serfs and bondmen rest at such a tide; and eager as was our lord abbat Edward for the completion of our stately edifice, and *speciliater* for the finishing of our dormitory, he would not allow a man to chip a stone, or put one flint upon another, or hew or shape wood upon St. Edbert's day; and he was almost angered at the Italian limner for finishing part of a glory which he had begun in our Ladie's chapel. It was a memorable day, and, *inter alia*, for this: it was the first night that the good lord abbat slept within the walls of the abbey; for hitherto, on account of the cold and

dampness of the new walls, he had betaken himself for his nightly rest either to a house close by in the town of Reading, or to the house of a God-fearing relation, who dwelt on the other side of Thamesis at Caversham.

After the completorium and supper (we had both meat and wine of the best at that cœna), the weather being warm, and the evening altogether beautiful, the abbat and reverend fathers, as well as the younger members of the house, gathered together in my lord abbat's garden at the back of the abbey, and sat there for a season on the green bank of the Kennet, looking at the bright river as it glided by, and at the young moon and twinkling stars that were reflected in the water, or discoursing with one another upon sundry cheerful topics. Good cheer had made me cheerful, and it remembers me that I made little coronals and chains of the violets that grew by the river bank, and of the bright-eyed daisies that covered all the sward, and threw them upon the gliding and ever-changing surface of the Kennet, and said, as I had done in my still happier childhood, "Get ye down to Sunning bridge, and stop not at this bank or on that, but go ye right down to Sunning, and tell my mother that I am happy with my shaven crown."

The lord abbat, looking back upon the tall tower of our church, and the broad massive walls of our Aula Magna, said—

"In veritate, this is a goodly and substantial house, and one fitted to beautify holiness."

"In truth is it," said that good and learned Italian father who had brought the limner from Pisa.

"Torpietro," said the abbat, "this soil grows no marble; we have not hereabout the nitent blocks of Carrara, or the soberer marble of Lucca; we have neither granite nor freestone; but rounded chalk-hills have we, and flints love the chalk-pit, and the pits of Caversham are inexhaustible; and with our mortar, rubble, and flints, we have built walls three fathoms thick, and have made an abbey which will stand longer than your Italian temples, built of stone and marble; for time, that corrodes and consumes other substances, makes our cement the harder and stronger. Somewhat rough are they on the outside, like the character of our nation; but they are compact and sound within, and not to be moved or shaken—no, scarcely by an earthquake."

"'Tis a substantial pile," quoth Torpietro. "Balestra, nor catapult, nor manginall, nor the mightiest battering-ram, will ever breach these walls; and therefore is the house safe against any attack of war, and therefore will it stand, entire as it now is, when a thousand years are gone."

"Nay," said the abbat, "name not war: a sacred place like this is not to be assaulted; and our good and brave King Stephen is now firmly and rightfully seated, and we shall have no intestine trouble. We have no fig-trees, or I would quote to thee, Brother Torpietro, that passage which saith . . . . Felix, my son, leave off throwing flowers in the stream; run unto the gate, and see what is toward, for there be some who smite upon the gate with unwonted violence, and it is now past the curfew."

When the abbat first spoke to me, I heard a mighty rapping, which I had not heard before, or

had not heeded, being lost in a reverie as I watched my coronals on their voyage towards Sunning bridge; but when his lordship spake to me, I hurried across the narrow garden, and into the house, and up to the outer gate, where I found Humphrey, the old janitor, and none but he. Humphrey had opened the wicket, and had closed it again, before I came to the gate. "Felix, thou good boy of Sunning," said he unto me, "thou art as nimble as the buck of the forest, and art ever willing to make thy young limbs save the limbs of an old man, so prithee take this corbel, and bear it to my lord abbat's presence forthwith, and bear it gently and with speed, for those who left it said there was delicate stuff within, which must not be shaken, but which must be opened by the lord abbat right soon. So take it, good Felix, for there is no lay-brother at hand, and the weight is nought."

I took up the corbel gently under my left arm, and began to stride with it to the abbat, down at the Kennet banks. I was presently there, for albeit the corbel was of some size, the weight thereof was indeed as nothing.

"So, so," said my lord abbat, as he espied me and my burthen, "What have we here?"

"Doubtless," said the then refectorarius, "some little donation from the faithful. Venison is not as yet; but lamb is in high perfection at this season."

"Nay," quoth the coquinarius, "from the shape of the wicker, I think it is rather some sizeable pike, sent down by our friends and brothers at Pangbourne."

"Bethinks me rather," said the lord abbat,

waving his right hand over the corbel (the jewels and bright gold of his finger-rings glittering in the young moon as he did it), "bethinks me rather that it is a collation of simnels from our chaste sisters the nuns of Wargrave, who ever and anon do give a sign of life and love to us the Benedictines of Reading Abbey. But open, Felix! cut the withies, and undo the basket-lid, and let us see with our own eyes."

As my curiosity was now at the least as great as that of any of my superiors in age and dignity, I cut the slight bindings, and undid the corbel; and then there lay, uncovered and revealed to sight —the most beautiful babe mine eyes ever beheld withal!

"Benedicamus!" said the lord abbat, gazing and crossing himself.

"Miserere! The Lord have mercy upon us! But what thing have we here?" quoth the prior.

"'Tis a marvellous pretty infant," said the limner from Pisa, "and would do to paint for one of the cherubim in the chapel of our Ladie."

"A marvellously pretty devil," said our then sub-prior, a sourish man, and somewhat overmuch given to suspicious and evil thoughts of his brothers and neighbours: "What have we celibatarians and Benedictines to do with little babies? I smell mischief here—mischief and irregularity. Felix, what knowest thou of this corbel? I hope thou knowest not all too much! But know all or know nothing, why, oh boy, didst bring this arcanum into this reverend company?"

"Father," said I, "'twas Humphrey bade me bring it, and for all the rest I know nothing;" and this being perfectly true, yet did I hold down

my head, for that I felt the blood all glowing in my face, not knowing how or why it should be so.

"Bid the janitor to our presence," said the lord abbat.

Humphrey, who had nothing doubted that the basket contained some creature comforts, such as the faithful not unfrequently sent to our house, soon appeared, and was not a little amazed to see the amazement of the monks, and the high displeasure of the abbat; for as age had somewhat dimmed his sight, and as the last gleams of twilight were now dying away, the good janitor did not perceive the sleeping babe.

"Humphrey," said the abbat, "what is this thou hast sent us? Tell me, in the name of the saints, who gave thee this basket?"

As the abbat spoke the infant awoke from its slumber, and began to cry out, and lay its arms about, as if feeling for its nurse; and hereat our old janitor's wonderment being manifoldly increased, he started back, and crossed himself, and said, "Jesu Maria! Jesu Maria!"

"Say what thou hast to say," cried our sacrist; "my lord abbat would know who left this corbel at the gate, and why thou didst take it in?"

"But," said the old janitor, making that reverence to his superiors which he was bounden to do, "may I ask what it is that the corbel holds?"

"A babe," said the prior.

"And of the feminine gender—to make the matter worse," said the teacher of the Novices.

"'Tis witchcraft," said Humphrey—"'tis nought but witchcraft! What Christian man, or woman either, could ever think of sending a babe to the monks of Reading!"

"But who sent the basket?" said the abbat.

"That know I not," said old Humphrey, still crossing himself.

"Then who left it with thee?" asked the sacrist.

"Two serfs that I have seen at this house aforetime," said Humphrey—"two honest-visaged churls, who were out of breath when they came to the wicket, and who went away to the westward so soon as they had put the basket in my hands, and told me to handle it gently, and carry it to my lord abbat forthwith."

"And said they nothing more?" quoth the prior.

"Yea, they did say there was delicate stuff within."

"And what stuff didst thou think it was?" said the coquinarius.

"Verily something to eat or drink."

"Thou art stolid," said the sour sub-prior; "thou art stolid, oh Humphrey, to take a corbel from strange men. Wouldst know the serfs again?"

"I should know them again if I could but see them again. Seen them I have aforetime. Whose men they be I know not; but I thought I had seen them before bring gifts and offerings to our house; and it is not in my office to open anything that is shut, except the convent-door; and ill would it have beseemed me to have been prying into a basket left for my lord abbat."

"But said the churls nothing else?" asked the abbat. "Bethink thee, oh Humphrey! said the churls nought else?"

"Methinks that when I asked them whose men they were, and who had sent this present, one of

them did make reply that my lord abbat would know right well."

Here all our eyes were bent upon the good abbat, who, to tell the truth, did look somewhat conturbated. But when the head of our house had recovered from this sudden emotion, he said to the janitor, "Were those the very words the man did speak?"

"The matter of the words was that," said Humphrey; "yet I do think the slaves subjoined that if your lordship knew not who sent the gift, your lordship would soon know right well. But as the churl was walking away while he was speaking, I cannot say that these were his *ipsissima verba.*"

"Janitor," quoth the abbat, "knowest thou what festival of mother church it is we have celebrated this day?"

"The feast of the blessed Saint Edbert," responded Humphrey, with a genuflexion and an *ora pro nobis.*

"Then from this day forward," quoth the lord abbat, "take not and admit not within these gates any donation or thing whatsoever from men that thou knowest not, and that run from our door instead of tarrying to refresh themselves in the hospitium."

"That last unwonted and unnatural fact," quoth the cellarer, "ought to have warned thee, oh Humphrey, that there was mischief in the corbel."

"But," replied the janitor, "it was past the time of even' prayer, nay, after supper-time; and they did place the basket in my hands, and vanish away all in a minute, and I could not throw the corbel after them, nor could I leave it outside the gate. But mischief did I suspect none."

Humphrey being dismissed, the elders of our house debated what had best be done with the child, which had not ceased crying all this while, and which moved my heart to pity, for it was a beautiful babe to look upon, and it seemed right hungry, and witchcraft could there be none about it; for our sub-prior, who had adventured to take it up in his arms, had espied a little golden cross round its neck, and an Agnus Dei sewed to its clothes. The lord abbat, whose heart was always kind to man, woman, and child, nay, even unto the beasts in the stable and field, and the hounds of the chase, said that albeit it had been cast into a wrong place, it was assuredly a sweet innocent and most Christian-looking child, and that as the hour was waxing very late, it would be well to keep it in the house until the morrow morn. But the sub-prior bade his lordship bethink himself of the sex of the child, and of the rigid rule of our order, which, in its strictest interpretation, would seem to imply that nothing of the sex feminine should ever abide by night within our cloisters. "In spite of its cross and agnus," subjoined the sour suspicious man, "I must opine that this piping baby hath been sent hither by some secret enemy, in order to bring down discredit and aspersions upon our community."

"But what, in the name of the Virgin, wouldst have us do with the little innocent?" said the abbat.

"Peradventure," quoth the sub-prior, "it were not badly done to set the brat afloat in its basket down the Kennet into Thamesis. It may ground among the rushes, and be found by the country people, or it may——"

"Brother," said the abbat, "thy heart is waxing as hard as the flint of our walls! I would not do that thing, or see it done, to escape all the calumnies which all the evil tongues of England could heap upon me."

"No, assuredly, nor would I," said the sub-prior; "for upon after-thought it doth appear that the babe perchance might drown. Still, my lord abbat, it is not well that it should stay where it is, or that the town-folk of Reading should know that it hath been brought to our door; for they have too many bad stories already, and some of them do remember the wicked marrying priests of the days of the Red King."

"True, oh sub-prior," quoth the lord abbat; "true and well-bethought. We must not, therefore, send the child into Reading town; but I will have it conveyed unto my good nephew at Caversham, and his wife will have care of it until we shall learn whose babe it is, and why so mysteriously sent hither. There is gentle blood in those veins; this is no churl's child. I never saw a more beautiful babe, and in my time I have baptized many an earl's daughter, ay, and more than one little princess. It must be a strange tale that which shall explain how the mother could ever part with such an infant. But it grows dark; so, Philip, take up the basket, and bear it straightway and with all care and gentleness to Caversham; and Felix, do thou go with Philip, and salute my kinsman in my name, and relate unto him the strange and marvellous manner in which the basket hath been brought into our house, and tell him I will see him in the morning after service."

Philip was an honest lay-brother of the house,

and between him and me there had always been much friendship; for on my first coming to the abbey, to be trained to religion and learning, he had procured many little indulgences for me, and had ofttimes taken me behind him on his horse when he rode towards Sunning to look after a farm which my lord abbat had near to that place. He was a mirthful man, and so fond of talk, that when he had not me riding behind him he usually discoursed all the way with his horse. Now he took up the corbel with as much gentleness as a lady's nurse, and we began to go on our way, the dear child still piping and bewailing. The sub-prior followed us to the gate to give Humphrey the needful order to open, for at that hour the janitor would not have allowed egress to any lay-brother or novice. "Beshrew me," said old Humphrey as the sub-prior withdrew, "but this foundling hath brought trouble upon me and sharp words; yet let me see its face, good Philip, for I hear 'tis a Christian child, and a lovely."

Hereupon we took the basket into Humphrey's cell by the gate, where a light was burning; and the janitor having peered in its face, vowed, as others had done, that he had not seen so fair a babe. "'Tis nine months old, at the very least," said he; "and ye may tell by its shrill piping that 'tis a strong and healthy child. Mayhap it cries for hunger;" and at this timeous thought the old janitor brought forth a little milk and honey and gave it to the babe, who partook thereof, and then smiled and dropped fast asleep.

We took the shortest path across the King's Mead to Caversham bridge. As we walked along Philip ceased not from talking about the child and

the unprecedented way in which it had been left at the abbey. Being a man much given to speculation and the putting of this thing and that together, he made sundry surmises which I will not repeat, for they touched the good lord abbat, and the next morning proved that though very ingenious they had no foundation in truth. When we came to the long wooden bridge, we found, as we had expected, that part of it was raised, and that the old man that levied the toll for the baron was fast asleep. But our shouting soon roused the toll-man, and he soon challenged us and lowered the draw-bridge, though not without sundry expressions of astonishment that two monks should be abroad at so late an hour. When we told him whither we were going, he bade us make haste, for the lights were disappearing in the mansion, and the family would soon be buried in sleep. He then lowered the draw-bridge at the other end, and we went on towards the hill side with hasty steps, the only light visible in the mansion being one that shone brightly through the casement of the southern turret.

"Ralpho, the toll-man," said I, "must have been more than half asleep, or assuredly he would have asked what we were carrying in the basket at this time o'night."

"May the babe have an extra blessing," quoth Philip, "for that it sleeps on and did not wake on the bridge! A pretty tale would gossip Ralpho have had to tell about us Benedictines if the babe had set up its piping on the bridge!"

The castellum or baronial mansion stood on the top of Caversham hill at the point where that hill is steepest; the village lay at its feet, and the

church then stood midway between the castle and the village. We were soon at the edge of the dry moat; but the draw-bridge was up, and we had to shout and blow the cow-horn for some time before we could make ourselves heard by any one within; and when the warder awoke and looked forth he was in no good humour. But as we made ourselves known, and told him that we came from the lord abbat upon an occasion that brooked no delay, he altered his tone; and after telling us that though bedward, he believed his lord and ladie were not yet in bed, as he could see a light in their bower above, he lowered the draw-bridge and unbarred the wicket. That which Ralpho had omitted to do on the bridge, the warder did under the gateway of the castle; for, pointing to the basket, he said, "What have we here, brother Philip? Cates and sweetmeats for my lord and ladie? Ay, Reading Abbey is famed for its confections!"

He had scarcely said the words when a noise came from the basket which made him start back and cross himself; for the dear child began to pipe and scream, and much more loudly methought that I had heard it do before. We, however, stayed not to talk with the astonished warder; for a waiting-woman had come down from the southern turret to inquire what was toward, and we followed this good woman, who was still more astonished than the warder, to the chamber where the lord and ladie were. Sir Alain de Bohun was a bountiful lord, ever kind of heart and gentle in speech; and the Ladie Alfgiva, his wife, descended from the Saxon thanes who had once owned and held all the country from Caversham to Maple-Durham, was the gentlest, truest ladie,

and at this season one of the fairest that lived anywhere in Berkshire or Oxfordshire. Before hearing the short tale we had to tell, Sir Alain vowed that the little stranger was welcome, and that so sweet a foundling should never want home or nurture while he had a roof-tree to sit under; and the ladie took the child in her arms, and kissed it, and pacified it; and before I had gotten half through my narration, and the message from my lord abbat, the babe went to sleep on the ladie's bosom. Our limner from Pisa ought to have seen that sight; for the Madonna and Child he did afterwards paint for the chapel of our Ladie was not so beautiful and tender a picture as that presented to mine eye by the wife of Sir Alain de Bohun and our little foundling. Much marvelled the gentle ladie at the tale; but her other feelings were stronger than her curiosity and astonishment; and she soon withdrew to place the child with her own dear children—a little boy some four or five years old, and a little girl not many months older than the stranger. Sir Alain gave to the lay-brother Philip a piece of money, and to me a beaker of wine, and so dismissed us with a right courteous message to our abbat and his good and right reverend uncle.

The warder would have stayed us to explain how it was that monks went about in the hours of night with a babe in a basket; but as he had a sharp wit and a ribald tongue, we forbore to answer his questions, and recommending him to the saints that keep watch by night, and telling him it was too late for talk, we began to return rapidly by the way we had come. As Ralpho let us across Caversham bridge he bemoaned the hardness of his life, and complained that Sir Alain put him to

much unnecessary trouble in a time of peace and tranquillity, when the bridge might very well be left open by night and by day without fear of the passage of foes. Alack! before the next morning dawned Ralpho was made to know that Sir Alain's caution was very needful. Scarcely had Philip and I gotten a rood from the bridge-end when that honest lay-brother shouted "Fire! Fire! a fire!" and looking to the west, the sky behind the town and hills of Reading seemed all in a blaze. The young moon had set; but as we came to the King's Mead our path was lighted by a glaring red light, which seemed every instant to become stronger and redder. "Eheu!" said Philip, who knew every township better than I then knew my Litany; "Eheu! there is mischief afoot! The flames mount in the direction of Tilehurst and Sulham and Charlton! More than one township is a-burning!"

I looked down the river, and joyed to see that there was no sign of conflagration at Sunning, and returned thanks therefore to my patron saint.

We were now running across the mead as fast as we could run; but before we came to the abbey-gate the alarm-bell rung out from the tower, and a loud shouting and crying came from the town of Reading, and the sounds of another alarm-bell from Sir Alain's castellum at Caversham.

"What can this mean?" said Philip. "The two serfs that brought the babe to our house came from the westward, or did go back in that direction, or so said old Humphrey. After twenty years and more of a happy peace, is this land to be wasted again by factions and civil war?"

Alas! Philip had said it! This night wit-

nessed the beginning of those troubles which carried woe into every part of England, and which ended not until sixteen long years had passed over our heads, sending some of our brotherhood with sorrow to the grave, and making others old men before their time; for, to say nothing of our personal sufferings and hazards, there was not one among us but had a brother or a sister and friends near and dear to him tortured or butchered in these the worst wars that were ever waged in England.

When we returned into the abbey we found that the lord abbat had called up his men-at-arms, and the three good knights who did military service for the abbey in return for the lands they held; that one of these knights and divers of the men-at-arms were mounting and about to go forth; and that the better conditioned of the town people of Reading were already bringing their goods and chattels to our house for protection; for the walls of the town had been allowed to fall into ruin during the long and happy peace which Henricus Primus had kept in the land, and our burghers had almost wholly lost the art military. Some of these men, who had been to the hills, said that the whole country was on fire from Inglesfield to Tilehurst, and from Tilehurst to Purley, which news destroyed the hope our good abbat had been entertaining that the fire might be accidental and confined to the thatch-covered houses of one village or township. And, in very deed, by this time the whole west seemed to be burning, and the welkin to be overcast by smoke and flame, and a reflected lurid and horrible light. The swift stream of the Kennet looked as though its waters had been trans-

muted into red wine, and the broad Thamesis shined like a path of fire. No eye closed for sleep in the abbey that night; and it was not until a full hour after the scarcely perceptible dawn of day that certain intelligence was brought us as to the causes and parties which had thus begun to turn our pleasant and fruitful land into a wilderness.

II.

We had sung matins in the choir, and had nearly finished chanting lauds, when three knights of good fame, to wit, Sir Hugh de Basildon, Sir Hugh Fitzhugh, of Purley, and Sir Walter de Courcy, from Inglesfield, arrived at the abbey, and demanded speech of our superiors. So soon as the service permitted, the lord abbat, the prior, and the other obedientiarii of our house retired into the abbat's garden with these worthy knights, who were in great haste, insomuch that they would neither stay to partake of my lord's collation, which was now nigh upon being ready, nor allow the saddles to be taken from their wearied horses. They stayed but a short while in the garden, and then remounting their steeds, they spurred away for Caversham, bidding the burghers of Reading and a number of serfs, who had collected outside our gates, to look after their bows and arrows, and to get such other weapons as they could, and to stand upon their defence, as traitors to King Stephen were abroad and might be soon upon them. These good people made loud lamentation, for they were ill prepared and provided, and they could not divine who these enemies and night burners could be. We, the humbler members of the house, were alike ignorant; but after he had refreshed his in-

ward man, the good abbat came forth and addressed us all, and the people without the gate, in this wise:—

"My brothers and children, and ye good men of Reading, who be also my children, lift up your voices and say with me, God save King Stephen, the rightful king of this realm, and down with the traitors who would shake his throne!"

Having all of us shouted as we were bidden to do, and with right good will, for King Stephen at this time was much loved in the land, my lord abbat continued his oration.

"The case," said he, "stands thus. That ungodly restless woman, the undutiful daughter of our late pious King Henry, whose body rests within these walls—that presumptuous Matilda, once Empress, but now nought but Countess of Anjou, hath sent over her bastard half-brother Robert, Earl of Gloucester, to claim the throne of England as her right; as if the martial nobility and bold people of this land could ever be governed by a woman, and as if Stephen, our good king and the well-beloved nephew of our late King Henry, who appointed him to be his successor, had not been elected with the consent of the baronage, clergy, and people of England, and confirmed in his lawful seat by our lord the Pope! Now this traitorous Earl of Gloucester, after taking the oaths of fealty and homage to King Stephen, and obtaining by the act possession of his great estates in this realm, hath suddenly lifted up the mask and thrown down the gauntlet, and sundry false barons like himself have followed his pernicious example, and are now raging through the country, seizing upon the king's towns and castles, treacherously surprising the castles of

honest lords and good knights, and burning the homes and destroying the lives of all such as will not join them, or of all such as hold the manors and lands these traitors desire to be possessed of. In the east Hugh Bigod, steward of the late king's household, and the very man who made oath before the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other great lords of the realm, as well lay as ecclesiastic, that King Henry on his death-bed did adopt and choose his nephew Stephen to be his successor, because this Matilda, Countess of Anjou, had been an undutiful child unto him, and had given him many and grievous offences, and was by her sex disqualified for the succession; this Hugh Bigod, I say, hath in the east seized Norwich Castle and hoisted thereupon the banner of this Angevin Countess. In the west the Earl of Gloucester hath armed all his vassals, and is calling upon all such friends as hope to better their worldly fortunes by deluging the country with blood and wasting it with fire. Some of these evil men have raised the banner of war in our quiet neighbourhood, and have fallen with merciless fury upon some of our noblest and best neighbours, taking them by foul treachery and surprisal, and waging war upon women and children, and unarmed serfs, in the absence of their lords. Yesterday a great band of these traitors marched from the vicinage of Windsore, and, last night, after a foul plunder and butchery of the people, the townships of Basildon, Whitechurch, Purley, Tidmersh, Tilehurst, Sulham, Theal, and Speen were given to the flames. Sir Ingelric, of Huntercombe, who hath ever been held as a loyal and fearless knight, and whose noble mate could trace her Saxon ancestry beyond the days of King

Alfred, was not at his home, but his fair young wife being forewarned of their coming, made fast the gates and defended the manor-house for divers hours: but, woe is me! the evil men set fire to the house, and—*combusta est*, it is burned, with the gentle dame and all that were in it! The brave Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe was not there, or mayhap —— "

"Ingelric of Huntercombe is here," cried that dark and sad-looking knight, who had just arrived on a panting steed; "Ingelric of Huntercombe is here, with a soul athirst for vengeance! But, my child! My lord abbat, tell me of my babe!"

The fearful conflagration, which had made us all think of the day of judgment, had caused my lord abbat, as well as the rest of us, to forget the little stranger that had come in the basket, not without bringing some trouble to him and to some of us; but his lordship soon collected his thoughts, and seeing how the matter stood, he clasped in his arms the knight, who had dismounted from his horse, and said to him in his kind fatherly voice, "Sir Ingelric, may the saints vouchsafe thee strength to bear the woe that hath befallen thee; but thy child is safe."

"Let me see her," said the knight; "let me hold her in mine arms; her mother shall I never see more! Her sweet body hath been consumed in the fire that hath left me without a home! I can see my wife no more—no, not even in death! But let me have sight of my child!"

The abbat then explained in a few words where the child was, and in what good and tender keeping; and while he was doing this, Humphrey, our old janitor, looking steadfastly at a churl who had

dismounted to hold Sir Ingelric's horse, and at another serf, who remained mounted, he said aloud, "These be the two knaves that gave me the basket!" and then entering into short converse with the men, Humphrey brought out these facts:— At the near approach of the danger, of which she had been forewarned, their mistress had given her child to them, with charge to hasten with it to Reading Abbey, and then to make all possible speed back to Tilehurst, whither, as she had fondly hoped, her lord would be returned before his enemies could do her harm, for Sir Ingelric had gone to no greater distance than to Wallingford, and a messenger had been despatched after him on the only fleet horse he had left in the stable, and well did she know that the love her husband bore her would bring him rapidly to her rescue. This was all we learned now, but we afterwards learned that the messenger on the fleet horse had been intercepted and slain; that the manor-house had been stormed and set on fire before the two serfs who had brought the child to Reading could get back; and that, at this sad sight, the said two bondmen, full of devotion for their lord, had thrown themselves into the woods, and had gone a wearisome journey on foot in search of him, and had met their master between night and morning near North Stoke Ford, for the conflagration had been seen at Wallingford, and had filled the heart of Sir Ingelric with awful presentiments, albeit he and no other man could at first conceive the cause and nature of the mischief which had so suddenly broken out in a time of the most perfect tranquillity. When Sir Ingelric had understood that which had befallen, he had well nigh died of sud-

den horror; but, rousing himself to vengeance, he had collected a few honest men and some horses, and had ridden with all speed to our abbey, being but too surely confirmed on his way, by a few of his serfs who had escaped, of the fate his fair young wife had met in the manor-house. Never did I see a face fuller of woe than was that of Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe when our good abbat, taking him by the hand, led him within the house, to give him ghostly consolation, and to commune with him upon the measures which ought to be adopted for the defence of the country. But I should tell how that, before our lord abbat quitted the outer gate, he gave commandment that the draw-bridge, which had not been raised for many a day, should be hauled up, and that the serfs of our abbey lands should be set to work to deepen the ditch, and to dig a new trench right down to the Kennet. Albeit no enemy was visible, the townfolk of Reading and all the simple hinds that had assembled were seized with a mighty consternation when we began to take measures for heaving up the bridge and closing our strong iron-bound gate. By order of the prior many of the better sort were admitted into our outer court, with their wives and children, as well as their property. Those who remained without wrung their hands, but departed not, for they felt that the very shadow of our holy walls would be a better protection unto them than any other they could find; and certes we would have brought them within those walls in case of extremity; for was not our house the asylum of the unhappy as well as the *refugium peccatorum*?

When Sir Ingelric had communed until the be-

ginning of tierce with our lord abbat, and had been somewhat restored by prayer and exhortation, and by meat and wine, he came out and called for his horse. But the abbat noted that the knight's horse needed rest, and so he ordered a fresh steed to be brought from his own stable, together with his own quiet grey palfrey, telling the brethren that he was minded to ride over to Caversham with Sir Ingelric to deliberate with his well-beloved nephew, who was too good a man of war to have omitted making some preparations against the threatening storm. "You will put up a prayer or twain for my safety," said the abbat to the prior, "and cause a *Miserere, Domine*, to be sung in the church. And thou wilt hold thyself ready, oh prior, to hurl an anathema at the head of the rebels, if they should come near unto this godly house; and moreover thou wilt see to such war-harness and weapons as we do possess, and station the strongest-armed of our monks and lay-brothers, and the stoutest-hearted of our serfs, with our men-at-arms, in the tower and turrets, with bows and cross-bows; for it may chance that those who respect not the Lord's anointed will have no respect for holy church that hath anointed him; and when the children of Ishmael fall on, the children of Jacob may defend themselves with the arms of the flesh."

Now our prior was a man of a very martial and fearless temperament, and one that well remembered how, in the times that were passed, bishops and abbats had put chain armour over their rockets and albs, and had ridden forth with lay-lords and men of war, and had ofttimes done battle for the cause which they held to be the just one, or the

cause of the church. It is not for a humble servant of mother church like me to decide whether such actions be altogether conformable to the councils of the church and the canons therein propounded; but this I do know, that the sword and battle-axe have wrought their effects upon stubborn and impenitent minds when our spiritual arms had failed, ay, when the wicked had laughed to scorn our interdicts and our very excommunications. But not to press further this *casus conscientiæ*, I will only record that our prior responded with a firm voice and willing heart to the warlike portions of our lord abbat's instructions, and that he, with marvellous alacrity, did arm the house and prepare to do battle.

As the gate was unbarred and the draw-bridge again lowered to allow the abbat and Sir Ingelric to go forth for Caversham, those of our knights and men-at-arms who had ridden at an earlier hour to make reconnaissance, came back with loose bridle to report that a great battalia of the rebels was advancing upon the town of Reading by the western road.

"Then," quoth our abbat, "is there no time to lose;" and putting his foot in the bright silver stirrup, he got into his saddle without the least assistance, albeit he was a corpulent man, and had had podagra. Two of our knights and half of our men-at-arms rode after the lord abbat and Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, but the rest tarried with us.

"Remember," said the abbat, turning the head of his palfrey, and addressing the town-folk and the serfs, "remember well that ye be all true men unto King Stephen!"

The poor people made a very feeble essay to shout "Long live King Stephen!" and then prayed that we would admit them in at the postern-gate if the rebels came nearer; which thing we did now promise them to do.

The lord abbat and his party, riding away at a hand gallop, were soon seen crossing at Caversham bridge; and very soon after they had crossed, a goodly band of armed men was seen to take post on the opposite bank of the river, a little below the bridge. Except these armed men, not a man, woman, or child could be discovered anywhere; for the shepherds and cowherds had driven their flocks and herds to the other side of Thamesis, and all the serfs and labouring people had fled either to our abbey walls or unto Caversham Castle. Only yesterday morning our green meadows and fruitful corn-fields had been full of life and joy and thoughtless song, but now they were solitary, and as sad and still as the grave. The wind, which blew freshly from the westward, still brought with it hideous drifts of smoke, which dirtied the bright blue sky, and a coarse pungent smell, which overcame the sweet odours that were emitted by our flowering hedge-rows and by the myriads of flowers which grew in the bright green meads and along the moist banks by the river side. It was all a Tartarus now; but on that sunny, happy May morning of yesterday it was like being in paradise to stand on our outer turret and scent the breeze, and feast the eye on plain and hill, meadow, river, and woodland, and to hear the lark singing in the clear sky over our head, and the blackbird whistling in the brake at our feet. Not a bird of all that choir was left now: the foul smoke and the pun-

gent smell had scared them all away, as Ætna and Vesuve are said to do when they vomit their sulphureous fires.

I was roused from some meditations of this sort by the scream of a trumpet, and by a chorus of rude voices that shouted, "The Empress for England! Down with the usurper Stephen! Long life to the Queen, and death to all who gainsay it!"

And presently after hearing these sounds I saw the head of a great column wind round the castle-mound (whereon there was not now any castle deserving of the name), and take the high road which runs from Reading town to Caversham bridge. Saint John the Evangelist to my aid, but it seemed a formidable host! And there were many men-at-arms in the midst, and a company of well-mounted and fully appointed knights rode at the head of it. But our prior, after waxing very red and wrathful at the first sight, did say, upon better observance, that the mass of that host were but rascaille people, serfs that had slipped their collars, knaves that had no arms but staves and bludgeons, and that would not stand for a moment against a charge of horse, nay, nor even against a good flight of quarrels or long-bow arrows.

"They will not win across the bridge," said the prior, "for the chains be up, and pass the river they cannot, for the skiffs be all on the other side, and there is no ford hereabout. But see, they halt! And now they wheel round for the King's Mead! Will the caitiffs hitherward? Let them come—our walls be of flint. By the founder of our house, it is this way they come!"

And in little more time than it takes to say the

credo and pater-noster, the rebels crossed a brook which runs into Thamesis, and came midway into the King's Mead, with the head of their column pointing straight for our main gate. But who be those that follow them on the grey palfrey and dapple jennet? By Saint John and Saint James, the patrons of our house, it is our good lord abbat, and it is that right-hearted man the mass-priest of Caversham, and the latter hath a white flag fastened to his saddle, and he upholds a golden banner whereon is depicted the effigies of Him who died for our sins, and taught that there was to be peace upon earth and good will among all men! And see, the rebels halt, and our abbat and the mass-priest fearlessly ride up to their leaders, and discourse with them. Word can we hear not at this distance, but plainly do we discern, by the abbat's gestures, and by the frequent up-lifting of the holy standard, that the head of our house is earnestly recommending peace and repentance, the truce of God for the present, and agreement and reconciliation hereafter. Gentle are our lord abbat's actions, and no doubt his speech, albeit the rebels have set their impious feet upon the lands of our abbey; but rude and outrageous are the gestures of those mailed knights that do confer with him.....And can their ungodly rage amount to this?.....Yea, verily, so it is! One of them rides his big war-horse against the grey palfrey, and the lord abbat of Reading is jostled out of his seat, and lies prostrate on the grass—may it be soft beneath him!

Judge ye of the choler of our prior, and of the grief and anger of all of us that saw this shameful

and sacrilegious sight. We shouted from our tower and turrets, "*O turpissime!*" and the prior, standing upon the loftiest battlement, stretched out his hands towards the traitors in the King's Mead, even as Pope Leo did from the walls of Rome, when Attila and his pagans came on for the assault of the holy city. But the prior's first anathema was not said before our good abbat, assisted by the mass-priest of Caversham, was on his feet, and to all seeming not much the worse for his fall. He now spoke so loudly to the knights that we could hear the sound of his voice and distinguish some of his words, *specialiter* when he conjured them to depart quietly thence, and avoid the shedding of blood. It was plain that the savage crew would not listen to him; and we saw him remount his palfrey, and turn his head back towards the bridge. We much feared that the rebels would lay violent hands upon him, and keep him as their prisoner; but, *nemo repente*, this was but the beginning of the great wickedness; and albeit impious factions did afterwards load the servants of the church with chains, and throw even bishops into noisome dungeons, and keep them there for ransom among toads and snakes, Jews and thieves, and other unclean men, this present band did offer no let or hindrance to our lord abbat or to the mass-priest, who went back at a good pace to Caversham bridge.

"And now," quoth our prior, with a brightening eye, "we shall surely see some feat of war if Sir Alain be alive! The foul rebels have refused to parley, and have atrociously wronged the would-be peace-maker. Ay, by the bones of King Henry,

'tis as I thought! The trumpets sound! Sir Alain's lances are on the bridge! May the saints give them the victory!"

I, Felix the novice, being at the topmost part of all the abbey with Philip, the lay brother, who had been teaching me how to use the long bow, did now see a battalia rushing across the bridge, a mixed force of horse and foot, and did further perceive a good company of cross-bowmen descend the left bank of Thamesis as if their intent was to march below our abbey to Sunning. The battalia which crossed the bridge divided itself into two parts, of the which one marched hastily along the road that leads right to the Castle-hill and town of Reading, while the other and major part struck across the meadows for the King's Mead, never halting or pausing until it was right in front of the rebels. With the party in the mead were seen the pennon and cognizances of Sir Alain de Bohun: it seemed but a small force compared with that which was opposed to it, but of horse Sir Alain seemed to have rather more than the adverse party. There was a short parley, the words of which we could not hear, but it was very short, and then we heard right well, from the one side the shout of "God for King Stephen!" and from the other "God for the Empress-queen!" and when they had thus shouted for a space, they joined battle. At first their superiority in number seemed to give the rebels the advantage; and our prior was so transported at this, that he clapped a coat of mail over his black gown, took a lance in his hand, and called for his horse, and would fain have gone forth with our knights and men-at-arms to charge the enemy in the rear. But, lo! the cross-bows, of

whom we had lost sight, appeared on the river in skiffs, and in less than an Ave they landed on the right bank; and then they formed in good order, and came on with quick steps to the right wing of the foe, and shooting close and all together, smote it sorely with their quarrels. And hereupon the rascaille people fell off from their leaders, and ran in much disorder across the meadows. Now that part of Sir Alain's battalion which had marched towards the Castle-hill set up a triumphant shout, and drove the fugards back again, and moved upon the other flank of the disordered rebel host. The serfs of the abbey-lands and the town-folk and others who had been cowering under our walls and even in our ditches, became full of heart at sight of the great success of Sir Alain's cross-bows and the easy victory the good knight of Caversham was now completing; and this encouraged the prior to distribute bows and bills among them, and to throw open the abbey-gate and form a third line or battalia round the discomfited foe. Divers of our brotherhood did go forth with the prior, and even take a post in advance upon the Falbury-hill; but I, Felix, having no commandment to the contrary, stayed where I was, in a very safe place, whence I could see all that chanced below. After making sundry desperate attempts to stop the flight of their pedones and bring them to a head again, the Empress's knights, not without holes in their chain jerkins, began to fly themselves and to knock down and ride pitilessly over their own people. They could go no other gait than close by our abbey and across the Falbury; and when they came near unto our force on the hillock, a stiffish flight of arrows and quarrels made them swerve and draw rein. At

this juncture, Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, whose lance was red with blood, and whose casque had been knocked from his head by some terrible blow, and whose face was covered with blood in a manner fearful to look upon, came thundering among the rebel knights calling upon his mortal foe, that caitiff knight Sir Jocelyn de Brienne, to tarry and receive his inevitable doom as a felon traitor, coward, and foul murtherer. At these hard words Sir Jocelyn, who was aforetime a man of a very evil reputation, wheeled round his horse, and with his lance in rest charged Sir Ingelric, who was charging him. Sir Jocelyn, the prime leader of this first rebellion, and main actor in the horrible deeds of the over-night, was wounded and unhorsed, and lay on the hard ground of the Falbury (not on a soft mead like that on which he made fall our lord abbat) crying "Rescue! rescue! Help me or I perish!"

Ay! there lay the proud strong man, struck down in his pride and strength, looking towards our abbey-gate, and upon the hospital for lepers, called the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, which Aucherius, the second abbat of our house, did build near to the great gate, and I ween that Sir Jocelyn would have changed his present estate even for that of a leper! and still he cried "Rescue! rescue! Will no true man stop and save me?" But the knights and men-at-arms that had ridden with him could not stay to lift him up or give him any aid, for that Sir Alain de Bohun and his horsemen were now again close upon them, and therefore did they spur their steeds and gallop madly past some of the town-folk our prior had armed. Rings still in my ear the horrible voice with which the

fallen and disabled Sir Jocelyn cried "Quarter! quarter!" and called upon his foe to show mercy, and name what ransom he would; and still my blood runs cold as I recall the manner in which Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, dismounting, lifted up his enemy's coat of mail and drove under it into Sir Jocelyn's heart his long thick dagger, screaming, "Where was thy mercy last night! Die unconfessed!" And Sir Jocelyn perished, and another knight and ten men-at-arms perished unshrieved upon our abbey lands, yea, and close unto our church and sacristy. Many that escaped were sorely wounded, and well upon two score of the commoner sort were made prisoners, either in the King's Mead or in the Falbury. Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, mad with revenge, would have butchered all these captives on the Falbury-hill as a sacrifice to the manes of his beloved wife, but Sir Alain de Bohun stood between the wretched serfs and this great fury, and when our good and merciful lord abbat rode up on his grey palfrey, Sir Ingelric was somewhat pacified at his discourse. By the foundation charter which the Beauclerc had given us, it appertained to the lord abbat, and to none but him, to judge of offences committed upon the lands of the abbey; yea, our lord abbat had the privileges of the hundred courts, and all manner of pleas, with soc and sac, infangtheof, and hamsockna; that is to say, he could try all causes, impose forfeitures, judge bondmen and villeins, with their children, goods and chattels, and try and punish any thief or housebreaker, or other evildoer taken within our jurisdiction. All these rights and privileges were granted to the abbat of Reading Abbey in their fullest extent, with judicial

power in all cases of assault, murder, breach of the peace, and the like; in short, in as full extent as belonged to the royal authority. Lord Edward might have hanged every one of those prisoners by the neck to the trees on the Falbury, and none could have said him nay; or he could have chopped off their hands and feet. But being of a merciful nature, he only made cut off the ears and slit the noses of a few of the churls, and then dismissed them all, as to keep them in prison would be troublesome and costly. And when this last thing was done, all the victorious party came into our church, where we the monks and novices did chant the *Te, Deum, laudamus*, after which our abbat delivered a learned discourse upon the rights of King Stephen, and put up a prayer for his preservation on the throne.

Much bloodshedding and many horribly vindictive acts did the lord abbat prevent on this unhappy day: nevertheless much blood was shed, and a new score of vengeance was commenced. The kin and friends of Sir Jocelyn could no more forgive and forget his death than Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe could forgive the burning of his house and the murther of his wife; every man that had fallen in the field left some behind him who were sure to call for vengeance.

III.

Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe and the other knights whose houses had been destroyed by the so sudden onset of their enemies, regained possession of their lands; and, in other parts of the kingdom, Stephen, by force of arms, or by treaty, recovered nearly all the castles which had been taken from him. Merciful was the soul of King Stephen, even as that of our lord abbat; for, although he lopped off the hands of some few of the mean sort, he took not the life of one lord or knight, but, upon submission made, did pardon them all their late rebellion. The empress's illegitimate half-brother, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, fled beyond sea; and when he was safe in Anjou, he sent his defiance to Stephen, wherein he renounced his homage, and called the king usurper. But before he fled out of England, Earl Robert had made a great league with many of our barons, and had induced the Scottish king to engage to invade our land with all the forces he could collect. King Stephen was again triumphant over his many foes; he took castle after castle from the English barons, and rarely began a siege which did not end prosperously. When the Scots, and Gallowegians, and Highlanders, and men of the Isles, burst into Northumberland and advanced into Yorkshire,

Stephen was not there; but the army that was collected for him by Thurstan, my lord archbishop of York, and that was commanded for him in the field by Ranulph, my lord bishop of Durham, and by William Peveril and Walter Espee of Nottinghamshire, and Gilbert de Lacy and his brother Walter de Lacy of Yorkshire, gained a glorious and most complete victory over the Scottish barbarians at Northallerton in the great battle of the Standard, slaying twelve thousand of them. The country, and the poor people of it, suffered much during these sieges, and intestine wars, and foreign invasions; but they came not near to Reading Abbey, and King Stephen was everywhere successful, until, in an evil hour for him and for all of us, he did violence to the church in order to satisfy the rapacity of his ungodly men of war. For ye must know that King Stephen, in order to gain the affections of the lay baronage, had given away so many lands and so much money, that he had now nought left to give, and still those barons cried "Give! give! or we will declare for the empress." "I see a flaw in your title, therefore give me two more castles," said one great lord. "I see two flaws, therefore give me four more castles that I may support your right," said another great lord. "I fought for thee at Northallerton, and therefore must have some domain for my guerdon," said another. But castles, domains, all had been given away already; there remained not of the crown lands enough to keep the king and his household, and as for the treasury, it had long been empty. Seeing that Stephen was like a spunge that had been squeezed, and that nothing was to be gotten except by war and change of government, sundry

of these great lords withdrew to the strongest of their castles, and renewed their correspondence with the Earl of Gloucester. In these great straits, and while Stephen was holding his court in Oxenford, threatened by foreign invasion, and not knowing how to distinguish his friends from his foes, he was advised by the worst of his enemies to lay his hands upon the property of churchmen. The most potent and wealthy churchman of that day was old Roger, bishop of Sarum, who had been justiciary and treasurer to Henry Beauclerc, and who had for a season filled the same offices under Stephen; and next to the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen's own brother, no man had done more than this Bishop Roger to bar the claim of the empress, and secure the crown for the king. Moreover, this great Bishop of Sarum had two episcopal nephews almost as great as himself; the first of them being Alexander, bishop of Lincoln; the second, Nigel, bishop of Ely. All three had been great builders of castles, and men of a bold and martial humour. I find not in the canons or in the fathers that bishops ought to make their houses places of arms; but it is to be remembered King Stephen, to please the baronage, had, at the commencement of his reign, given every baron permission to fortify his old castle or castles, and to build new ones; nor is it to be forgotten that in the midst of so many places of arms, the simple unfortified manor-house of a bishop could never have been a safe abiding place, or have afforded any protection to the serfs who cultivated the soil, and the rest of my lord bishop's people. If Bishop Roger and his nephews did build some castles for the defence of their manors and the people upon them, and did expend

much money in temporalities, they did also raise splendid edifices to the glory of God. Witness the great church at Sarum, which Bishop Roger rebuilt after it had been injured by fire and by tempest—witness the beautiful works done at Lincoln by Bishop Alexander, who nearly rebuilt the whole of that cathedral; and at Ely, by Bishop Nigel. And these three great prelates did make noble use of their wealth, in bringing over from foreign parts good builders and artisans, and men of letters and doctrine, to improve and teach in their several ways the people of this island; and if Bishop Nigel was somewhat overmuch given to hunting and hawking, and spent much time, as well as much money, upon his falcons and falconers, doubtlessly it was because the climate of Ely is cold and damp, and requireth much exercise of the body for the conservation of health, and because the circumjacent fen country doth incredibly and most temptingly abound with wild-fowl proper for the hawk to fly at. But to the propositus. King Stephen, being minded to plunder these three great prelates, did summon them all three to his court at Oxenford, where many ravenous lay lords and some foreign lords had previously assembled. The two nephews, apprehending no mischief, and being young men and active, went willingly enough; but it was otherwise with the uncle, who was now a very old man. Bishop Roger had lost his relish for courts, and seemingly had some presentiment; for, as he started on his journey, he was heard to say, "By my Ladie St. Mary, I know not wherefore, but my heart is heavy; but this I do know for a surety, that I shall be of much the same service at court as a fool in battle." At Oxenford

the three bishops were received with a great show of courtesy, as men who had done notable service to the king, and as men whom the king delighted to honour; but they had not been long in the town when a fierce quarrel arose about quarters and purveyance between the retainers of Bishop Roger and the followers of that outlandish man the Earl of Brittany. The aged prelate would have stilled this tumult, but the Bretons, who had been purposely set on by those about the king, would not desist, and swords being drawn on both sides, the affray did not end until many men of the commoner sort were wounded, and one knight was slain. And hereupon it was wickedly given out that the bishops' people had begun the affray, and that the three bishops had set them on to break the king's peace, and murther his guests within the precincts of his royal court. Bishop Roger, the uncle, was seized in the king's own hall, and Alexander, the bishop of Lincoln, at his lodgings in the town; but Bishop Nigel, who had taken up his quarters in a house outside the town, getting to horse, galloped across the country, and threw himself into the castle of Devizes, the strongest of all his uncle's strongholds. And it was thought that the Bishop of Ely would not have been able to do this, and to distance his pursuers by leaping hedge and ditch, if he had not providentially practised hunting and hawking in his easy days. Bishop Roger, and his less fortunate nephew Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, were confined in separate dungeons at Oxenford. They were severally told that the king held them as traitors, and that the price of their liberation would be surrender unto Stephen of all their castles and manors, with whatsoever

treasure they contained; and those who delivered the message chuckled at it, seeing that they hoped to have a share in the great spoil. At first Bishop Roger and Bishop Alexander did manfully refuse to give up anything, but bishops in dungeons and in chains are weak, and kings be sometimes very strong; and after they had been menaced with torture and death, the two prelates put their names and seals to an act of surrender and renunciation, and the castles which Roger had built at Malmsbury and Sherborne, and that which he had enlarged and strengthened at Sarum, and the magnificent castle which Bishop Alexander had built at Newark, together with other places of strength, were taken possession of by the king's people, in virtue of the orders of the two bishops to their own people. But the alert, hard-riding, and warlike Bishop of Ely would not give up the castle of Devizes, into which he had thrown himself on his escape from Oxenford; and, counting on the strength of his uncle's best fortress, and on the affection the garrison and the people of the neighbouring country bore to his family, Nigel did defy the power of King Stephen. Our unhappy ill-advised king, whom I have so often seen, and with whom I have so often spoken in this our house at Reading, had not the head to conceive, nor the heart to execute, the foul trick which followed. No! it was all the contriving and the doing of some of his ill-advisers, of the Earl of Brittany, or Sir Alberic de Vere, or some other or others of those children of perdition. Fasting is commendable at some seasons, but starvation is horrible at all. If a man starve himself, he is guilty of the worst and most unnatural species of suicide; and if a man

starve another, certes he is guilty of the cruellest of murthers. That which impresses on my mind the belief that the aforesaid Sir Alberic de Vere was deep in this guilt, are the facts of which I have had assurance; to wit, that Sir Alberic never afterwards gave a feast in his own castle, without seeing the apparitions of two ghastly, pale, starving bishops take their stand opposite to him, and knit their brows, and wave their right hands, as if they were pronouncing a curse each time his plate was laid before him or his wine-cup filled; and that the said Sir Alberic did die at the last of angina, which closed up his throat and allowed no food to pass. Bethink ye whether the knight did not then think of Bishop Roger and his episcopal nephew! But the procedure to force the Bishop of Ely to give up the strong castle of Devizes was this:— Bishop Roger and his nephew, the Bishop of Lincoln, were loaded in their dungeons with more chains, and orders were given that they should be kept without food until the castle was delivered up to King Stephen. When Bishop Nigel was told of this intent he could not believe it, nor was it easy, even in those wicked days, for any man to conceive the world wicked enough to starve two prelates. "I will keep mine uncle's castle for him," said Bishop Nigel, "for they dare not do the thing they speak of." But, alack! his lordship was soon convinced to the contrary; for Bishop Roger himself, already pale and emaciated, was carried to Devizes, and made to state his own case in front of his own castle. And the old man implored his nephew to surrender, and so save the life of his uncle and that of his brother: and then Bishop Nigel gave up that great fortress, and there-

upon Bishop Roger and Bishop Alexander were allowed to have food, after they had been three days and three nights in a fearful fast. Before long all three of the bishops were set at liberty, but they had been plundered of nearly all they possessed. The evil advisers of King Stephen got most of the spoil. The robbery did not even a momentary good to the king, and terrible was the penalty he was made to pay for it. The whole body of the dignified clergy turned against him; and even his own brother, Henry, bishop of Winchester, who was now the Pope's legatus for all England, did join the other bishops in charging Stephen with sacrilege. It was his own brother, the legatus, who summoned the king to appear before a synod of bishops at Winchester; and what is brotherly love when weighed in the balance with the duty of every churchman to the church? King Stephen would not attend *personaliter*, but he sent unto Winchester that Sir Alberic de Vere of whom I have spoken; and Sir Alberic went into the hall of synod with a great company of armed knights, and did there much misuse the prelates of the land, and did refuse, in Stephen's name, to make restitution to Bishop Roger and his two nephews of that of which they had been despoiled; and when he had done these things, Sir Alberic made appeal to the pope and dissolved the council, the wicked knights with him drawing their swords to enforce obedience. The bishops separated for that present, but every one of them saw that madness and much wickedness had prepared the downfall of King Stephen. Bishop Roger died of old age, and grief and indignation, and of the fatal effects of that dread fast; and while he was dying, the plate and

money which he had saved from the king's rapacity, which he had devoted to the completion of his glorious church at Sarum, and which he had layed for safety upon the high altar, were seized and carried off by some who cared not for the guilt of sacrilege, and who were so blind that they could not see in what such crimes must end. Forty thousand marks, by our Ladie, was the value of that which was stolen from the shadow of the Holy of Holies!

Now some of the baronage and clergy did send messengers into Anjou to invite the Empress Matilda into England, and to give her assurance good that they would place her upon the throne of her late father. And the ex-empress, being a woman of a high spirit, did presently come over with her half-brother the Earl of Gloucester, and one hundred and forty knights; and the two nephews of the late Bishop Roger and many of the optimates did renounce their allegiance to King Stephen and join her standard. Bishop Nigel, who would have continued to hold the castle of Devizes if it had not been for that fearful fast, went into the Isle of Ely, his own diocese, and there amidst the bogs and fens, and on the very spot where Hereward the Lord of Brunn had withstood William the Conqueror, he raised a great rampart and collected a great force against Stephen. In other parts our bishops were seen mounted on war-horses, clad in armour, and directing in the battle or the siege: and many and bloody were the battles which were fought during two years, and until King Stephen was surprised and defeated in the great battle of Lincoln, and taken prisoner by the Earl of Gloucester, the half-brother of the empress. Ste-

phen was now thrown into a dungeon in Bristowe Castle, and his brother the Bishop of Winchester and legatus acknowledged the right and title of the empress, and led her in triumph to his cathedral church at Winchester, and there blessed all who should be obedient to her, and cursed all who should refuse to submit to her authority. And this being done, Stephen's brother, the bishop and legate aforesaid, did convene an assembly of churchmen to ratify her accession. At this synod the said legate bore testimony against his brother, and said that God had pronounced judgment against him; and the great churchmen, to whom it chiefly belongs to elect kings and ordain them, did elect Matilda to fill the place which Stephen's demerits had vacated. Yet some of the clergy there were who did not think that they could be so easily discharged of the oaths they had taken unto Stephen, or move so far in this matter without a direct command from our lord the pope, and many lords there were, as well of the laity as of the clergy, who did not like Matilda the better for knowing more of her. But not one felt more unhappy at these changes than our good lord abbat, who came back from the last meeting of the clergy at Winchester well nigh broken-hearted; for, albeit he lamented his errors, he had much affection for King Stephen and great reverence to the obligations of an oath, and very earnestly desired peace and happiness to the country.

Also was he and all of us of the house at Reading, and all devout and considerate men in the land, much consternated by great signs in the heavens: for on the twenty-first of the kalends of March in the year of our redemption eleven hundred and forty, while

we were sitting at dinner, there was so great an eclipse of the sun that we could not see to eat our meat, and were forced to light candles, and when lights were brought in our appetites were gone because of our great fear; and when we went out to gaze at the obscured sun and blackened heavens we did plainly see divers stars twinkling near the sun. And these sad sights were seen all over the land, making men believe, while they lasted, that chaos was come again, and that this day was to be the day of judgment. Abbat Edward did interpret these things as omens of our future woe.

"I do foresee," said he, "that infinite woe will arise out of these our distractions, and I can plainly see with only half of an eye that too many of our magnates be looking to nothing but their own worldly advantage. With this classis of men 'twill be down with Stephen and up with Matilda to-day, and down with Matilda and up with Stephen to-morrow; just as they hope to gain by the change. They will all find in the end that they have miscalculated, but that will not heal the wounds that will have been inflicted on the country through their selfish unsteadiness, and lack of principle, and oath-breaking. The ex-empress hath brought a pestilent set of hungry foreigners over with her; and every one of them is looking for some great estate or bishopric or abbey; others will follow, and they will have no bowels of compassion for the people of this land. 'Tis true King Stephen hath done much amiss or hath allowed evil things to be done in his name, but Matilda will do worse, and will have less power than he to prevent the rapacity and bloodthirstiness of others! Steel-clad barons and knights will not yield obe-

dience to the distaff. Even the church will be divided. St. John and St. James to our aid! but my heart trembles for this house, and for the poor townfolk of Reading, and the freemen and the serfs who have so long lived in peace upon our manors; I am an old man—this journey to Winchester hath added the weight of ten more years—I shall not live to see an end to these troubles which have already lasted four years. Death will relieve me from witnessing the worst; but when I am gone hence, oh my brethren and children, put your faith in heaven, and remember that the honestest policy is aye the best, and meditate night and day, and labour hard, in order to lessen the sufferings of our poor vassals and dependants."

Grieves me to say that some of our house who made many solemn protestations now, did not in aftertime do that which they ought to have done.

Affairs were in this state, and the flames of civil war were raging all round us, and the health of our good lord abbat was daily breaking more and more, when the Empress Matilda passed through Reading without stopping at our abbey to say an orison at her father's grave, being on her way to Westminster, there to be crowned and anointed by those who had crowned King Stephen only six years ago. But the citizens of London, who were very bold and powerful, loved Stephen more than Matilda, and before the coronation dresses could be got ready they rose upon her and drove her from the city, flying on horseback and at first almost alone, as she did. This time the daughter of the Beauclerc found it opportune to come to our abbey, for she wanted food, lodging, and raiment, and knew not where else to procure them. A messenger on

a foundered horse announced that she was coming, and by the time the man had put his beast into our lord abbat's stable, a great cloud of dust was seen rolling on the road beyond the Kennet from the eastward. "*Medea fert tristes succos*—she is coming, and will bring poisons with her! She cometh in a whirlwind," said our good lord abbat, "and albeit she is her father's daughter—the lawfully begotten daughter of the founder of this house, (though some men do say the contrary,) it grieves me that she cometh at all. Last year, and at this same season of the year, we did lodge and entertain King Stephen, and prayed God to bless him; and now must I feast this wandering woman and cry God save Queen Matilda? The unlettered and rustical people be slow of comprehension, yet will they not have their hearts turned from us by seeing these rapid shiftings and changings? And so soon as the commoner sort lose their faith or belief in the principles of their betters, crime and havoc will have it all their own way. This people —this already mixed people of Saxons and Normans—will go backwards into blood, and there will be war between cottage and cottage as well as between castle and castle!"

The empress-queen arrived at our gates, and with a numerous attendance; for some had followed by getting stealthily out of London, and some had joined her on the road. Sooth to say she was an imperious, and despotical, and loud-voiced, manlike woman, and of a very imposing presence. Maugre her hasty flight she had a coronet of gold on her head, and a jewel like a star on her breast, and her garments were of purple and gold. A foreign lord, with a truculent coun

tenance, bore a naked sword before her, and another knight, with a visage no less stern, carried a jewelled sceptre.

"'Tis mine own father's house," said she as she came within our gates, "'tis the gift and doing of mine own father, of blessed memory, and much, oh monks! did you wrong him and me by entertaining within these walls the foul usurper Stephen. The usurper is rotting in the nethermost dungeon of Bristowe Castle, and there let him die; but, oh abbat, lead me to my dear father's tomb, that I may say a prayer for the good of his soul; and see in the coining place what money thou hast in hand, for much do I lack money and must for the nonce be a borrower! Bid thy people make ready a banquet in the hall, for we be all fasting and right hungry; and send into the township and call forth each man that hath a horse and a sword, in order that he may follow us to Oxenford, and help to be our guard upon the way. Do these few things, oh abbat, and I will yet hold thee in good esteem. The land rings with thy great wealth and power. By Notre Dame of Anjou! 'tis a goodly house, and the walls be strong, and the ditch round about broad and deep,—by the holy visage of St. Luke! I will not hence to-night though all the rebel citizens of London, that do swarm like bees from their hives, should follow me so far."

Our good lord abbat could do little more than bow and cross himself, and our prior of the bellicose humour, who partook in our abbat's affection for King Stephen, reddened in the face and turned aside his face and grinded his teeth, and muttered down his own throat, "Beshrew the distaff! The

Beauclerc, her sire, was more courteous unto clerks!"

Our sub-prior, being of a more supple nature, and being, moreover, not without his hopes of being nominated to the abbatial dignity so soon as our lord abbat should be laid under the chancel of the abbey church, kneeled before the empress-queen, and then formed some of the monks *in processionale*, and began lead the way to the sepulchre of Henricus Primus. But this roused the abbat and threw the thoughts of our prior into another channel, and the lord abbat said in a grim and loud whisper unto the sub-prior, "I am chief here, and none must move without my bidding;" and the prior said without any essay at a whisper, "Oh, sub, seek not to climb above *me!*"

The proud woman reddened and said, "If ye would honour me, oh monks, as your queen, make haste to do it! An ye will not, I can get me in without your ceremonies. No time have I to lose, and money and aid must be forthcoming!"

Then up spake the lord abbat Edward, and said in a loud voice, "Oh dread ladie, when that king of peace and lion of justice, *Rex pacis et leo justitiæ*, did found this house, he did give us his royal charter, wherein it is said, 'Let no person, great or small, whether by violence or as a due custom, exact anything or take anything from the persons, lands, or possessions whatsoever belonging unto the monastery of Reading; nor levy any money, nor ask any tax for the building of bridges or castles, for carriages or for horses for carrying; nor lay any custom or subsidy, whether for ship-money or tribute-money or for presents; nor . . . .'"

"Oh abbat of the close fist," said Matilda, "I only want to borrow."

"But we may not lend without full consent of all our chapter monks in chapter assembled," quoth the prior.

"And the foundation charter of Henricus Primus," said our abbat, "recommends all the successors of the said royal founder to observe the charter as they wish for the divine favour and preservation, and pronounces a malediction upon any one that shall infringe or diminish his donations. Dread ladie, thou art the Beauclerc's daughter: the curse of a father is hard to bear!"

There was some whispering and sign-making among her followers; but the imperious woman said not a word: she only stretched out her right hand and pointed forward, into the interior of our abbey.

We now formed in more proper order and went through the church to the Beauclerc's grave, on the broad slab of which there burned unceasing lamps, and sweet incense renewed every hour, and at the edge of which there was ever some brother of the house telling his beads and praying for the defunct king, the founder of the house. Dim was the spot, for death is darkness, and too much light suits ill with the decaying flesh and bones of mortal man, be he king or plough-hind; yet, as the empress-queen entered, our acolytes touched the tips of three hundred and sixty-five tapers—sweet smelling tapers made of the wax brought from Gascony and Spain and Italie—and in an instant that dim sepulchral place was flooded with light, the converging rays meeting and shining brightest upon the black slab and the graven epitaph which began with the proud titles of the Beauclerc king,

and which ended with that passage from holy writ which saith that all is vanity here below.

Matilda knelt and put her lips to that black slab (which she safely might do, for it was kept clear of all dirt and dust, it being the sole occupation of one of the lay brothers of our house to rub it every day and keep it clean), and she said an orison, of the shortest, and made some show of shedding tears; but then she quickly rose, and would have gone forth from the vault or cappella. But the lord abbat was not minded that the first visit paid by his daughter to the tomb of her father should pass off with so little ceremony and devotion; and, he himself taking the lead with his deep solemn voice, the Officium de Functorum, or Service for the Dead, was recited and chanted. The empress-queen was somewhat awed and moved, and there seemed to be penitential tears in her eyes as we chaunted "Beati Mortui qui in Domino moriuntur;" but at the last requiem "Æternam" she flung away from the place and began to talk with a loud shrill voice of worldly affairs and of battles and sieges—for the royal-born woman had the heart of a man and warrior, and her grandfather the great Conqueror was not more ambitious or avid of dominion than she.

When we had well feasted Matilda and those who followed her in the abbat's apartment, we hoped she would be gone, for it was a long and fine day of June, well nigh upon the feast of St. John, and she well might have ridden half way to Oxenford before nightfall; but she soon gave the abbat to understand that she had no intention of going so soon. Without blushing she did ask how and where we monks could lodge her and her

women for the night, telling us that she could not think of sleeping in the town, seeing that it was but poorly defended by walls and bulwarks. The abbat looked at the prior, and all the fathers looked at one another with astonishment, but the ungodly waiting-women, who came all from Anjou and other foreign parts, only smiled and simpered as they gazed at one another and observed our exceeding great confusion.

"In truth, royal dame," said our lord abbat, "it is against the rule of our order to lodge females within our walls."

"But I am your queen, oh abbat," said Matilda, "and this is a royal abbey, and my sire founded it and endowed it! Have I not, as my father's daughter and lawful sovereign of this realm, the right to an exemption from the severity of your ordinances?"

"Ladie," quoth the abbat, "I wit not that you have such right, or that the rule of St. Benedict is in any case to be set aside."

"But it hath been set aside," said Matilda, "and queens and their honourable damsels have slept in royal abbeys before now."

"That," quoth the abbat, "was before the Norman conquest, when, through the indolence, carelessness, and gluttony of the Saxon monks, the statutes of our order were generally ill-observed."

"But I tell thee, oh stubborn monk, that I, the empress-queen, that I, thy liege ladie Matilda, have slept and sojourned in half the abbeys and priories of England!"

"'Tis because of these civil wars which have so long raged to the destruction of all discipline

and order, and to the utter undoing of this poor people of England! I, by the grace of God, abbat of Reading, would not shape my conduct after the pattern of some abbats and priors that be in this land, or willingly allow that which they perchance may have permitted without protest, and to the spiritual dishonour of their houses."

Here the eyes of the empress-queen flashed fire, and wrathful and scornful was the voice with which she said unto our good lord abbat, in presence of most of the community, "Shaveling, I am here, and will here tarry so long as it suits my occasions! I believe thy traitorous affection for my false cousin Stephen hath more to do with thine obstinacy than any reverence thou bearest to the rules of thine order. But, monk, 'tis too late! thou shouldest have kept thy gates closed! I and my maidens are within thy house, and these my faithful knights will see thee and thy brethren slain between the horns of the altar rather than see the Queen of England thrust out like a vagrant beggar from the abbey her own father founded!"

As the empress-queen said these words the knights knit their brows and made a rattling with their swords. This did much terrify the major part of our community, and I, Felix, being then of a timorous nature, and a great lover of peace, as became my profession, did creep towards the door of the hall. But our prior spoke out with a right manful voice against the insults put upon our good abbat, telling the empress-queen to her face that respect and reverence were due to the church even from the greatest of princes; that her father, of renowned and happy memory, would not so have treated the humblest servant of the church;

and that if this unseemly business should be put to the issue of arms—if swords should be drawn over her royal father's grave—it might peradventure happen that the armed retainers of the abbey would prove as good men as these outlandish knights, and that the fathers and brothers of the house would fight for their lives, as other servants of the church had ofttimes been constrained to do in these turbulent, lawless, ungodly days."

At this discourse of our bellicose prior the empress-queen turned pale and her lip quivered, though more through wrath than fear, as it seemed to me; but her knights left off noising with their swords; and one of them, a native knight, spoke words of gentleness and accommodation, and put it as an entreaty rather than as a command, that the queen should be allowed to infringe our rules for only one night.

"My conscience doth forbid it," said our lord abbat, "for it may be made a precedent, to the great injury and decay of our discipline. Therefore do I solemnly enter my protest against it. But as I would not see this holy house defiled by strife and blood, nor attempt a forcible expulsion, I will quit mine apartments." And so saying, the lord abbat withdrew, and was followed by all of us. The queen slept in the abbat's bed; her maidens on the rushes, which were carried into that chamber from the abbat's hall; and the knights and men-at-arms slept in the Aula Magna. And, as our good abbat had foreseen, this evil practice was taken as a precedent, in such sort that empresses and queens, and other great princesses, have in these later times been often lodged in

Benedictine and in other houses; yet, wherever the abbats and monks entertain a proper sense of their duty, they lodge these visitors in the lord abbat's house, apart from the religious community.

But before sleeping, the empress-queen did many things, for it still wanted some hours of the Ave Maria, and many were the stormy thoughts that were working in her brain. Two of her knights we allowed to go out of the house by the posterngate, but farther ingress we granted to none; and not only did our armed retainers keep watch for us, but our monks, under the vigilant eye of the prior, did also keep watch and ward all through that evening and night, for we feared some extreme mischief; and it would not have failed to happen if Matilda had been enabled to get her partisans in greater force within the house. In truth, not many of our community knew that night what sleep was. The materials for an abundant supper were furnished to the empress-queen and her people; and some of these last were singing ungodly songs in the abbat's great hall when our church-bell told the midnight hour; yea, there was a noise of singing, and a running to and fro, and a squealing of womanly voices long after that, to the great sorrow and shame of the fathers of our house. I, Felix, albeit only a novice, was of those who slept not. And I saw a great sight. Watching in the eastern turret, I did see a fiery meteor, hirsute like a comet, but not so big, shoot up from the marshes on the other side of the Kennet, not far from the back of our abbey; and this meteor, as it passed over our house, did

divide itself into three several parts, and these did rush away to the westward as quick as lightning, and there drop and disappear. Before the night came again I was made to understand what these things meant.

IV.

FROM all ungodly guests *libera nos!* Although they had feasted so late at night, the people of the empress did make an early call for a matutinal refection; and our good chamberlain and coquinarius and cellarius were made to bestir themselves by times, and sundry of our lay brothers and servitors, to the great endangering of their souls, were made to run with viands and drink into our lord abbat's hall, and there wait upon the daughter of the Beauclerc and her foreign black-eyed damsels, who did shoot love-looks at them and discompose their monastic sobriety and gravity by laying their hands upon their sleeves and twitching their hoods for this thing and that (for the young Jezebels spoke no English), and by singing snatches of love songs at them, even as the false syrens of old did unto the wise Ulysses. Certes, the founder of our order, the blessed Benedict, did know what he was a-doing when he condemned and prohibited the resort of women to our houses and their in-dwelling with monks. Monks are mortal, and mortal flesh is weak: *et ne nos inducas in tentationem.*

It was still an early hour, not much more than half way between prima and tertia, when more troubles came upon us. The two knights who had been sent forth by the daughter of the Beauclerc

to make an espial into the condition of the country, and to summon her friends unto her, returned to our gate with a large company of knights and men-at-arms, and demanded to be readmitted. Our good abbat, calling together the fathers of the house, held counsel with them; and it was agreed that to admit so great a company of men of war would be perilous to our community; and even our bellicose prior did opine that our people would be too few to protect the abbey if these men without should be joined to those the empress had within. It was our prior who addressed that great company from the porter's window over the gateway, telling them that the two knights who had come from London with the empress might be readmitted, but that our doors would not be unbarred even unto them unless the rest of that armed host went to a distance into the King's Mead. Hereat there arose a loud clamour from those knights and men-at-arms, with great reproaches and threats. Yea, one of those knights, Sir Richard à Chambre, who was in after time known for a most faithless man, and a variable, changing sides as often as the moon doth change her face, did call our lord abbat apostate monk and traitor, and did threaten our good house with storm and spoliation. The major part of us had gathered in front of the house to see and hear what was passing; but, alack! we were soon made to run towards the back of the abbey, for while Sir Richard à Chambre was discoursing in this unseemly strain, and shaking his mailed fist at the iron bars through which he could scantly see the tip of our prior's nose, a knight on foot, who wore black mail and a black plume in his casque, and who never raised his visor and scarce spoke word after

these few, came running round the eastern angle of the abbey walls, shouting "'Tis open! 'tis ours! Win in, in the name of Matilda!" The voice that said these few words seemed to not a few of us to have been heard before, but we had no time to think of that. The armed host set up a shout, and ran round for our postern gate, which openeth upon the Kennet, and we all began to run for the same, our lord abbat wringing his hands, and saying "The postern! the postern! some traitor hath betrayed us!"

Now our postern was secured by two great locks of rare strength and ingenuity of workmanship, and the keys thereof were not intrusted to the portarius, but were always kept by the sub-prior, and without these keys there was no undoing the door either from within or from without. As he ran from the great gateway, I heard our prior say in an angry voice unto the sub-prior, "Brother Hildebrand, how is this? Where be the keys?" And I heard the sub-prior make response, "On my soul, I know not how it is, but verily the keys I did leave under the pallet in my cell."

When we came into the paved quadrangle, we found some of our retainers hastily putting on their armour; but when we came into the garden, we found it thronged with men already armed, and we saw the postern wide open and many more warriors rushing in through it: the evil men who had stayed with the queen, and who had so much abused our hospitality, had already joined the new comers, and the united and still increasing force was so great that we could not hope to expel them and save our house from robbery and profanation. Our very prior smote his breast in despair. But our good

abbat, though of a less bellicose humour, had no fear of the profane intruders, for he stood up in the midst of them and upbraided them roundly, and threatened to lay an interdict upon them all for the thing that they were doing. But anon the empress herself came forth with one that waved a flag over her head, and at sight hereof the sinful men set up a shouting and fell to a kissing, some the flag, which was but a small and soiled thing, and some—on their knees—the hand of the Beauclerc's daughter; and while this was passing, those foreign damsels came salting and skipping, and clapping their hands and talking Anjou French, into the garden. There was one of them attired in a short green kirtle that had the smallest and prettiest feet, and the largest and blackest eyes, and the longest and blackest eyelashes, and the laughingest face, that ever man did behold in these parts of the world; and she danced near to me on those tiny pretty feet, and glanced at me such glances from those black eyes, that my heart thumped against my ribs; but the saints gave me strength and protection, and I pulled my hood over my eyes and fell to telling my beads, and thus, when others were backsliders, I, Felix the novice, was enabled to stand steadfast in my faith.

The empress had taken no heed of our lord abbat, or of any of us; but when she had done welcoming the knights that came to do her service, and, imprimis, to escort her on her way to Oxenford, she turned unto the abbat and said, "Monk, thou art too weak to cope with a queen, the daughter of a king, the widow of an emperor, and one from whom many kings will spring. But by thy perversity, which we think amounts to treason,

thou hast incurred the penalty of deprivation; and when we have time for such matters, or at the very next meeting of a synod of bishops and abbats, I will see that thou art both deprived and imprisoned."

"That synod," said our abbat very mildly, "will not sit so soon, and from any synod I can appeal to his holiness the Pope."

"Fool!" quoth Matilda, with the ugliest curl of the lip I ever beheld; "obstinate fool! the Pope's legate is our well-beloved subject and friend the Bishop of Winchester."

"See that you keep his allegiance! He hath put you upon a throne, and can pull you down therefrom!" So spake our prior, who could not stomach the irreverent treatment the Countess of Anjou put upon his superior, and who knew that Matilda had in various ways broken her compact with him, and done deeds highly displeasing to King Stephen's brother, the tough-hearted Bishop of Winchester.

"Beshrew me!" quoth Matilda; "but these Reading monks be proud of stomach and rebellious! Sir Walleren of Mantes, drive them into their church, and see that they quit it not while we tarry here."

"I will," said the foreign knight; "and also will I see that they do sing the *Salve, Regina.*"

And this Sir Walleren and other unknightly knights drew their swords and called up their retainers; and before this ungodly host the abbat and prior and the monks were all compelled to retreat into the church, leaving the whole range of the abbey to those who had so unrighteously invaded it. But as soon as we were in the choir,

instead of singing a *Salve, Regina*, we did chant *In te, Domine, speravi.*

A strong guard was put at the church-door and in the cloisters; but it was not needed, as we could oppose no resistance to those who were now robbing our house; and as it had been determined therefore that all who had come into the church should remain, with psalmody and prayer, until these men of violence should take their departure from the abbey, or complete their wickedness by driving us from it. As they ransacked our house, as though it had been a castle taken by storm, and as they shouted and made such loud noises as soldiers use when a castle or a town hath been successfully stormed, we only chanted the louder in the choir. For full two hours did these partisans of Matilda ransack the abbey, with none to say them nay. At the end of that time, when they had gotten all that they considered worth taking, that ill-visaged knight Sir Walleren of Mantes came to the church-door, and called forth the abbat and prior, saying that the queen would speak with them before she went, and give them a lesson which they might remember. Though thrice summoned in the name of the queen, the heads of our house did not move, nor would they have gone forth at all if the fierce Sir Walleren aforesaid had not sent in a score of pikes to drive them, or prick them from their seats. Nay, even then, the prior would have run not unto the door, but unto the altar; but the good abbat, fearing that God's house might be desecrated by blood, took the prior by the sleeve, and whispered a few soothing words to him, and so led him out into the cloisters; and then all we who had been driven into the church

followed the abbat and the prior, and went to the quadrangle, where was the queen on horseback, mounted on the lord abbat's own grey palfrey, which had been stolen from the stable, together with every horse and mule that our community possessed. It was a sad sight; and the lord abbat's master of the horse and his palfrey-keeper were wringing their hands at it. Our good cattle, save and except the lord abbat's palfrey and a fine war-horse which had appertained to one of our knights, but which was now mounted by that silent knight in the black mail, who never raised his visor, were loaded with the spoils of our own house, to wit, the coined money taken out of our mint, provisions, corn, wine, raiment, and goodly furnishings. The masked knight had a plain shield, carried by his page, and no cognizance whereby he might be known: he held in his hand one of the queen's reins, and by his gestures, and his constant looking to the great gate of our house, which was now thrown wide open, he seemed very eager to be gone. As our lord abbat, with his hand still upon the prior's sleeve, came through the crowd and nigh to the space where Matilda sat upon his own palfrey, she first frowned upon him and then laughed at him, and between laughing and frowning said—"Oh abbat that shalt not be abbat long, thou hast comported thyself like a traitor and a very churl in stinting thy queen of that which she needed, in begrudging hospitality to these fair damsels, and in barring thy doors against these my gallant knights and faithful people. For this have we, for the present, relieved thy house of some of its superfluous stuff. It is not well that disloyal monks be so well supplied and furnished,

when a queen, and noble ladies, and high-born knights be unprovided and bare, and forced by treasons foul to flee from place to place as if they were accursed Israelites. Light meals are followed by light digestion, and abstinence is favourable to prayer and devotion. Yet have we taken nothing from ye, O monks, but what is rightfully ours, or was given ye by my father of thrice glorious memory."

"Oh Empress, or Countess of Anjou, or Queen of England, if so must be, the deeds which have been done in this holy house, built and endowed by thy father for the expiation of his sins, will make the bones of thy father turn in his grave, and will bring down a curse upon the heads of thee and thy party. Bethink thee, and repent while it is yet time! Thy father, the father of his people and the peace of his country, *Pax patriæ, gentisque suæ Pater*, did for the good of his own soul found this abbey, and endow it with the town and manor of Reading, and with all the lands which had aforetime belonged to the nunnery of Reading and the monasteries of Cholsey and Leominster (which houses had been destroyed in our old wars), and he did make it one of the royal mitred abbeys, and did give the lord abbat privilege to coin his own money, by having a mint and mintmaster. Other donations did he make, and other privileges and honours did he confer upon our community. And hath not our lord the pope by a special bull confirmed and sanctified this kingly grant, and taken our house, with all its possessions and appurtenances, to wit, lands cultivated and uncultivated, its manors, meadows, woods, pastures, mills, fisheries, and all other, under the protection of the

holy Roman see? And hath not his holiness decreed that none are to disturb our house, or to lay an impious hand on our possessions, or to keep, or diminish the same, or in any other way give us trouble; but that all that we have and hold is to be kept under the government of the monks, and for the pious uses for which it was given? And in the same bull hath not the pope blessed those who keep this commandment, and cursed those who in any way break it? Unless thou makest restitution thou wilt be denied the viaticum on thy death-bed—*et a sacratissimo corpore et sanguine Dei et Domini nostri aliena fiat.*"

At these words spoken, the countess did somewhat tremble on the palfrey, and turn pale; but one of her wicked advisers from beyond sea said that she did but borrow, and would make restitution at the fitting time, and that we, being so rich, could well spare some of our substance.

Our treasurer, who would not deign to speak to this foreign marauder, said to the countess, "Oh, ill-advised ladie, we be none so rich, and much is expected from us. By thy father's endowment full two hundred monks are to be kept for aye in this his royal abbey, and we be as yet scantly more than one hundred and two score. Also do the good people that we have drawn to this township of Reading look to us for present employment and support; and herein have we much laboured, for the good of the realm, and the happiness of the commoner sort. In the days of thy grandfather, the dread Conqueror of this kingdom, when the Domesday-book was made, Reading had only twenty-nine houses; but now look abroad, and

see how new houses have risen, and men have increased under the shadow of our peaceful walls."

"There will be woe and want among that industrious people," said abbat Edward, "if thou carriest away from us this great spoil, and all the money that we have minted! The curse of the poor, which is the next terriblest thing to the curse of God and holy church, will cling to thee, oh countess, or queen! Look to it, oh Matilda! I see the crown already dropping from thy head."

"This is treason!" said the silent knight with his visor down, in a voice which made all of us start, for it sounded like that of one who had lately been our fast friend.

Matilda, rising in her saddle, with glaring eyes and reddened cheek, said, "And I, rebel monk, do see the mitre falling from thy head. Thou wilt not be abbot of Reading this time next month."

"*Fiat voluntas*, let the will of God be done," replied our lord abbat.

"And now," quoth the violent daughter of the Beauclerc, "let us ride on our way for Oxenford. Methinks we be now strong enough to defy all traitors on the road." And she struck with her riding-wand the grey palfrey, which it much grieved our abbat to lose, and followed by her knights and her leering and laughing foreign damsels, she rode out at our gate, and with a great host departed from Reading.

When the evil-doers were all gone we made fast our doors, and proceeded to examine the condition of our house and its community. They had completely emptied the buttery, the store-house, the granary, the wine-cellar; they had so stripped the lord abbat's house and the lodging of the prior that

there was nothing left in them save the tables and chairs, the mats and rushes; they had broken open both treasury and sacristy, and had stolen thence all our most precious relics, and all our gold and silver vessels, and all our portable pictures and crucifixes; they had not left us so much as a patera, a chalice, or an encensoire; they had even laid their impious thievish hands upon the silver lamp which had been used to burn day and night at the head of the Beauclerc's tomb, and they had carried off with them the Agnus Dei and the jewelled cross which Henricus Primus had worn for many years of his life, and which, at his order, had been laid upon his tomb. That silver lamp had been sent to the abbey by Queen Adelise, the Beauclerc's second and surviving wife, who, on the first anniversary of the Beauclerc's death, gave us the manor of Aston in Hertfordshire, offering a pall upon the altar in confirmation of the grant; and who likewise gave us the land of Reginald, the Forester, at Stanton-Harcourt, nigh unto Oxenford, and afterwards the patronage and revenues of the church of Stanton-Harcourt, to supply the cost of the silver lamp, which she herself did order should burn continually before the pix and the tomb of her late husband. Yet Matilda and her plundering band had carried off this precious cresset—and long did they prevent us getting any rent or revenues from the lands which Queen Adelise had granted us. Not the most recondite and secret part of our house had escaped their search. Much did we marvel at this, until, calling over the roll, we found that three members of our community did not answer to their names. The three missing were, two novices, to wit, young

Urswick, the white-headed, from Pangbourne, and John Blount from Maple-Durham, and one full monk, to wit, Father Anselm, of Norman birth, who had but lately taken the vows, but who had been much employed by our treasurer in offices of trust. The two novices (may their souls be assoiled!) had been wiled away by those young Jezebels, and had put on warlike harness, and had gone with Matilda to serve her as men-at-arms: Father Anselm, being a well-favoured man, had found favour in the sight of the Countess of Anjou, and had gone with her to be her mass-priest, and to aim at some vacant bishopric or abbey. Well had it been for us if he had never come back to Reading. Heavy suspicions had fallen upon our sub-prior Hildebrand, touching the postern gate; but it was ascertained upon inquiry, that Urswick, the white-headed, who had been wont to wait upon the sub-prior, did, at the bidding of Matilda, or of one of her damsels, steal the keys and undo the door.

Besides the three deserters from our own body, we found that divers of our armed retainers had taken service with the errant countess, and had gone away with her with their arms and horses; and that even one of our knights, who did service for the lands of the abbey he held, had forgotten his bounden duty and his honour in a sudden fantastic affection for a pair of black eyes.

We were bemoaning our losses, and our exceeding great calamity and disgrace, and wondering where we should get a dinner, when, some three hours after the departure of Matilda, and the host that followed her standard, another great body of horse and foot, bearing the banner of King Stephen,

marched towards our gates, demanding meat and drink, and vowing, with many soldier-like profane oaths, that they would burn and destroy all such as were not for Stephen. The new alarm thus created was, however, but short, for some noble barons and knights, who had been riding in the rear, came spurring up to the van, which was now halting in the Falbury, and among these we saw, with his vizor down, that right noble lord Sir Alain de Bohun, Lord of Caversham and the well-beloved nephew of our lord abbat, whose sad heart was much rejoiced at his so sudden appearance.

"Be it King Stephen or Queen Matilda," said the abbat, "let us throw open our gates to our well-beloved nephew, for he will not see harm done to us, and now, verily, we have nothing to lose but lives not worth the taking." And the gates were thrown open, and Sir Alain was welcomed and affectionately greeted by his uncle; and after many expressions of astonishment and indignation at the wrongs which had been done us, Sir Alain and divers of the lords and knights with him retired for a space to the lord abbat's despoiled and naked apartment, with the lord abbat and our prior, and some other fathers. I was not of that council, being but a novice, nor can I say it that I ever learned in after times *all* that was said in it; but I do know that when it was finished (and it lasted not long) the prior came forth with a very confident countenance, and told us all that the Bishop of Winchester, the pope's Legatus à latere, had changed sides, that Stephen of Blois was still King Stephen, and that we must sing a *Te Deum laudamus* for that same. And

we all went forthwith into our church, and the barons and knights went in after us, and we admitted as many as the church would hold of those men-at-arms, and bill-men and bow-men, that had halted in the Falbury with King Stephen's banner, and albeit we were hungry and faint, we sang the *Te Deum* for Stephen with sonorous voices.

Sir Alain de Bohun, one of the very few lords of England that never changed sides during these nineteen years of revolutions and wars, had fought bravely for King Stephen in the great battle at Lincoln, where other barons and knights had deserted with all their forces to Matilda's illegitimate brother and commander the Earl of Gloucester; and after Stephen had been taken prisoner (not until both his sword and battle-axe had been broken), Sir Alain had escaped from the field and had joined one of the many leagues of nobles who vowed never to submit to the distaff, or allow the Countess of Anjou to be Queen of England. In the five months which had passed since the battle of Lincoln, Sir Alain had fought in sundry other battles, and had given heart to many a knight, who, after the synod of Winchester, had despaired of the cause of King Stephen. He had appeared with a good body of horse, and the standard of Stephen, on the southern side of Thamesis, opposite the city of London, and his appearance had encouraged the citizens to rise and drive out Matilda. And the day before, appearing in the suburb of London, Sir Alain de Bohun had been at Guildford, and had there conferred with Stephen's queen, the good Maud, and also with Stephen's brother, the Bishop of Winchester, who did already repent him of that which he had done in synod.

But that the bishop had met either Queen Maud or Sir Alain was for the present kept secret.

The Lord of Caversham and his friends had crossed the river, and entered London city within an hour of Matilda's flight. Having toiled far that same day, the horses of the king's party were weary, and could not give pursuit; but after short rest they followed the flying queen along the great road which leads to the westernmost parts of our island. Jesu Maria! had they come unto Reading a few hours sooner, before the arrival of that battalia which the two knights Matilda had sent forth from our abbey had collected, the violent woman might have been made prisoner, and our house have been saved from plunder. But now the horses of King Stephen's friends were again aweary, and though Sir Alain and the noble barons with him were stronger in foot soldiers, they were much weaker in horse than the host which had left Reading with the countess, who, upon these sundry considerations, and for that she had been gone more than two hours, was let go on her road to Oxenford without pursuit.

The burghers of Reading who had endeavoured to save themselves from plunder and violence by throwing up their caps and shouting for the errant queen, but who had been plundered and beaten all the same (nay, divers of them were wounded by sword and lance, and cruelly maimed), now came to our abbey-gates, making their throats hoarse with shouting for King Stephen and the good and gracious Lord of Caversham; and some of the richer franklins of the township and neighbourhood, who had escaped being plundered by Matilda's party, upon learning the sad case in which we, the

monks, had been left, hastened to bring us meat and drink.

Sir Alain de Bohun, who had not seen his wife or his home for many a sad day, was about to ride across the fields homeward, when his ladie's page was seen running across the King's Mead towards our abbey.

"Yonder comes one from Caversham," said Sir Alain; "and I read by his looks and his hurry that he bringeth no good news!"

"Fear not," said the abbat, who saw that his nephew's cheek was growing pale, "for the saints have ever defended thy roof-tree, and as I told thee before, the Ladie Alfgiva and the children were as well as well could be at the hour of noon of yesterday, when I did see them."

Nevertheless, the little page did bring bad news, or tidings which much afflicted Sir Alain and our lord abbat. There had been treachery at Caversham, and a fast friend had played loose. That sweet babe, the daughter of Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, who had caused our household so much dismay four years agone, and had sent me and Philip the lay-brother on the night-journey to Sir Alain de Bohun's castle, had dwelt in that castle ever since, and had been nurtured with all delicacy and honour, like a child of the house. For a long season Sir Ingelric, her father, had no safe home unto which he could take her; for since the beginning of these unhappy wars, no house in England could be called safe that was not moated and battlemented, and strongly garrisoned; and if Sir Ingelric had possessed a castellum, he had no gentle dame unto whom he could confide his infant female child. But the Ladie Alfgiva was as ten-

der as a mother to this babe, and this tenderness became the greater when death deprived her of her own little daughter. Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, who had taken vengeance on the destroyer of his wife and home, Sir Jocelyn de Brienne, in the Falbury almost at our abbey gates, seemed engaged for life in a blood-feud with Sir Jocelyn's family and friends, and to be for ever wedded to the party of King Stephen by the strong ties of necessity and revenge. Many were the combats he had fought between that time his house and wife were burned, and the time when King Stephen prepared for that campaign which had ended so disastrously at Lincoln. During this long and busy interval he went not often to Caversham, so that his child grew up with little knowledge of him. The little Alice was wont to call Sir Alain de Bohun her father, even as she called the Ladie Alfgiva mother. Once or twice within the last twelve months Sir Ingelric had said, that since his house was well nigh rebuilt, he should have a safe bower for his daughter, and that Alice must soon home with him; and each time he had said the words the child had run from him to the Ladie Alfgiva, and had clung round her neck, weeping and saying that she would not leave her mother; and her playmate and champion, that right gallant boy Arthur de Bohun, the only son, and now the only child, of Sir Alain, who was some four years older than Alice, said that she must not leave him. It was noticed upon these occasions, that although Sir Ingelric began as in a jest, his countenance soon grew dark and his voice harsh, and that he almost shook his child when he took her on his knee and told her that she must love her father, and must

not always be a burthen unto other people. Nay, the last time that he said these words he pressed the little Alice's arm so violently that he left the blackening marks of his fingers upon it. Other things were noted as well by Sir Alain de Bohun as by the Ladie Alfgiva. It is not every man that is chastened by calamity. Sir Ingelric's great misfortune had made him fierce, proud, and rebellious to the will of Heaven; and, in losing his fair young wife, he had lost his best guide and monitor. He became hard of heart, and grasping, and covetous; and as for more than three years the party of King Stephen had been almost everywhere victorious, he had abundant opportunities of satisfying his appetite for havoc and booty. But the more he gained the more he wished to get, and by degrees he gave up his whole soul to avarice and ambition. Sir Alain de Bohun, who looked for no advantage unto himself, who adhered to King Stephen out of loyalty and affection, and who kept out of the horrible and unnatural warfare as much as he thought his duty would allow him, entertained apprehensions that his friend Sir Ingelric loved the war for what he gained by it, and would not be very steady to any losing party. Sir Ingelric, however, had fought bravely for King Stephen at Lincoln, and had there been taken prisoner. But he had paid a ransom to his captor, and had been some time at large, busied in putting the finishing hand to the strong castle which he had raised on his lands at Speen. Though the distance was so short to Caversham, he had not gone once thither until the evening of the unhappy day on which the Countess of Anjou had come to our abbey—that is, the evening of yesterday—but

then he had told the Ladie Alfgiva that as the weather was so fine and the country so tranquil (alack! the good people at Caversham had not seen the arrival of Matilda and her young Jezebels at our abbey), he would take the two children forth for a walk in the meadows by the river side; and the false knight had gone forth with the children, and neither he nor the children had since been seen or heard of. As the little page came to this point in his dismal story, not only our prior, but several of us less entitled to speak in such a presence, cried out, "That knight in the black mail who kept his vizor down, and that went away with the countess, was none other than Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe;" and our abbot said, "Verily, the voice was that of Sir Ingelric!"

"Woe for these changes!" said Sir Alain de Bohun, "woe and shame upon them. If men have no faith even with old friends—if men do shift from side to side like the inconstant wind, this war will never know an end, and truth, and honour, and mercy will depart the land! Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe! I aided thee in thy wretchedness, and King Stephen did afterwards hand thee on the road to riches and greatness. I first gave thee money and the labour of my serfs that thou mightest re-edify thy house, but now thou hast built to thyself a strong castle, wherein thou thinkest thou canst defy me, now thou believest the cause of Stephen to be desperate, and therefore dost thou raise thy hand against me, and steal away, like a thief, not only the child that was thine own, but also mine only son, that the woman of Anjou may have my dearest hostage in her power. May God of his mercy protect my dear boy! But, oh Sir

Ingelric, thy treachery is ill-laid and ill-timed, thy cunning is foolishness. Great things have happened since thou hast been castle-building, and thou wilt find that thou hast quitted the stronger for the weaker party. Hereafter will I make thee pay, if not for thy black ingratitude to me, for thy disloyalty to thy too bountiful king, and for the tears my ladie wife will shed for her double loss!"

Here moisture very like a tear stood in the eyes of the Lord of Caversham: but grief gave way to wrath as he said that the felon knight might have taken his own child, which would long since have been in its grave but for the Ladie Alfgiva, without robbing him of his son.

Our good abbat, who had his prophetic seasons, said, "Grieve not, my well-beloved nephew. The two children will do well together, and thou wilt soon have them restored to thy house: they were born to be together and love one another, and so will not be separated. Alice will repay thee hereafter for the ingratitude and treasons and other evil doings of her father."

Here I, Felix the novice, and Philip the lay-brother, who had carried little Alice from the abbey unto Caversham, and who had loved the child ever since, did say "Amen! amen! So be it."

"The children," said an honest franklin who had stood by all the time of these discourses, "be surely gone with the Countess of Anjou for Oxenford; as on the road beyond the town I saw a blue-eyed boy riding before a man-at-arms, and a little girl in the arms of a waiting-woman who rode close to the countess on a piebald horse, and both the children were crying piteously."

"Then will we recover them at Oxenford," said one of the knights.

Sir Alain de Bohun, with a part of the company who had come with him, mounted for Caversham; and when Sir Alain began to ride, I could see that he rode hotly and impatiently. The rest of the knightly company we entertained in the abbey as best we could, and lodged them for that night, the good franklins having brought us in some clean straw and rushes for that purpose. The commoner sort slept in the open air on the Falbury, with their weapons by their sides.

But before the troublous day was finished, other dismal tidings and sights of woe were brought to our house. John Appold and Ralph Wain, two franklins whilome of good substance, who farmed some of our outstanding abbey lands beyond Pangbourne, came to tell us that their houses had been burned, their granaries emptied, and the plough-hinds and shepherds and all the serfs driven away by Matilda's people, who had chained them together by their iron neck-collars, and had goaded them before them like cattle with the points of their lances. And before these sad tales were well ended, Will Shakeshaft, a faithful steward who dwelt in a house our lord abbat had at Purley, arrived on a maimed horse, and with a ghastly cut across his face, to let us know that violence had been done to his wife, and that that fair house had been burned also. A little later there came three of our poor serfs howling so that it was dreadful to hear, and holding in the air their red and still bleeding stumps. They had been amputated and then liberated, in order that they might go forth and show all the people what they had to expect if

they opposed or so much as forbore to aid and join the empress-queen. As the night became dark, we could trace the march of the countess by a line of fire and smoke. Such were the things which drove the poor people of England into impiety and blasphemy, making them say that Christ and the saints had fallen asleep! And these things lasted in the land for fifteen more years.

V.

WHEN baptized Christian men did steal the children of other Christian men, yea, and torture and slay them, no marvel was it that the unconverted Israelites, who had been allowed to come into the land in great numbers since the Norman conquest, should do deeds of the like sort. So it was, that in King Stephen's reign the rich Jews of Norwich did buy a Christian child from its poor parents a little before Easter, and on the Long Friday, when the church was mourning for the crucifixion of our Lord, they tortured him after the same manner as our Lord was tortured, and did nail him on a rood in mockery of our Saviour; and afterwards buried him. These sacrilegious and cruel Jews thought that their horrible crime would be concealed, but it was revealed from above, and the people of Norwich smote the Jews and tortured them as they merited; and the Lord showed that the Christian child was a holy martyr: and the monks took him and buried him with all honour and reverence in Norwich Minster; and he is called Saint William, and through our Lord wonderful miracles are wrought at his tomb even in our own day, and his festival is kept with becoming solemnity on the twenty-fifth of the kalends of March.

Sad and sinful was it for Christian parents to

sell their children to Jew, or even to Gentile. The evil practice had once been common in England, and in the port of Bristowe children were once sold in great numbers to be carried into Ireland and elsewhere; but the church had put down the unnatural traffic, and when King Stephen came to the throne no freeman would have sold his child. But want and hunger now severed the natural tie, and starving parents sold their starving children rather than see them die before their eyes and they unable to help them. Yea, frantic mothers would give their infants from their dried-up breasts to any strangers that would promise to nourish them. *Horresco repetens!* I do shudder in the telling of it, but so it was. Fair English children were again sold to traffickers on the western coast, who carried them into Ireland, and in such numbers that the slave-market of the Irishry was all overstocked with them. In the happy and plentiful days which now be in the land such things are hard to believe; but I, as a novice, did often see them with mine own eyes, and the causes that led thereunto. Yea, have I seen the poor people of England roaming by the wayside and eating garbage which scarcely the fox or the foul birds of the air would touch, rambling in the woods and fields in search of roots and berries, ay, grazing on the bank-side like cattle, or that great sinner Nebuchadnezzar; for flocks and herds were swept away, and slaughtered, and wasted by the armed bands that ever ranged the country, or were kept penned up within the castles of the strong men—those pestilent barons and knights that were now for Matilda and now for Stephen, and always for plunder and all crime, living and fattening upon

great and bloody thievings—*magna et sanguineolentia latrocinia*: and the fields could not be cultivated because of the continual passing and repassing, and burning, and fighting, and slaying of these armed hosts and bands of robbers, who did worse than the heathen had ever done; for after a time they spared neither church nor churchyard, neither a bishop's land nor an abbat's land, and not more the lands of a priest than the fields of a franklin, but plundered both monks and clerks! And so it came to pass that nearly every man that could, robbed another, and carried away his wife or daughter, and did with her what he list. If two men or three came riding to a town, all the township fled, concluding them to be robbers. Some of our bishops and learned men continually did excommunicate them and curse them; but the effect thereof was nought, for they were one and all accursed, and forsworn, and abandoned; and grieves me to say that too many bishops and churchmen were men of violent and unsteady councils and castle-builders themselves, waging war like the lay lords, and being as void as they of steadiness and loyalty, and mercy for the people. Verily I myself have seen prelates clad in armour and mounted on war-horses, even as at the time of the Conquest, and in that guise directing the siege or the attack, or drawing lots with the rest for the booty. The strong men constantly laid gilds on the towns, and called it by a Norman name which signifyeth *torture;* and when the poor townfolk had no more to give, then they plundered and burned the towns; so that thou mightest go a whole day's journey and never behold a man sitting in a town or see a field that was tilled. To

till the ground was as useless as to plough the sea, for no man could hope to reap that which he sowed. Thus the earth bare little or no corn; and bread became of a fearful dear price; and flesh, and cheese, and butter were there none for the poor. Ay, franklins who had been rich men, and who had kept good house and been bountiful to the poor and to mother church, were seen begging alms on the road. Many of the poorest died of hunger on a soil which God had blessed with fertility, but which sinful men had turned into a wilderness; and many, going distraught, threw themselves into the rivers, or hanged themselves in the woods. This was greater woe than England had witnessed during the long wars of the Norman conquest; and it was in this abyss of misery that fathers and mothers sold their children.

On the morning after his going to Caversham Sir Alain de Bohun returned unto our house with the knights who had gone with him; and before it was time to begin the service of tertia in the church, he and all the company, as well foot as horse, marched away to the north-west. They intended for Oxenford, but did not take the direct road; for they had learned from scouts that Matilda's party had been strengthened by some bands from the eastward, and Sir Alain and his friends hoped to get an increase of strength in the westward before they turned round upon the countess. But while the partisans of King Stephen were marching to the westward and gaining great strength on the borders of Wiltshire, the Countess of Anjou suddenly decamped from Oxenford and began a march for Winchester, for she had at length conceived suspicion and alarm at the con-

duct of the Bishop of Winchester, the king's brother, and our lord the pope's legate. Intending to pass through Berkshire into Hampshire and unto Winchester, she took her course by Cumnor, Abingdon, and Wallingford. The news of her approach was a death-blow to our good abbat. He had been for some time past declining. He could not away with the thought of Matilda's evil doings unto our house. Being a man formerly addicted to hospitality, good company, cheerful conversation, music, and innocent mirth, he was observed to forsake all this with much melancholy and pensiveness, and so to droop and pine away; but yet was it the news of the countess's coming that gave the finishing stroke. Eheu! and Miserrimus! A better monk or a nobler lord abbat was never slain by princely violence and the wickedness of excommunicate men. He was at Sir Alain de Bohun's castle, and I and Philip the lay-brother were in attendance upon him when our scouts brought the intelligence that Matilda was at Abingdon with the heads of her columns pointing along the road towards Reading. The good, kindhearted man had gone to Caversham in order to console the Ladie Alfgiva, whom he found, like Rachel, mourning for her children, yet not mourning like one that would not be comforted. But comfortless and sad was the face of our lord abbat when he gave his niece the parting blessing, and warned her to look well to her castle, and bade the warder to keep close the gates, and not admit so much as a strange dog within the walls. There had been a slow fever in his veins ever since the bad visit of the Angevin countess, and now his limbs shook and his eyes seemed to swim in his head, and he had much ado

to mount the rough upland horse which had been procured for him in lieu of his gentle-paced palfrey. "Felix, my boy," said he unto me as we descended the slopes of Caversham towards the river, "ride close to my bridle-hand, for I am faint, and a heavy sickness is upon my heart." As he rode across the meads, the breeze, which blew freshly and coolly from the broad river, did somewhat revive him; but anon he complained of the rough motion of his steed, and gently lamented the loss of his ambling grey, which Matilda had stolen from him so foully. When near to the great gate of the abbey he turned round and looked towards the river and the Caversham hills that were shining in the setting sun; and then, as he went under the archway, I saw tears drop from his eyes, and I heard him mutter to himself, "'Tis a right beauteous sight, but I shall see it no more." And that night, and before the middle watches thereof, praying for the community of Reading and all England besides, and imploring the saints to protect the house at Caversham and the two sweet children, he turned his face to the wall and died, to the unspeakable grief of every honest member of the house. He left this troubled world in such good repute as a virtuous and holy man, that assuredly he merited beatification, if not the higher glories of canonization.—*In Domino moritur.*

Before going to his bed, our good abbat held council with all the obedientiarii and sworn monks of the abbey, and I was of the number of those who thought that this exertion, and his long and anxious speaking, hastened his demise. His opinions were, that the monks ought to keep close their gates, and call in their retainers and some of

the townfolk of Reading to help them to defend the house; that Matilda could not tarry long for a siege or any other object, as Sir Alain de Bohun and his party would soon retrace their steps; and that the monks, having made good their house by standing on the defensive, should remain neutral in the horrible war, taking no step and raising no voice either for King Stephen or Queen Matilda, until they saw what course was taken by the pope's legate or a synod of the church. All present at this council, whether cloister monks or monks holding office, agreed that this advice was the best that could be given, and protested that they would follow it; and Hildebrand, the sub-prior, was the loudest of any in his prayers that St. James and St. John the Evangelist, patrons of our house, would long preserve the life of our good old abbat, who had governed the abbey for many years with great wisdom and gentleness; and, sooth to say, in all that time he had ruled as a fond father rules his own children, and never did he sadden the heart of an honest man and faithful servant of the church, or cause a tear to flow until he died.

But, woe the while! the wickedness, the treachery, and malice of the times, had spread themselves on every side and to every community; and some members of our once quiet and loving brotherhood there were that hid Judas hearts under fawning countenances; and before the passing bell ceased to toll for our abbat's death, these unhappy men took secret council with one another, and resolved to act in a manner altogether different from that which had been advised, and that which they had promised and vowed to follow. And, lo! on the second evening after the death of our good abbat, when

the Angevin woman and her host came again unto our house, like a whirlwind, with lances in the air, and clouds of dust rolling before their path, the sub-prior and his fautors, including as well some of the franklins and retainers, as monks and novices, and lay brothers of the abbey, did drive away the other party, and lower our drawbridge, and throw wide open our great gate, and sing hosannas, and cry, "Long live the empress-queen! God bless the sweet face of Queen Matilda, the lawful sovereign of this realm!" And again Matilda came within the cloisters, and took possession of our house with her lawless men of war and her gadabout damsels. This time they could not rob, for we had not the wherewithal, unless they took our gowns, hoods, and sandals, and our flesh and bones; but they did worse things than steal. Matilda ordered that on the instant the fathers of the house should proceed to elect and appoint a new abbat.

"Dread ladie," said Reginald, our prior, now the highest in office, "This cannot be! It is against the rules of our order; it is against the canons of holy church; it is against the feelings of humanity; it is contrary to common decency! Our late lord abbat lies as yet unburied within our walls. He must be first interred honorably, and as becometh the dignity of the house; and before we, the fathers of the house, can open a Chapter, many masses of requiem must be said, and the guidance of the Spirit must be invoked to help us in our election, and notice must be sent unto the head of our order, and alms must be given unto the poor. Albeit, I see not what alms we can give, since our house hath been so ——"

"Rebel monk," cried Matilda, "reproach not

thy queen! But I do perceive that thou art a fautor of Stephen, like the old rebel that hath departed. I told him that the mitre was falling from his head, and I now tell thee that it shall never drop upon thine."

"Would that it had pleased the saints to keep it on the head which wore it so long, and with so much honour," said our bold prior. "I never aimed at it, or had a wish for it. I would not stoop my body, or stretch out my hand, to pick it up, if it lay at my feet. I would never wear it except forced so to do by canonical election, and the free and strong will of my brothers. Matilda, thou that ransackest houses of religion, and the very tomb of thy father, and tramplest on the monks that live to pray for the soul of thy father, I would not accept the mitre and crozier from thee if thou wert to fall on thy knees and implore me to do it! I stand here as an humble but faithful servant of this community—as a lowly member of the great family of St. Benedict; and if I raise my voice, it is only for the sake of our religion and unchangeable rules. Thy men-at-arms need not grind their teeth, and point their lances at me. I fear them not; and in this cause would face torture and death."

"By the splendour!" cried Matilda, "we do but waste time in speech with such as thou art. I tell thee, thou traitor and malignant, that the election shall be made forthwith; and that before I quit this house I will see an honest man put into the abbatial chair, and confirm him therein by our royal deed. Thou wilt not question, oh monk, that the election of a Chapter is nought without the assent and confirmation of the lawful sovereign; and as I have weighty matters in hand, and will

soon be far away from Reading, there might be great delay in obtaining my confirmation if it were not given now."

At this passage the sub-prior, bowing before Matilda more lowly than he was ever seen to bow before the effigies of our Ladie in the Ladie's chapel, said yea and verily, and that this last was a weighty consideration before which the rule of St. Benedict might, in some points, give way; and that in times of trouble and discord and anarchy like these we were living in, the royal abbey of Reading could not with safety be left for a single day without a head.

This discourse of the sub-prior much chafed our fearless and honest prior, Reginald, who well knew the man and his ungodly designs; but before the prior's wrath allowed him to speak, our sacrist brought forth the book and opened the rules of our order, and read the same with an audible yet gentle voice, and with the same gentleness did show that much time must be allowed for mature deliberation; that a Chapter could not be assembled while the house was full of strangers and armed men, for that elections must be free and unbiassed by fear or by any other worldly consideration; and then he did fall to quoting the charters of the Beauclerc, which direct that on the death of a lord abbat possession of the monastery, with all its rights and privileges, shall remain in the prior, and at the disposal of the prior and the monks of the Chapter, and that none shall in any ways meddle in the election of the new abbat: and when the sacrist had thus spoken, the cellarer or bursar, the second father of the convent, who had charge of everything relating to the food of the

monks, and who always knew best, by the eating, who were present and who absent, did beg it might be observed that three cloister monks were absent, one disobediently and contumaciously (meaning hereby Father Anselm, who had absconded with the countess on her previous visit); but two, to wit, the chamberlain and the almoner, on the business of the abbey—and without the votes of these two named fathers no election could be legal or canonical.

"But my good cellarius," said the sub-prior, in a very dulcet and persuasive tone of voice, "it yet behoves us to think of the dangers of the times, and to provide for the security of this royal abbey and God-fearing community, even though we should depart from the rigid letter of some of our minor rules. Remember, oh cellarius, that these be days of trouble, and that we be living in the midst of discord and anarchy, and treachery, and ——"

"Treachery, quotha! I wis there was no treachery in this community until thou didst bring it amongst us," cried our prior; "nor did we know discord or anarchy in our abbey, or in any part of the manors and hundreds appertaining unto this house until thou, oh Matilda, didst come to our gates! Troubles there were around us, and for those troubles the good men of our house grieved —not without labouring to alleviate them; but we were a quiet community when thou didst come thundering at our gates, bringing with thee thy subtle maidens and thy violent men of war! and hadst thou never come we had still been at peace. If thou wouldst listen to me now, I would say Get thee gone and cease from troubling us! But

orgeuil mesprise bon conseil, pride despiseth good counsel, and pride and hardness of heart will lead to thy undoing."

Tradition reporteth that the wrath of William the Conqueror was a thing fearful to behold; that the rage of the Red King was a consuming fire; and that the slower and stiller but deeper hate of Henry the Beauclerc was like unto the grim visage of death; yet do I doubt whether the wrath of all these three preceding kings, if put all together, could be so dreadful as that which the choleric daughter of the Beauclerc did now display: and certes the extreme passion of rage in a woman, even when she hath not a regal and tyrannical power, is fearful to behold. From the redness of the fire she became pale as ashes; but then she reddened again as she shouted "Ho! my men-at-arms, gag me that old traitor!"

"Tyrannous woman, that the sins of the land have brought into England, the truth will endure and be the same though I speak it not. Thou hast violated the sanctuary—thou hast dishonoured and plundered the very grave of thy father! See that he rise not from the grave to rebuke thee."

"Drag the traitor hence; put chains upon him; cast him into the dungeon," cried the unfaithful wife of the Angevin count; and the men-at-arms who had laid their rude hands upon the prior to gag him, did drag the prior out of the Aula Magna. And when he was gone, Matilda swore oaths too terrible to be repeated, that, seeing she must herself away on the morrow, she would leave a garrison of her fiercest fighting men in the abbey, and devastate all the abbey lands that lay on her march, if our fathers did not forthwith elect and appoint

a lord abbat true to her party and obedient to her will. Most of the officials and cloister monks held down their heads and were sore afeard. Not so the sacrist and cellarer, who cried "Charter! Charter!" and repeated that such election could not be, and who were thereupon dragged forth and put in duresse with the bold prior. And now the sub-prior, who never doubted that the choice was to fall upon him, did entreat those who had the right of voting to submit to the will of God and the commandment of the queen, and so save the house from ruin: and some he did terrify, and some cajole, talking apart with them, and telling them that he would be good lord and indulgent abbat unto them all. At last the timid gave way, and the monks of delicate conscience would resist no longer; and the sub-prior, with a smile upon his countenance, said to Matilda, in his blandest voice, that the community was ready to elect whomsoever her grace might be pleased to name.

"'Tis prudent and wise in the community," said Matilda; and then she clapped her hands thrice, as great lords or ladies use to do when they would summon a menial or call in their fool to make them sport; and as she clapped her hands she said, "Come in, my Lord Abbat elect!"

And then, from an inner apartment, where he had been listening all the while, there glided into the great hall, and stood before us, with an unblushing and complacent countenance, that rule-breaker and deserter—Father Anselm.

I did think that our sub-prior would have fallen to the ground in a swoon, for his legs trembled beneath him, and his face became as ashy with grief and disappointment as that of the countess

had lately been with rage: his eye, fixed immoveably on Father Anselm, became glazed and dull, like the eye of a dead fish, and instead of a cry of wonderment, I heard a rattling in his throat. But in a while the sub-prior recovered, and ventured to say that the Chapter could by no means elect one who had broken his vow of obedience, and who was thereby under censure and interdict.

"In absenting myself from the house, I did but obey the command laid on me by the queen's grace," said Father Anselm.

"Not the sovereign ladie, nay, nor the sovereign lord of the land, can give such command without the foreknowledge and consent of the Lord Abbat, or of the prior in the abbat's absence," said the sub-prior, whose voice was growing bolder; "and dread ladie, I tell thee again, that the chapter cannot elect this monk—I tell thee that I myself will protest against such choice, and defeat such election."

"Ha!" cried Matilda, "sayest thou so? Then shalt thou join the other rebel monks. Men-at-arms, away with him! He but wanted the mitre for his own ugly head; but my dear mass-priest, thou shalt have it, and none but thee, for I can rely on thy faith and love, and thou art the handsomest monk that ever shaved a crown or wore a hood." And as she spake the last words, she looked so lovingly at him that it was a shame to see.

Well! our false and double-dealing sub-prior was whirled away to the dungeon, and the remaining officials and cloister monks were commanded by Matilda to begin the election of Father Anselm and finish it off hand, the countess vowing by the

visage of St. Luke that she would not take food again until the thing was done.

The terrible threats of the countess and the subtle arguments which Father Hildebrand, the sub-prior, had made use of, in the belief that he was to be our abbat, had such weight with the fathers that they kissed the jewelled hand of Matilda, and went into the chapter-house; and there, in less time than had been wont to be spent in deliberation on the slightest business of the house (mailed knights and fierce men-at-arms standing by the chapter-door the while), they did name and elect the runagate Anselm to be our lord abbat, the monks of tender conscience merely holding up their hands in assent, and saying no word, but uttering in their secret souls that they acted under fear and violence, and that all this was uncanonical work and foul, and against the rule of St. Benedict. And then they all came forth from the chapter-house, singing *Benedictus Dominus;* and the countess and her painted damsels looked out from the windows of the abbat's house and laughed, and the armed and ungodly multitude set up a shout, as though they had gained a great victory. I will not tell how, in Father Anselm's inauguration in the church, the rules of our order, the canons, the decretals of councils, and the bulls of the pope, were all transgressed, or turned into a jest and mockery: these things are not to be forgotten, but I will not relate them. Instead of a godly bishop, it was the countess herself that placed the mitre on the head, and the ring on the finger of Father Anselm, and that gave him the first kiss and accolade—*Osculum Pacis,* while *Te Deum laudamus* was being

sung in the choir; but verily was it sung in so faint and plaintive a manner, that it sounded more like a *Miserere Domine*. But when it was over, the intrusive abbat was kissed by all the convent, according to rule; and *Benedicite* having been said, Father Anselm gave thanks to the monks for that they had chosen him, the least of them all, to be their lord and shepherd, not on account of his own merits, but solely by the will of God. O! sinful and sacrilegious Anselm, better had it been for thee that thou hadst never been born!

The will of the wicked woman was thus accomplished, but it brought her neither future worldly success nor present peace. That same night as I, Felix the Novice, lay in my cell unable to sleep, mourning for the loss of our good lord abbat, and ruminating on all which had since befallen us, I heard a cry, a piercing shriek, which rang through our cloisters and corridors, and through every part of our great abbey. Yea, as I afterwards learned, it was heard by the prior and by those that were with him in the prison underground. Cardiff castle did not ring and echo with so shrill a shriek of agony when the red-hot copper basin was held over the face of the Beauclerc's unhappy brother Duke Robert to sear his eyes and destroy his sight, as did now the abbey of Reading, which was mainly built in expiation of that great crime of Henricus. It was followed by a loud call for lights—lights in the queen's sleeping chamber. And lights were carried thither, and Matilda slept no more that night; and before the dawn of day preparations were made for her departure. The shriek was from her, the vision was hers. *O beate virgine!*

save us from ill deeds and an ill conscience, and the dreams they do bring. The vision of the Beauclerc's daughter, as it afterwards came to my knowledge, was this:—her father appeared before her, holding in his right hand his heart, which had not been brought to our abbey with his body, but which had been deposited in the church of St. Mary at Rouen, which his mother had founded; and this heart did distil great gouts of blood, as if in agony for the wrong which had been done our abbey, and the insults which had been heaped upon his grave; and the face of the spectrum was menacing and awful, and the visionary voice full of dread—the words so terrible that the countess would never repeat them save to her confessor.

In the same watches of the night there were moans and groans in the prison underground. Nor was it only the upbraiding of an evil conscience that caused Hildebrand, our sub-prior, so to lament and cry out. For our bellicose and choleric prior Reginald did beat him, and tweak him by the nose, reviling him as a Judas Iscariot; and, peradventure, he would have slain him outright, or have done him some great bodily harm, if the gentler and more circumspect sacrist and cellarer had not been there to intercede and intervene. Our prior was the strongest man that then lived in all these parts. A terrible man in his wrath was our prior! But his wrath was never kindled except against evil-doers, and the swinkers and oppressors of the poor. With all others he was as gentle as a lamb, and he was ever indulgent to error and all minor offences, as I, who lived long under his rule, can well testify—REQUIEM ÆTERNAM.

I, Felix, having in the bye-gone times had much familiarity and friendship with our two backsliding novices, Urswick the Whiteheaded from Pangbourne, and John-à-Blount from Maple-Durham, did much marvel how it fared with them since their apostacy, and did diligently seek them out in the great press which came with the countess, to the end that I might talk gently with them upon their transgressions, and obtain from them some knowledge of what had become of the little Alice and my prime friend young Arthur de Bohun, hoping hereby to gain tidings grateful and cheerful to the ear of the good and bountiful Ladie Alfgiva. But neither in the evening nor in the morning could I see Urswick or John among the people of the countess. Yet in the morning, just before the departure, I gave a bowman my only piece of money, and learned from him that a part of Matilda's host with sundry wains and horse-litters had not come with her unto Reading, but had taken a shorter road for Winchester; and so I did conclude that my two quondam comrades had gone with that company, and I did comfort myself with thinking that they had yet so much grace left in them as to have been averse to come back and witness our exceeding great misery. Yet did the archer spoil this my comfort by telling me that two black-eyed damsels had gone with that division, riding like men upon big war-horses. Of children the man knew nought; nor he nor any man of the meaner sort had been allowed to look into the wains or to approach the litters. There might be children, he said, among this moveable and vagrant host, but he had seen none. Here again did I grieve, for I loved Alice and Arthur right well,

and would have laid down an untold treasure in gold to have it in my power to speak comfortably unto the Ladie Alfgiva.

At the command of Father Anselm the monks of the house, and we the novices likewise, did form in processional order, and accompany Matilda from our gates even unto the Hallowed Brook, that branch of the swift and clear Kennet which floweth by the township; and halting on the bank of that holy and peaceful water, which ought not to have heard such notes, Father Anselm made us chaunt *Hosanna* and *Jubilate*, and promised to the Angevin countess a bloody and complete victory over all her enemies. And hence, upon *famam vulgi*, the trifling and ungrounded talk of the common people, who, in parts remote from Reading, knew not the violence which had been used, it was proclaimed to the world that the abbat and monks of Reading, in this unhappy year eleven hundred and forty-one, had received the empress-queen with the highest honours, and had made themselves her servants and beadsmen. *Pater de Cœlis, Deus, miserere nobis!*

VI.

While she was yet at Oxenford, Matilda had rudely summoned the Bishop of Winchester, legate to the pope and brother to King Stephen, to appear in her presence and give an account of his actions and intentions. The bishop had replied that he was getting ready for her; and this was true enough, for he was manning and victualling the castles which he had built within his diocese as at Waltham, Farnham, and divers other places. Upon quitting our house at Reading, Matilda hoped, by a rapid march, to surprise the bishop within Winchester, and to make him captive, and to send him loaded with chains to join the king his brother in Bristowe Castle, in despite of his legatine and episcopal character and the authority of the holy see. But the lord bishop was ever wary and well advised, and before the countess could reach Winchester he withdrew from that most royal city, having first fortified his episcopal residence therein, and set up his brother's standard on the roof. Matilda was treacherously admitted into the royal castle at Winchester, whither she summoned her half-brother the great Earl of Gloucester, and her uncle David, king of Scots, who had been for some time in England vainly endeavouring to make her follow mild and wise counsels. The Scots king

and Gloucester, and the Earls of Hereford and Chester, went straight to Winchester and abided with the queen and her court in the castle. But the bishop had made his palace as strong as the castle, and when the party of Matilda laid siege to it, the bishop's garrison, being resolved not to yield, did many valorous and some very sinful deeds. They sallied more than once against the people of Matilda, and put them to the rout; and they hurled combustibles from the palace, and set fire to the houses of the town that stood nearest to the palace in order to drive thence the enemy's archers; but by their thus doing, the abbey of nuns within the town, and the monastery called the Hide without the town walls were consumed, to their great sin and shame. Here was a crucifix made of gold and silver and precious stones, the gift of King Canute, the Dane; and it was seized by the ravenous flames, and was thrown from the rood-loft to the ground, and was afterwards stripped of its ornaments by order of the bishop-legate himself, and more than five hundred marks of silver and thirty marks of gold were found in it, and given as largesse to the soldiers; for, whether they stood for Stephen or for Matilda, or whether they did battle with the sanction of the church or warred against its authority, these fighting men did mainly look to pay and plunder. And at a later season the abbey of nuns at Warewell was also burned by William de Ypres, an abandoned man, who feared neither God nor men, and who did change sides as often as any one; but at this season he was for King Stephen, and he set fire to the religious house for that some of Matilda's people had secured themselves within it.

Having made a ruin all round the episcopal palace, the bishop's garrison, being confident of succour, waited the event. The legate did not make them wait long. Being reinforced by Queen Maud and the stout citizens of London, who to the number of two thousand took the field for King Stephen, clad in coats of mail, and wearing steel casques on their heads, like noble men of war (more money, I wis, had they in their pouches than most of our noble knights or pseudo proceres), he turned rapidly back upon Winchester, and besieged the besiegers there. By the first day of the Kalends of August, or nigh upon the festival of Saint Afra, saint and martyr, the bishop did gird with a close siege the royal castle of Winchester. Herein were Matilda, the King of Scots, the Earls of Gloucester, Hereford, and Chester, and many others of note; and of all these not one would have escaped if it had not been for the respect paid by the bishop and the party of King Stephen for the festivals of the church, which verily ought to be held by all parties as Truces of God, neither party doing anything while such truce lasts. But when the siege had endured the space of forty and two days, and when those within the royal castle had eaten up all their victual, the 14th day of September arrived, which blessed day was the festival of the Holy Rood, and a sabbath-day besides; and lo! at a very early hour in the morning of that day—*Festa duplex*, while my lord bishop's host were hearing mass, or confessing their sins—which alas! were but too numerous—Matilda mounted a swift horse, and, attended by a strong and well-mounted escort, crept secretly and quietly out of the castle. Her half-brother the Earl of Glouces-

ter followed her at a short distance of time, with a number of knights, English, Angevins and Brabançons, who had all engaged to keep between the countess and her pursuers, and to risk their own liberty for the sake of securing hers. They all got a good way upon the Devizes road before the beleaguerers knew that they were gone. But so soon as it was known that they had broken the Truce of God, the bishop's people were to horse, and began a hot pursuit; and at Stourbridge the Earl of Gloucester and his band of knights were overtaken, and, after a fierce battle, were for the most part made prisoners. But while the long fight lasted, the countess, still pressing on her swift steed, reached Devizes, the work of, and the cause of so much woe unto, the magnificent castle-building Roger, late bishop of Sarum. But the strong castle of Devizes was not furnished with victual, so that the countess could not tarry there; and being in a great fear as to what might befal her on the road, she put herself upon a feretrum or death-bier, as if she were dead, and caused herself to be drawn in a hearse from Devizes unto Gloucester, whereat she arrived in that guise, not without the wonderment of men and the anger of the saints. Of all who had formed her strong rearward guard on her flight from Winchester castle, the Earl of Hereford alone reached Gloucester castle, and he arrived in a wretched state, being wounded and almost naked. The other barons and knights who escaped from the fight of Stourbridge threw away their arms and essayed to escape in the disguise of peasants; but some of them, betrayed by their foreign speech, were seized by the English serfs, who bound them with cords and drove them before them with whips

to deliver them up to their enemies. Yea some of the churls did cruelly maltreat and maim these proud knights from beyond sea, thereby taking vengeance for the great wrongs and cruelties which by them had been committed. Nay men of prelatical dignity were not respected, for they had had no bowels for the people, who now stripped them naked and scourged them. The King of Scots, Matilda's uncle, got safe back to his own kingdom; but her half-brother, the most important prisoner that could be taken, was conveyed to Stephen's queen Maud, who laid him fast in Rochester castle, but without loading him with chains as Matilda had done unto Stephen, for Queen Maud was merciful and generous of heart.

Sir Alain de Bohun, who had joined the legate with a good force before the siege of Winchester Castle was begun, made haste to enter into that castle when it was abandoned by Matilda and given up by the few soldiers that remained in it. It was no thirst for blood and no appetite for plunder that made our good Caversham lord enter into the fortalice; but it was his fatherly love for his only boy, and his tenderness for the little Alice, who had grown up as his daughter. He thought that in so hurried and rough a departure the children whom he had traced to Winchester Castle must have been left therein; but although he searched every part of the castle, as well below ground as above, he could not find the children, or any trace of them, nor could he from the prisoners taken learn more than that a fine young boy and a beautiful little girl, together with sundry foreign damsels, had been sent from Winchester a day or twain before the legate commenced the siege of the castle. Sir

Alain, albeit sorely disappointed, thanked Heaven that the children had not been separated. A little later in this year's terrible war, when Sir Alain de Bohun had discomfited a force commanded by Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, his once cherished friend, but now his deadliest foe, and had well nigh taken Sir Ingelric prisoner, a writing was in secret delivered unto the good lord of Caversham by one who wore pilgrim's weeds, but who was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and, in verity, a fautor and spy of the countess. Sir Alain being competently learned, and well able to read without the assistance of his mass-priest, who was not there to aid him, did peruse the secret missive, which did tell him in the name of Matilda that she had his son in sure-keeping, and would never deliver him up or permit the eye of father or mother to be blessed with the sight of him until Sir Alain should have abandoned the traitor Stephen and have joined the rightful queen of England; and that if he long failed so to do, the boy would be sent beyond sea and immured in an Angevin castle, where all traces of him would be for ever lost, and where, doubtlessly, he would soon perish. "But if," said the letter, "Sir Alain de Bohun will follow the loyal and wise example of his once friend Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe and come join the queen, her grace will receive him with honour, and Sir Ingelric will forget that which is passed, and the boy shall be restored, and the little maiden likewise, and they shall be contracted in marriage, and the queen will give a rich dower to Alice out of her own royal domains, and Sir Ingelric and Sir Alain may live neighbourly and happily together as aforetime."

Sir Alain, who could write as well as read, re-

plied in few words that his conscience forbade his breaking oaths to King Stephen; that he could not change sides either through fear or through interest; that he could not subject his lance to the distaff, or believe that the warlike baronage of England would ever live quietly under the rule of a woman; that he must trust to God and his saints for the protection of his only child, as also for the well-being of his not less than daughter; and that if it were the will of Heaven that the children, who had been brought up so lovingly together, should be conjoined at some future day in holy matrimony (of which in happier days there had been some talk between him and the little maiden's father), it would not be in the power of empress or queen to prevent it. "If," said Sir Alain de Bohun in terminating his epistle, "if, oh Matilda! thou shouldest so far forget the tender feelings of a woman and mother as to do harm to mine only son, and thereby bring my wife with sorrow to the grave, God will so strengthen mine arm in battle as to enable me to take a fearful vengeance upon thy party and upon some that are nearest to thee. But thou wilt not do that which thou sayest. So let me have no more secret, tampering missives. When Thamesis flows backward from Caversham to Oxenford instead of pursuing its course to the everlasting sea, then, but not until then, will Sir Alain de Bohun prove false to his oath and traitor to King Stephen."

Circa id tempus, or nigh upon the time that Sir Alain sent this response unto Matilda, Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, having composed his feud with that family and kindred, espoused the rich widow of that Sir Jocelyn who had burned his wife, the

mother of the little Alice, in his house, and who had been by him slain in the Falbury of Reading, almost at our gates. The ladie of Sir Jocelyn had acquired an ill-fame during her widowhood, for she was greedy of other people's goods and avaricious of her own, faithless unto her friends, merciless to her foes, and to her vassals and serfs haughty and cruel. It was as much from the darkness of her deeds as from her foreign and dark complexion, that she had gotten all through the country the name of The Dark Ladie. But she was rich, passing rich, and aspiring, and allied with some of our greatest men, and Sir Ingelric had given up his whole soul to ambition and gold. This unseemly matrimony was mainly brought about by the countess, and there were others of the like sort, which all terminated in misery and woe, and in visible manifestations of God's wrath and vengeance.

The Dark Ladie, who had done much mischief in the land in her widowed condition, became still more terrible as the wife of Sir Ingelric, and that lost knight became all the worse for his union with her. They crammed their castle at Speen with a most ungodly garrison, and with prisoners they kept and tortured for ransom.

King Stephen being a close prisoner in the castle of Bristowe, and the Earl of Gloucester being well guarded in Rochester Castle, each of the contending parties was, in a manner, without a head, for Stephen's brother, the bishop-legate, was, after all, but a priest, and the woman Matilda was nothing without her half-brother. A negociation was therefore set on foot for a mutual release of prisoners. This was several times interrupted, and at each interruption the party of King Stephen threatened to

send the Earl of Gloucester out of the land unto Boulogne, there to be buried in a castle-prison deep under the ground, and the party of Matilda threatened to send King Stephen over to Ireland and consign him to the wild Irishry; but at last, on the first of the kalends of November, it was agreed between them that the great Earl of Gloucester should be exchanged for King Stephen; and the earl and the king being both liberated, each betook himself to the head-quarters of his friends and partisans. Both factions now stood much as they did previously to the battle of Lincoln; but fearfully had the people of England suffered in the interim. And yet, after all these sufferings, neither faction did turn its thoughts *ad regnum tranquillandum*; but both did prepare for more battles and sieges, sending forth their bands of foreigners and leaving the cruel castle-holders to seize, torture, plunder and kill. While the land was thus weeping tears of blood, the king and his brother, the bishop, made repair unto London, where the king had his best friends, and where the legate did summon a great ecclesiastical council to meet at Westminster on the 7th of the kalends of December, *ad pacem componendam*, for the composing of peace unto the church and kingdom. When this council met on the appointed day, which was in the octaves of Saint Andrew, King Stephen addressed the prelates: he mildly and briefly complained of the wrongs and hardships he had suffered from his vassals, unto whom he had never denied justice when asked for it; he said that if it would please the nobles and bishops of the realm to aid him with men and money, he trusted so to work as to relieve them from the fear of a shameful submission to the

yoke of a woman, and so to succeed in his enterprises as to put an end to intestine war and havoc, and establish his throne in peace. When the king had done speaking, the legate his brother, who only nine months before had in the synod held at Winchester declared for Matilda, rose and proclaimed that the pope had ordered him to release and restore his brother, that Matilda had observed nothing of what she had sworn to him; that the great barons of England had performed their engagements towards her, and that she, not knowing how to use her prosperity with moderation, had violated all her engagements and oaths; that she had even made attempts against his, the legate's, liberty and life; and that this freed him from the obligations of the oaths he had taken to the Countess of Anjou, for he would not longer call her queen. The legate further said that the judgment of Heaven was visible in the prompt punishment of her perfidy, and that God himself now restored his brother the rightful King Stephen to the throne. Albeit there were some among them who had but lately quitted the party of Matilda, the prelates and great men at Westminster assembled did agree that all loyal men ought forthwith to arm for King Stephen, and that the adherents of the countess should be everywhere stripped of their usurped authority, whether in church or civil government; that forced elections should be all annulled, and that sentence of excommunication should go forth against all the obstinate and irreclaimable partisans of the countess. And the Bishop of Winchester, as legatus à latere, did stand up with a new bull of the pope in his right hand, and pronounced the dread sentence against all such as should disturb the peace in

favour of the Countess of Anjou, or should build new castles in the land, or invade the rights and privileges of the church, or wrong the poor and defenceless.

Judge ye if the news of these high proceedings at Westminster did not bring with them joy and comfort unto the friends of the late Lord Abbot Edward and all the honest monks of Reading abbey! Besides the sin and shame of his forced election, we had suffered many things at the hands of Anselm during the few months that he had held rule over us. In all that time he had kept the stout-hearted prior Reginald in the prison underground, and had maliciously devised penances and punishments for all such members of the community as had pitied the prisoner. He had alienated and sold some of the abbey lands to furnish out men-at-arms for his countess. He had half-starved the brotherhood, and no hospitality had he exercised unto strangers except to some Angevin marauders; and when he went away to see the countess, which more than once he did, he left in the abbey some of these outlandish men to keep us in submission and dread. But now his evil reign was over, for so soon as they had learned what had passed at Westminster, and had gotten a rescript from the legate, the elders of our house took counsel together and resolved to liberate Reginald the prior, and offer him the mitre, and to throw Father Anselm into the prison instead of the prior. And the thing was easy to do, for by this time Anselm had given offence to every cloister monk, novice, and lay-brother, and the warier sort did all opine that now that King Stephen was liberated, and his enemies excommunicated by the legate, the cause of the countess must be altogether desperate.

And so with one voice and one will Anselm was seized and thrown into the underground cell, and the prior was brought forth, and conducted in triumph to the abbat's house, and there told that he must be our lord abbat. Most true it was that he had never wished for this post of eminence, and now prayed the brotherhood to elect the chamberlain or the sacrist or any experienced cloister-monk rather than him; but the universal will and voice of the community would not be gainsayed, and in the course of a few days the prior was unanimously elected, by those who had the right of voting in the Chapter, to be our abbat; and then we all carried him into the church in procession, sang *Te Deum laudamus*, with loud and jubilant voices, rang the bells until they well nigh cracked, and set him on the abbat's throne, and did him all the homage that is due unto the mitred abbat of a royal abbey; and then brought up Father Anselm, and drove him out of our gates with many kicks behind, for our new lord abbat would not have him linger and pine in that cold dark cell underground, saying that he knew to his cost how sad a thing it was, and that to hold any captive therein would be to make the wholesome air of the house infaust and insalubrious.

As he was crossing the Holy Brook the townfolk of Reading, who no more loved Anselm than did we the monks, caught him by the girdle and threw him into the stream, so that he was nearly drowned at the place where he had forced us against our conscience to psalmodize for Matilda. He took these things so much to heart that he got him back into Normandie. It was said by some that he falsified his history and his very name, and so

gained admission into the abbey of Bec, but from the volatile nature of the man, I did rather give my belief to another report—to wit, that he turned himself into a jongleur or trouvere, and went about France with women and menestrels and other lewd people.

Sundry times he promised, and did in his heart intend, to visit our house, and force the restitution of the lands which the usurping Anselm had alienated to ungodly men; yet King Stephen came not to Reading for many a year, and when he came he could not tarry with us. But the king sent Sir Alain de Bohun to build up and restore the ruinous castle of Reading; and when this had been done, and when, by the vassals and serfs of the abbey, the walls of the township had been strengthened, we entered upon the enjoyment of such peace and tranquillity as we had not known during five long years; for the Philistines could not come suddenly upon us, or easily break through our defences. At Reading, indeed, we did live as in a little Goshen, while war was raging all round about; and albeit we could not always defend our outlying manors and houses from fire and sword, but suffered many and grievous losses in serfs, cattle, corn, hay, farm-houses, and granges; we yet suffered less than other communities, and nothing at all in comparison with the abbat and monks of Abingdon, our neighbours, but not always friends. Driven from their once quiet seat at Oxenford, or too sorely troubled in their residence there by the people of the countess, and the constant coming and going of warlike and plundering bands, many of the professors and pupils, *doctores et alumni*, did come unto Reading, and under the shadow of

our secure and peaceful walls, pursue those studies which were destined to give to England a learned priesthood and a universal increase of civility. Our brotherhood too did attend to that learning and to the making of many good books which had done honour to the Benedictines ever since their first foundation and in whatsoever country their order was established. Our scribes and copyists once more worked amain in their quiet cells, multiplying with a slow but correct pen the precious works of antiquity, and the holy books, and the lives of saints; and need there was for this labour, since other religious houses had no peace or leisure, and great and fearful was the destruction of books and codices in the conflagrations and stormings of this long intestine war. But for the labours of the Benedictines and some few learned monks of other orders in England, and but for the blessed saints, who kept alive their love of letters and books, and gave them heart and strength to work even in a season of horror and despair, the land would have been plunged back into utter barbarism, and would have been void of learning and of books as when the great Alfred came to the throne. In the tranquil easy days in which I now write, for the solace of my lonely hours and for the preservation of the fading memory of the times of trouble, and for no fame or vain glory, the sense of these things hath already become faint in men's minds, and mayhap, in after ages, when the world shall have made great strides in learning and all civility, these labours of the Benedictines will be altogether forgotten, or be treated as nought. Yet was it they that did mainly save the land from a great retrograde step; and I, Felix, *servus servorum*, the humblest or least

worthy member of the order (who have so often seen shining in our western turret the midnight lamp which lighted our copyists and makers of books at their solitary labours, and who have seen those labours steadily pursued when the country was ringing with the din of arms, and was blazing with midnight fires, and when no earthly honour or reward whatsoever seemed to attend their toil), would fain put upon record some faint notice of that which was done in the evil times by our house and order: but not unto us the praise, but unto thee, oh Lord! They, themselves, sought for no applause—*Celata virtus*—their virtue is all hidden: not so much as the name is preserved of these good and laborious monks who did so much for learning and religion.

It was about the time in which Sir Alain de Bohun did re-edify Reading Castle, that I, Felix, recovering from my early podagra, under the instruction and guidance of old father Ambrosius (he hath now been many years at rest in the chancel of our church, and I in gratitude do say a daily prayer over his grave), did first addict myself to the use of the pen, beginning with a missal, which our Pisan limner did richly illuminate; and when this my first essay was finished, I did present it unto the Ladie Alfgiva in her house at Caversham, and that bountiful and right noble ladie did acknowledge the gift by sending unto the abbey five milch cows and a goodly stock of Caen fowls, which our community at that time much needed, for there had been a murrain among cattle, and the spoilers had again swept bare our best farms.

Many were the tears shed by me, and many the

masses and prayers said by our house for the said Ladie Alfgiva and the two missing children. Grief and anxiety for her son and foster daughter did at times almost bow that noble dame to the earth, and her grief was the greater because of her frequent loneliness and the hazards her lord was running in the many sieges and battles of the times; but although her health declined and her cheek became wan, hope and trust in heaven's goodness did not forsake her. A pious dame was Ladie Alfgiva, and of a nature high and noble in all things. Though thinking day and night of her only son and her only living child, she never once implored Sir Alain to purchase the boy's release and his restoration to her arms by proving false to his oath and untrue to the king, and every time that her lord came to his home she dried her tears and did all that she could to conceal her great grief so long as he tarried with her. The virtuous woman is a crown unto her husband, and verily there be wives as well as virgins that merit the crown the church awards to saints and martyrs. Saint Catherine on the wheel, or Saint Agatha at the fiery stake, suffered not pangs so acute as those of this bereaved mother; and their torture was soon over, and while they suffered they saw from the wheel and stake the heavens opening to the eye, and they heard heavenly music in the air which made them deaf to the shouts of the infidel rabble that were slaying them. So much bliss and so great a foretaste of celestial joy was not vouchsafed unto the secular Ladie Alfgiva, and could not be expected by her: nevertheless had she her happy visions and sweet soothing sounds during her long bereavement. More than once,

in her great loneliness, when her lord was away fighting for King Stephen, as she stood on the battlements of her castle at eventide, she saw her boy and his playmate Alice sitting on the flowery bank which slopes down to the river, as they used often to sit before Sir Ingelric did steal them away; and she heard their merry little voices on the breeze, and their frolicsome laugh. Some would say that she but took two stray lambs for the lost children, and that the sounds she heard were only made by the evening breeze among the tall growing grass and the leafy coppices; but I, Felix, could never so interpret it unto her. But constantly did I strive to give her comfort, and to conceal from her the cruelties that were daily committed in the land, and to stop the thoughtless indiscreet tongue of her people who would have filled her ears with horrible tales of murdered children and babes, for not the massacre of the Innocents in Judea was so fierce as the slaughter that raged in England.

VII.

When our good lord abbat Edward had been dead well nigh a year, to wit, in the summer season of eleven hundred and forty-two, King Stephen, from great fatigue of body and uneasiness of mind, fell sore sick, and lay for a long while like one that was dying. While this lasted the barons of his party did many evil deeds, there being no authority strong enough to check their lawlessness; and, at the same troublous season, the partisans of Matilda and the foreign mercenaries in her pay did ravage all the western parts; and more robbers came over from Anjou, Normandie, and Picardie, asking no pay, but only free quarters, and the right of plundering the poor English. It was a Benedictine from Rome that had studied medicine in the school of Salerno, that brought a healing potion to the king, and snatched him back to life from the jaws of the grave.

So soon as Stephen could mount his war-horse he marched with a great force unto Oxenford, where the countess had fixed her court; and he invested that unhappy city with a firm resolution never to move thence until he had gotten his troublesome rival into his hands. After some fighting, in which many lives were lost by both parties, Stephen burst into the town, and having

set fire to a large part thereof, he laid siege unto the castle into which Matilda and her people had retired. Now the castle of Oxenford, standing in the midst of waters, was very strong. From St. Michael's mass well nigh unto Christ's mass, *à festo Michœelis usque ad natali Domini*, did King Stephen persevere in the siege, telling all men that complained of the hard service that he must have the castle, and in it the countess, and that then there would be peace in England.

In the mid siege, our new lord abbat, who had had much correspondence with the lord abbat of Abingdon, with the prior and monks at Hurley, and with other Benedictine houses, for the good purpose of saving the remnant of the Christian people in those parts, and putting an end to the cruelties and many deadly sins which were daily committed, received from the Abingdon cell at Cumnor, nigh unto Oxenford, a missive from the abbat of that community, who entreated him, now that the country was clear of Matilda's people, to repair unto Cumnor that they might take council together, and together confer with King Stephen, who seemed at that moment to be in a heavenly disposition, and to have an exceeding great desire to tranquillize the land, and to consult with the loyal abbat of Reading. Now albeit Stephen had, by means of Sir Alain de Bohun, expressed his great contentment at the expulsion of Father Anselm, and at all that had been done by our community since the great meeting of the synod at Westminster, the election of the prior to be our lord abbat had not yet been formally confirmed by the king; and therefore Dominus Reginaldus did make haste to accept the invitation of the abbat of

Abingdon, and to get him unto Cumnor. Not for any merit of mine own, but through the kind favour he was ever pleased to show me, I was chosen to be of the travelling party. Philip the lay-brother went likewise; but Philip was a brave and ready man, quick-witted, and well-trained aforetime in the use of arms, and in the riding of the great horse. Although the nerve of the Angevin faction was shut up in Oxenford Castle, my Lord Reginald was too wise a man to put himself on the road with a weak escort; for he well knew that there were many barons and knights, calling themselves King Stephen's friends and the friends of mother church, that would not scruple to plunder an abbat, or to keep him in their donjons for the sake of a great ransom; and well nigh every castle between Reading and Oxenford, and between Oxenford and Bristowe, was a den of thieves, and worse; and Lord Reginald had not lost his bellicose humour by being promoted to the highest dignity. "By the head of Saint John the Baptist," said he, as we were about to take our departure, "not a robber of them all shall lay me in his crucet house without having a hard fight for it! Before I bear the weight of their sachenteges, I will make them taste the sharpness of my lance, and the weight of my mace." And so was it that we went forth from Reading forty and one strong, and every man of us armed cap-à-pie, and most of us well mounted. The lord abbat wore a steel cap under his hood, and a coat of mail and steel hose under his robes; and he had a two-edged sword at his side and a heavy mace at the pommel of his saddle, and a good lance resting on stirrup-iron; yea, and I, Felix the novice, wore ringed

armour and a steel casque, and had my sword and lance: Englehard de Cicomaco, that famed and well-judging knight, who was one of the retainers of our abbey, doing military service for the abbey lands he held near Hurley Common, did say that I looked a very proper man-at-arms, and did bestride my steed like a knight—but these are vanities, and I by my vows did renounce all vanity. Yet can I but mark that when we came to Cumnor a great baron asked who was that gallant well-favored young soldier that rode in the van, near to the lord abbat of Reading.

On our way we tarried for a night at Berecourt by Pangbourne, where we had a goodly house among the hills which had wont to be a summer residence of our abbats. But this goodly house had been robbed and spoiled, and our vassals and serfs had not yet been enabled to restore it. We were therefore roughly lodged and not over well fed; but that which affected me more grievously than this was the sad condition of the poor people of Pangbourne, who had been so prosperous and happy before these accursed wars began. Sad were the tales they told, and not the least sad of them all was this: my quondam friend and brother novice, Urswick the Whiteheaded, had been in the spring season of this year at Pangbourne with a great band of English and foreign robbers, ransacking the place of his birth and maltreating the friends among whom he had been born and bred; and his aged father had to his face pronounced a curse upon him; and in a quarrel with some savage men from Anjou touching the division of spoil, Urswick had been slain on the bank of Thamesis, before he could recross the river or get out of sight

of his native village: and, since that black morning, or so our serfs did say, his well-known voice had been heard at midnight, and he had been seen by the light of the moon, now habited as a monk, and wringing his hands by the river side where he fell, looking piteously towards the abbey of Reading, from which he had fled, and now equipped as a man-at-arms, and galloping on a great black horse, across the country and up the steep hills and down the precipices—fire flashing from the eyes and nostrils of the infernal steed, and from the burning heart of the lost novice.

On our march from Pangbourne we shunned the townships and castles as much as we could, and took especial heed not to get near unto Wallingford; for the strong castle there was held by Brian Fitzcount, the most terrible of all Matilda's partisans, and the greatest robber of them all; and the castle at this very time was known to be full of unfortunate prisoners whom he kept and daily tortured in order to make them disclose their supposed hidden treasures, or to pay a heavier ransom than any they had the means of paying. Christian burghers and franklins, noble knights who had warred against the heathen in Palestine, nay churchmen, the highest in the hierarchy, were known to be in his foul prison, pent up with Jewish traffickers and money-dealers; the noblest and the purest with the vilest and foulest of the earth: and the gaolers and torturers of Brian Fitzcount treated the Christians no whit better than the Israelites that were chained at their sides, contaminating them with their touch and poisoning the air they breathed. Night after night, such of the poor townfolk as had contrived to live in the

midst of these horrors without deserting Wallingford, were startled in their sleep by the cries and shrieks which came from the grim castle; and when in the morning they adventured to ask what had been toward in the night watches, the Count's people would tell them jestingly from the battlements that it was nothing, or that Brian Fitzcount had only been coining a little more money, or that a Jew had had his teeth drawn, or that a traitor to the empress-queen had been questioned about his treason and treasure.

The great prison in this castle of Wallingford was called Brian's Hell, and it was deserving of the name. But the fiends were abroad, as well as within those abominable walls—the spirit of the arch-fiend was everywhere. The village churches and the chapels and hospitia in solitary places had been destroyed or turned into fortalices; deep trenches were cut in the churchyards among the consecrated abodes of the dead; the sweet sounding church bells had been thrown down, and engines of war had been set up on the church towers. Yea! the resting places which the church and the piety of the faithful had built and stocked for the poor and hungry wayfarers in the desert had been plundered and destroyed—the last holy resting-places had been profaned! The temple of peace and mercy had been turned into a place of arms!

As we came near to Hanney mead and the river Ock—that pleasant little river that wells from the ground near Uffington and drops into Thamesis by Abingdon, and that has the most savoury pike that be fished in these parts—we came suddenly upon a castellum which we could by no means avoid; for it had been lately built, and we knew not of

it, and it lay so low among marshes that we saw it not until we were close upon it. It lay close to the only road that led to the ford across the river. To a trumpet which sounded a challenge from the walls our party replied with sound of trumpet, and then at the abbat's commandment proceeded deliberately onward. As we came nearer, the warder of the castle shouted "For whom be ye?"

"What if I say for King Stephen?" quoth our lord abbat, rising in his stirrups and waving his lance over his head.

"Long live King Stephen! an thou wilt," said the warder, "but thou must pay toll ere thou mayest pass the river."

"The lord abbat of Reading pays not even bridge toll, and here there is no bridge," said our lord abbat, "and fords be ever free. Go read our charter: *In terris et aquis, in transitibus pontium*, by land and by water, and in the passing of bridges, we be free from all tolls or consuetudinary payments. If thou wilt have toll from me, i'faith, thou must come forth and take it."

"Thou art but a traitor," cried the warder. "Long live the empress-queen!" shouted divers armed men who ran to the battlement, and as they did shout did also bend their cross-bows. But by this time we had all put spurs to our horses, and we dashed past the ugly castellum and across the ford without receiving any hurt, albeit a quarrel did hit the lord abbat's steed near unto the tail and make him caper. Had our party been less numerous and warlike, doubtless we had been lodged that night among Brian Fitzcount's prisoners.

The town and abbey of Abingdon we did also avoid, keeping a little to the westward thereof; for

another tyrant and man destroyer had built himself a great castle in that vicinage, and there had been many feuds and factions and changing of sides among the monks of Abingdon, while the best and most trusty of that community were known to be at the house at Cumnor with their abbat. The roads were deep and miry, the way was long, the days were short, and the weather of the saddest; but on the third evening after our departure from Reading we arrived at the Cell of Cumnor, where our lord abbat was hospitably received by the abbat of Abingdon, and where we of less note found good lodging and entertainment, to wit, a blazing wood fire whereat to dry our clothes, clean straw to sleep upon, and salted meats and manchets to eat, and good Oxenford ale to drink.

On the morrow, when it wanted but two days of the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, King Stephen with a few lords and knights rode from the beleaguer of Oxenford Castle to Cumnor, and did there confer with the two abbats and other ecclesiastics. What passed in the council chamber I cannot tell; but it was seen by all of us that the king wore a cheerful aspect, and it was told unto us all that the castle was reduced to extremity, and that, there being no escape thence, the countess must soon surrender or die of starvation. When the conference was over, and when the king had been entertained as royally as the abbat of Abingdon could do it in that place and at that time—and when Stephen had laid his offering upon the altar in the church, he rode back to the siege, and our lord abbat of Reading, and all of us who had come with him, attended the king to Oxenford, intending there to tarry until the surrender of Matilda.

"With the saints to my aid," said our abbat, "I may prevail upon this perverse daughter of the Beauclerc to deliver herself quietly up, and upon King Stephen to be merciful unto her in her captivity. If the Angevin countess should still persevere in the wickedness of her ways, and attempt to escape again on a bier instead of putting an end to the woes of the land by a surrender, forty good swords the more may do service for the king. My children, my friends, ye will all be vigilant in this matter, and do duty like good soldiers, if it should be required of ye!" And as the good lord Reginald went into Oxenford town and saw the palace which the Beauclerc king had there builded, and saw the engines of war, and heard the horrid noise of war all about, he heaved a sigh and said, "*Eheu! quantum mutatur!* How be all things changed! Here in the days of Henricus Primus, that peace-loving king, *Rex pacis*, have I seen nothing but quiet scholars and learned men, and the court of a king that was an academe and a sanctuary of letters. Wot ye, my boy Felix, why it was that Henricus did build him a palace here?" And I having confessed my ignorance as became me, our abbat went on to say, "Felix, my son, the Beauclerc had collected in his most royal park at Woodstock many wild beasts from foreign parts, such as lions and bears, leopards and lynxes, and porcupines, and of these he had a wonderful great liking, and here at Oxenford learned men were collecting every year in greater numbers, and in the company of these scholars his grace did take marvellous delight: in truth it were not easy to say whether he liked the beasts better than the bookish men, or the bookish men better than the

beasts; but, to have the enjoyment of both, he oft-times fixed his residence between them; and therefore was it, my son, that Henricus Primus raised this royal dwelling, and preferred it above his other houses." That very night, albeit I knew it not then, there came to King Stephen the very unfavourable news that the countess's half-brother, the great Earl of Gloucester, who for some months had been absent, had returned into England with a great body of Angevin and Norman troops, and had brought with him Henry Fitz-empress, Matilda's young son and heir, had stormed and taken the castle of Wareham, had been joined by many traitorous barons who had but lately given fresh oaths of fidelity to Stephen, and was marching through the land to relieve his sister in Oxenford Castle and fall upon her besiegers. Maugre the pains that were taken to conceal this intelligence, it got abroad, and was by some double-dealer conveyed to Matilda within the castle.

That night there fell a great fall of snow, and after the snow a sharp and most sudden frost did set in, which in less than twenty-four hours did cover the river Isis and the moat of the castle and the circumjacent marshes with thick ice. The beleaguerers made themselves great fires, and seemed not to remit in their watchfulness. I, Felix, with Philip the lay-brother, and Sir Englehard de Cicomaco, did mount guard and stand wakeful all that bitter night, opposite to a postern gate of the castle. From time to time some great officer of King Stephen went from watch to watch, and all round the lines to see that the people did their duty and slept not. Joy came to my heart, and the deadening cold seemed to quit my body, when

I saw Sir Alain de Bohun come to the place where I stood.

"Watch well to-night, oh Felix," said that brave and always courteous lord; "watch well to-night, and to-morrow will we have our enemy in our hands—and dear friends, too. Felix! I have had assurance that my son and thy little friend is within those walls! To-morrow Matilda must yield; so watch well that postern."

I kissed Sir Alain's hand, and vowed that not so much as a famished cat or rat should come forth of that gate, nor did there while my watch lasted.

On the next day, the vigil of St. Thomas, as soon as it was light, a white flag was raised in the camp in token of peace or truce, and our lord abbat, with a goodly train of ecclesiastics, bearing church banners and elevated crucifixes, came down to the very edge of the castle moat, and demanded speech of the countess; and Matilda ascended to the battlements, but rather to rebuke them than to hear them. I, Felix, being relieved from my night watch, did see that stern woman of many adventures and indomitable pride stand on the castle top in that cold, grey, leaden air. Thin was she, and gaunt and pale, like one that had suffered long fasting and sickness; but she had the same flashing eye and resolute look as at the time when she dictated her will to our house at Reading; and if her voice was more hollow, it was not less imperious and awe-commanding now than it was then. The lord abbat entreated her to give up the castle, promising, in the name of King Stephen, that no harm should be done to her or to any that were with her; that she should be honorably escorted to the coast, and there embarked for Anjou; that lands and

money should be given to her and her adherents with a liberal hand; and that the king would take all her partisans into his peace, if they would but be true to treaty, and give up a war which had already lasted so many years to the reproach of Christendom, and to the utter undoing of the people of England. The abbat told her that her famishing state was known, and that hope of escape there was none.

"And who told thee, oh meddling monk, that I ever thought of escape? Dost not know that the Earl of Gloucester is at hand, to do the thing which he did aforetime at Lincoln? We have meat and meal yet, and will abide the earl's coming. I will not throw open these gates, or quit these walls, until I see the false recreant Stephen in chains at my feet, praying again for that life which I ought to have rid him of long since."

As the proud woman said these words, I could see that many of our bystanders looked at one another with perplexity and alarm, and that divers even of the churchmen put on very thoughtful countenances, and did nothing and said nothing to aid our lord abbat, or to rebuke the countess, who in a great passion of wrath threatened to have him hanged for a felon under the archway of his own abbey.

Some there were that would have counselled an immediate assault upon the fortress; for albeit no breach had been made in those formidable walls, the moat was so frozen that it would bear any weight, and scaling ladders and other needful materials were not wanting. But the more cautious sort said that the famishing garrison were very numerous and very desperate; that it would be

better to wait a day or two, and have the castle upon composition; that the Earl of Gloucester had yet sundry days of march to perform; and that if he came with ever so great a host, he would find it no easy work to break through our barricades and defences, and get into the town. Some of the churchmen, moreover, did say that no enterprise of war would prosper during the festivals of the church; and, certes, the major part of King Stephen's soldiers did seem fully determined to keep this the vigil, and to-morrow the festival of St. Thomas the Apostle, according to the rubric, whether the king would have it so or not. Hence there was a very visible relaxation of vigilance. Refreshed by a short sleep in the day, I did watch again that night with the beleaguerers; but my post was not where it had been the night before, and in the morning, before I could be relieved, I learned that the countess had escaped through the postern which I had watched so well. Marvellous, truly, was the skill and fortune of the Beauclerc's daughter! She had escaped from Devizes by putting on the semblance and trappings of the dead, and now she had escaped from Oxenford like a sheeted ghost! A little after the midnight hour she had dressed herself all in white, and had thrown white sheets over Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, and three others of her knights; and she and these four sheeted warriors had stolen out of the castle by the postern gate, and had crossed the moat on the ice and traversed the ice-bound Isis, and creeping on their hands and knees over the deep white snow, they had escaped detection, and got safely through our lines and all our outposts. On foot, in the deep snow, Matilda with her attendant spectres tra-

velled to Abingdon; but there they found friends and horses, for the news of the coming of the Earl of Gloucester had reached the place, and had been very fatal to men's loyalty unto Stephen. From Abingdon, without resting there, the countess rode through that cold night to Wallingford Castle, where Brian Fitzcount received her very joyfully. But these things came to my knowledge afterwards; and when it was first heard that the countess was gone, none could tell how she was gone, or whither she had betaken herself. The notice was not given until more than seven hours after her departure, when, as the day began to dawn, a starving man-at-arms cried out from the battlements that the garnison were ready to throw open the gates unto King Stephen, and so save themselves from death by hunger, as the queen had fled thence, and was no longer in any danger. At first the news was not credited by any of the king's people; but soon the governor of the castle sounded trumpets for a parley, and held out a flag of truce, and offered to deliver up the castle upon condition that his life and the lives of his people should be spared. King Stephen himself came rushing to the post opposite the castle gate to learn the truth, and settle the conditions of surrender; and with him came Sir Alain de Bohun, mortified yet rejoiced, a much perplexed yet a happy man; for though it should be found that the scourge of England had escaped, he had a confident hope that she could not have carried away his son with her.

King Stephen spoke aloud to the castellan, and said, "This is but a fabulous rumour! The countess of Anjou is where she hath been these last three months! Unsay what hath been said! Tell me

that she is within those walls, and, starving as thou art, I will give thee more than the conditions thou askest—I will give thee wealth and honours! Only say that she hath not escaped."

"Earl of Moriton and Boulogne!" shouted the proud castellan, "if the empress queen were within these walls I would starve and die, but never open these gates unto thee! Let mine offer to surrender be a proof that she is gone hence. I swear, by the holy rood, that she hath been gone ever since midnight."

"Whither hath she gone?" cried Stephen.

"I know not, and would not tell thee if I did know; but 'tis likely she will soon tell thee where she is."

While the castellan was talking in this guise on the outer walls, many of our lords and knights, with their men-at-arms, got them to horse, and, dividing into different parties, went scouring over the country in all directions, some along the road that leads to Woodstock, some on the Abingdon road, some down the river towards Newnham, some towards Forest Hill, and some across the hills towards Islip and Weston-on-Green.

Many slips and falls had they on the frozen ice and slippery roads; yet was it all but a bootless chace. The party that went along the Abingdon road, and that came back even faster than they went, as Sir Brian Fitzcount had advanced a body of horse to the township of Abingdon, had met on their advance an aged shepherd who had been out in the night in search of some sheep that had been lost in the snow drifts; and this aged man had told them that about the midnight hour he had seen gliding along the road between Oxenford and

Abingdon five ghosts or revenants all in white, which he took to be the uneasy spirits of some who had perished in our diurnal slaughters; and this was all that was learned by our too late pursuing companies.

In the first heat of his wrath and bitterness of his disappointment the king refused to admit the garnison to capitulation, and threatened to hang them all, together with many of his own watch; but our lord abbat moderated his wrath. Sir Alain de Bohun, eager for sight of his boy, and always averse to bloodshed, did recommend mercy and moderation; and so, about mid-day, terms were granted, and the castle was given up to Stephen. I was among the first that entered with our good Lord of Caversham. Sir Alain found many friends among those who had been kept as prisoners by the Countess; but for some time he could not find his son, or hear anything concerning him, save that the boy had been seen in the castle a few days agone. Fearful thoughts agitated the loving father, and made him turn ghastly pale. Had the Countess in her rough nocturnal flight carried the boy with her? No, there was a knight who opened the postern-gate for her, and who swore upon his cross that none had gone forth but the empress-queen, Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, and the three other knights. Had the desperate woman in her fury against one of the most constant of her enemies taken the life of the dear boy? None would confess to the atrocious deed, yet none seemed to know what had befallen Sir Alain's son. In truth they were all ravenous and stupified with their excess of hunger, and were only eager to get out into the town, and at the meat and drink which

had been mercifully promised them; and for many a day few of them had taken any note of what was doing within the castle or in the lodging of Matilda. But the Lord of Caversham and the best of his own people, and I, Felix, and Philip, the lay-brother, did rush into the apartment of the Countess and ransack it well; and while we were in an inner room in the tower that looks upon Isis, we heard a feeble voice as of one lamenting, and pulling aside some hangings on the wall, we discovered a small low door under an arch, and thereupon Sir Alain, all of a tremble, cried out in a voice that went unto the hearts of all of us, "Who lieth within? Is it thou, mine only son?" and the faint voice said "My father," and said no more. The iron-bound door was locked, and the key was gone; but spite of its thickness and strength, we soon burst the door open with a mighty crash. I did enter that foul hole in the wall with Sir Alain, and did see and hear that which passed when he raised his boy from the dirty straw upon which he had fainted; but I have not the power to narrate that which I saw and heard. Nay, to speak more soothly, I did see but faintly, for the light that came into the cell through a narrow loophole was but scant, and my gushing tears did almost blind me. But we soon carried the boy out into wholesome air, and put wine to his lips; and he recovered and knew his father. And when he had eaten and gained strength, he told his sire, who had never before been seen so wrathful, that he had not tasted meat or drink for two whole days and nights. Verily it did seem that the Countess had destined him to die of starvation, and that she had herself secreted him in that

hideous hole in the castle-wall, for none of her attendants would confess any knowledge of the thing. But Sir Alain would not give credit to these protestations of ignorance, saying that some of the Countess's people must have known what was done in her own apartment, and sorely did he beat with the flat of his sword an old foreign hag that had been the Countess's chamber-woman, and two Angevins that had been in constant attendance upon her; and he swore more oaths than had ever come from his lips, that were it not for the love of the king his master, and for the king's honour, and for his own religious respect for compacts and treaties and capitulations of war, he would hang them all three on the top of that accursed tower.

So soon as I saw that the hope of the house of Caversham was restored to some of his strength (and he gave me a proof thereof by saluting me and taking me by the hand as an old friend), I went forth to try if I could gain some intelligence of the little Alice, who was not born to live separated from Arthur, and likewise of my whilom friend and companion John-à-Blount from Maple-Durham, who had fled from our house at Reading with the novice Urswick, of unhappy memory. I soon learned from some retainers of Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe that the little maiden, before the coming of King Stephen to Oxenford, had been bestowed with her step-mother in the strong castle at Old Speen, which Sir Ingelric had rebuilded; but the fellows knew not, or pretended not to know, anything touching our fugitive novice John-à-Blount. Therefore did I put my soul and body in peril by going into the very midst of the Countess Matilda's black-eyed damsels; for I thought in the

nature of things that he should be among those young Jezebels who had first led him astray. Albeit the merciful terms of capitulation were faithfully observed, and knights of good repute were stationed in the castle to see that no harm was done to those that had surrendered; the interior of the fortress was still a scene of unspeakable confusion and alarm. Fierce knights that had not prayed for many a day, and rough outlandish soldiers who knew not how to say a credo or an ave, were muttering orisons and telling their beads, or holding their crucifixes in their hands, crying ever and anon to the more truculent visaged of the king's people, "We have all rendered upon paction—We be all in the king's mercy and honour—Touch not our lives or limbs, or eyes, but give us to eat, or we perish!"

The women of the countess, whose eyes were much less bright and dangerous than when I last saw them in their pride and insolency at our abbey, lay all huddled and crouching together in a corner of the castle-yard, where divers clerks of Oxenford, with the marshal of King Stephen's camp, were making lists of the names and qualities of the prisoners. Many men, as well English as foreign, were standing near these affrighted and more than half-famished women; and a few young knights and esquires seemed to be speaking words of comfort to divers of them; but among these men I could not see John-à-Blount, from Maple-Durham, nor any young man that resembled him; and when I asked of many, they all told me that they knew nothing of the said John: which was grievous unto my soul, for I had hoped to find him there, and to reclaim him, and thereby save him from the

fate of the unhappy Urswick. As I was about to turn from that company of women, I was brought to a pause by a pair of eyes, swimming in tears, that did bind me to the spot, like one spell-bound. They were the large black eyes of that damsel in the short green kirtle, and of the incomparably small feet and ankles that had come salting and dancing up to me in the garden of our house at Reading; but alack, she danced not now, and seemed scarcely able to stand, and instead of the laughingest she had the saddest face; and she was all thin and haggard as the poorest of the wandering houseless beggars we had met on our march from Reading to Oxenford. I had the remnant of a manchet in the sleeve of my monastic gown, and though many eyes were upon me, and others might be as hungry as she was, I took forth the blessed piece of bread, and thrust it into her skinny hands, and then hurried away to Sir Alain de Bohun, who did forthwith order some meat and drink to be given to those poor outlandish starvelings.

On the day next after the surrender of the castle, the foreign women—praise and thanks to the Lord for that same!—were all sent away under a strong and reliable escort for the city of London, there to be kept by Stephen's good queen Maud until they should be ransomed or exchanged for other prisoners. And in the current of that same day we did hear but too surely what the escaped countess was a-doing. She had gone forth from Wallingford Castle with Brian Fitzcount and a great host of foreign mercenaries, and was marching to the westward to meet the Earl of Gloucester, who was not so near to Oxenford as had been reported, and she was again marking her evil path with blood

and flames. King Stephen resolved to follow her and bring the great earl to battle; but the countess and her half-brother having met in Wiltshire, retreated rapidly to the west, where lay their great strength in partisans and castles, and they threw themselves into the castle of Bristowe, which was their strongest hold all through the war. The king would have turned back to lay siege to Wallingford Castle, in the absence of its terrible lord the merciless Brian Fitzcount; but a plot broke out in the vicinage of London, and sundry barons raised the banner of Matilda in Essex, thereby obliging Stephen to march with all speed to the eastward. So Wallingford Castle remained in the hands of the robbers, to be a curse to the country and a den of torture: but we, the monks of Reading, with little aid but what the saints sent us, and with no loss of life to our party, did prevail over another band of thieves and destroy their den, to the inestimable relief and comfort of that country side.

VIII.

THE day before King Stephen marched from Oxenford to pursue the countess, our lord abbat, who grieved to see that his brother of Abingdon was influenced by the changes of the times and by the rumour of the great force which the Earl of Gloucester had brought with him, took his departure for his own abbey, and with us went Sir Alain de Bohun, who needs must restore his beloved son to his ladie and home ere he tried again the fortune of war or entered upon any new emprise. The lord of Caversham took with him a score of retainers, so that we were now sixty-two well-armed men. The young Lord Arthur sometimes rode before his father, and sometimes a manèged horse by himself, for the boy was now in his tenth year, and had been taught by times to do that which befits a knight. A proud and happy man I wis was Sir Alain as he looked upon his only son and thought of the great joy their return would give to the Ladie Alfgiva. Much also did I converse with the young Lord Arthur on the road, and he did tell me how much he had grieved when Sir Ingelric had carried away from him his little playmate who had travelled with him so many days in horse litters, and who had abided with him in so many castles that he could not tell the names of

half of them. A shrewd brave boy was the young Lord Arthur, and for his age marvellously advanced in letters; and I, Felix, had at times given him instruction before that Sir Ingelric did steal him away from his home so feloniously. Again, though through no fear, since our party was so strong and warlike, we shunned the townships and castles that lay near our road. Also did we choose another ford whereby to cross the river Ock without passing near the walls of that uncivil castellum that lay in the swamps; for we were all anxious to be home and had no tools for trying a siege; nay, had we not among us so much as a single scaling ladder. Yet when we came to our poor house at Pangbourne we heard that which did put us in heart to undertake the storming of a castle. It was dark night when we arrived there, and the day had been a day of heavy snow with rain, and I was sitting with a few others by the kitchen fire in the chimney nook drying myself, when a little boy of the village came in and tugged me by the sleeve, and said that there was one without who would speak with me. Such message liked me not, nor did the time of night, for I thought of Urswick and his hell-horse; nevertheless I soon followed the boy to the house porch, and thereby I found a lonely man, sitting on a cold wet stone, with his face muffled, and his body bent to the earth like one sore afflicted. Started I not back with the thought that the form that I saw was but the spectrum of Urswick! It spake not, nor did it move. I turned me round to grasp my conductor by the arm, but the boy was gone; and I stood alone with that lone and dolorous figure which I could but faintly see, for there was no moon, and

the stars were overcast with black clouds, and verily my fears or my exceeding great awe did not aid my eyesight. But at last the figure rose from the cold stone and said, "Is it thou, oh Felix? Is it thou, my once friend?"

The voice was that of John-à-Blount from Maple-Durham; and before I could say "It is even I," that erring novice clasped me by the hand and peered into my face, and turned me towards the faint uncertain light, and then fell upon my neck, and wept aloud. I led him farther from the house-door, and when he grew calmer I communed with him where none might overhear his words; but I took not this step until he vowed to me that his soul was penitent, and that he had come unto Pangbourne only to do a good deed. He confessed unto me that the love of woman had been his undoing, that one of the countess's foreign damsels had practised upon him and bewitched him, and that he had done many deadly sins on her account in battles and nightly surprisals, and the burning and storming of towns. But after a season the young cockatrice had scorned his love, and had told him that she must mate with a great lord, and not with a runagate shaveling, who had neither house nor lands: and at her own prayer her mistress, the Countess Matilda, had sent poor John-à-Blount away to serve with Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, and Sir Ingelric had for a long time left him in his castle with a gang of robbers and cut-throats.

"Oh, John-à-Blount!" said I, "these foreign women be worse than painted sepulchres. I doubt not that Urswick was entreated in like manner by his leman."

"He was, and worse," quoth John; "and it did drive him into a boiling madness, and into the doing of the most savage deeds."

"Urswick had ever a wild heart and volage thoughts; Urswick perished in his guilt," said I: "but thou are more fortunate in that thou livest to repent."

"I know his fate," said John, "and may the saints now spare us the sight of him on his infernal steed! By all the saints that preside over our house at Reading, I was penitent before; but the tale of these nightly visitings of my comrade Urswick did complete my guerison, and make me resolve to do that which I have now come hither to propose."

"What good and expiatory deed is that?"

"The delivering up of Sir Ingelric's detestable castle," replied John-à-Blount.

"That were a good deed if thou couldest do it."

"I can," said John, "if a few will march thitherward with me; for there be those within that will help me, captives that I can release from their chains, and unwilling vassals of Sir Ingelric. Dost comprehend me, Felix?"

I then asked whether the little Alice were safe within the castle, and whether Sir Ingelric's second wife were a mate worthy of such a husband, for fame reported her to be so, and it was hard to think well of one who had married the slayer of the husband of her youth. John gave me assurance that Alice was there, and harshly used by her step-mother, and that the said dame was well nigh as merciless and rapacious as her present lord, keeping prisoners in the donjon and putting them to the torture for their money.

"But we lose time," said John; "the deed in hand must be done to-night, or some within the hellish cavern will be racked to-morrow morning. So lead me to the prior—to the new lord abbat I would say—that I may propound my plan unto him or unto Sir Alain de Bohun. When the deed shall be done they will throw me into the abbey prison; but I am past caring for that, and have not long to live."

I told him that our new abbat, the Lord Reginald, was the most indulgent of men, and Sir Alain the most generous, but he would not be comforted. While walking back to the porch of the Pangbourne house I did inquire of him how he so well knew about our coming and our party; and to this he made answer that Sir Ingelric's castellan, who had gotten by his stealthy movements and savage assaults the name of the Wolf, did constantly keep in his pay some wretched serfs who acted as scouts and spies, and ofttimes lured heedless men to their destruction. "Ye were watched," said John, "at your going unto Oxenford, and would have been attacked if you had not been so well provided; and ye have been tracked and watched on the return, and I, upon the report of those espials, and upon a feigned show of great zeal, have been sent hither by Sir Ingelric's fit mate to see whether an attack might not be made during the darkness of the night upon my lord abbat's horses and baggage."

"May the foul fiend reward that same unwomanly ladie for the impious intention," said I.

"He will," quoth John, "if the good lords will but take counsel of so lowly and miserable a man as I am."

When we came near unto the porch, the heart of my sad companion failed him, and he said that he could not face the lord abbat so suddenly, and that it were better I went in to prepare the way for him. I had no suspicion of his penitence or his present good faith, but my short experience in war had made me wary, and I called to some men-at-arms that were tending their horses in the stable, and bade them look to the stranger. My lord abbat and Sir Alain were already at their supper, and savoury was the smell of the fried fish of Thamesis and the roasted meats that were spread on the table before them; but before he heard half of that which I had to say, the abbat thrust aside his platter and gave thanks to Heaven as for the return of a prodigal son, and thanked the patron saints of our abbey for so good a prospect of destroying a nest of robbers; and Sir Alain gave thanks for the same, and for so fair a hope of recovering the gentle little Alice; and the young Lord Arthur, who was eating at a side table placed near the fire, started to his feet and said that he would go with sword and pike to break open the wicked castle and recover his playmate; and they all three bade me hasten to the porch and bring in John-à-Blount. Many a hardened sinner would have been brought to repentance if he could but have seen in how kindly a manner the lord abbat received the penitent stray sheep of his flock. He raised John from the earth, he told him that his sins would be forgiven him, he bade him be of good cheer, and to put some little present cheer into the haggard trembling young man he gave him a cup of wine in his own silver cup. Although he had been straitened by no siege and had under-

gone no compulsory fast, the face of that black-eyed damsel that wore a green kirtle was not more changed than that of John-à-Blount: and I almost shuddered as I looked upon it in the bright light of that room. The abbat and Sir Alain listened with eager attention to the unhappy youth; and when they had heard him out his plan was speedily agreed. He would hasten back to the foul den he had left, and tell Sir Ingelric's people that the weary travellers were buried in sleep, and that there was the fittest opportunity in the world for seizing their cattle and baggage, and bringing off a rich booty. The entire garrison of the castle was barely two-score men. One half of these would sally to make the booty, and these might all be seized on their march by an ambuscade of my lord abbat's followers. Of those that would remain within the castle sundry were ready to revolt, and John-à-Blount would release the many prisoners, and slay the castellan, that ravenous wolf, in the den.

"My son," said the abbat, as John was taking his hasty departure, "do what thou wilt with the Wolf, but spare Sir Ingelric's wife."

"And," said Sir Alain, "as thou valuest thine own life, or the future health of thy repentant soul, have a care of the little Alice in the affray."

John laid his right hand upon his breast, and bowed lowly. Following him almost to the door of the room our kind-hearted lord abbat said, "Still there is one thought that doth spoil my present hope and joy: thou mayest fail in thine enterprise, and if thou art but suspected thou wilt be murthered by that bloody Wolf. Bethink thee, my son! Peradventure it may be better that thou stayest in

safety where thou art, and that we leave this vile castellum to be reduced by regular siege at some future day."

"My lord and father," said John, dropping on his knee, and kissing the abbat's hand, "should I die in the attempt to perform a good deed, thou wilt have prayers and masses said for me. But I shall not die to-night, and I see no chance of miscarriage. I could wish that for me the danger were greater, that it might the better stand as an atonement for my many transgressions."

"Go then, my son, and God speed thee! And then will we ourselves shrieve thee, and absolve thee after some due penitence, and make thee sound in conscience, and heart-whole and happy again."

John-à-Blount kissed the abbat's hand once more, and prayed the saints to bless him: but as he rushed out at the door we saw big tears in his eyes, and heard him mutter that he should never be happy again in this world.

"That poor boy," quoth Sir Alain, "hath not yet forgotten the young syren that led him astray."

"'Tis witchcraft and sortilege, *maleficium et sortilegium*," said the abbat. "But by the help of our prayers and relics we will disenchant him."

Sir Alain shook his head, but said no word.

Forty men of us put on harness and followed in the track of John-à-Blount when he had been gone some short time. Sir Alain would have willed the lord abbat to tarry in the house with Arthur, but the abbat would on no account be left out of the adventure, saying, that his presence and exhortations might spare unnecessary bloodshed; yet while he was saying the words he was feeling the point

of his lance, and he took with him his heavy battle mace. We all journeyed on foot, for war horses would be but an incumbrance at Sir Ingelric's castle, and by neighing or making other noise they might spoil our ambuscade on the road. That road was a very rough one, and the night continued rather dark; hence divers of us stumbled, and fell more than once: nevertheless we kept up a good pace, and in little more than an hour came to a wooded hollow, about midway between Pangbourne and Speen, through which the robbers must pass on the way from their castle to our manor-house. The trees were all leafless and bare; but the trunks of the ancient oaks were thick, and so every man of us got him behind an oak, twenty on this side the narrow road and twenty on that, and there we all stood concealed from view, and silent as grave stones. I, Felix, had a bad catarrh, yet did I neither cough nor sneeze all the while I was there, for I had prayed unto the saint that hath controul over coughs and colds. For a space that seemed to us very long we heard no sound, and in that wooded hollow and night-darkness we could see but a very little way. I began to think that the good strategem had miscarried, and to moan inwardly for John-à-Blount as a murthered man. But at last we heard, not voices, for the ungodly Philistines were as silent as we, but the heavy tread of footsteps on the broad heath, just above the hollow; and these sounds rapidly came nearer; and then, by peeping round the bole of my covering tree, I did faintly discern a score or more of dark figures descending in loose and careless array into the hollow. As we had been bidden, we all stood stock still until the robbers were at the bottom of

the hollow, and between us; but so soon as they were there as in a trap, Sir Alain shouted "Now for the onslaught in the name of King Stephen!" and our abbat shouted "Down, traitors, down!" and the valorous Lord of Caversham and our not less valorous lord abbat, and every man of us, from this side of the pathway and from that, sprung from behind the trees and hemmed in the evil-doers; and in less time than I can say it the heavy mace of our lord abbat laid two of the robbers on the earth with bleeding pates, and Sir Alain's lance went through the body of one that seemed the leader, and pinned him to the very oak behind which I had been standing. The rest, after making vain effort to retreat the way they had come, laid down their arms and cried piteously for quarter and for that mercy which they had never shown to other men. There were a score of them besides the three that had gotten their death-warrants. We bound the score with the cords and thongs we had brought with us, and putting them in motion with the sharp heads of our lances, we proceeded rapidly to the foul donjon at Speen, our lord abbat saying that thus far was well, and some of our captives already beginning to say to Sir Alain that they would change banners and fight for King Stephen if his lordship would spare their lives and accept their services. The dark wintry clouds rolled away, and the stars shone out brightly as if in approbation of our enterprise, and in no long while we did see that equable little river the Lambourne, which neither overflows in winter nor shrinks in summer, but is at all seasons the same (its pike be pale in colour, and in taste not to compare with those of Ock), gliding to join

our own swift, sweet Kennet at the township of Shaw; and we saw still clearer the swift Kennet gliding before us, on its way from Speen to our abbey walls at Reading and the broad Thamesis. And then, as we hurried on our way, and as the stars shone out with still more brightness, we discovered broken columns and fragments of walls, standing up from the ground like spectres on a heath; and anon we heard the owls hooting to one another among these ancient ruins. And ancient in sooth they were, for the Romans in the days of the Cæsars had built them a city at Spinæ which men do now call Speen, and these dark and fantastically shaped fragments and ruins were all that remained of it; for the men of Newbury, who have ever had a great envy to other townships and a great liking for the property of other men, had levelled most of the Roman walls and had carried away the stones and bricks thereof to enlarge their own town; and people of other townships had helped themselves at Spinæ as though it had been a common quarry. Such fate befalls towns in decay; but such will never befall our glorious abbey at Reading, for the saints and angels have custody thereof, even as we have meetly expressed, in large letters graven upon the left door of our gate-house under the abbey arms, ANGELI TUI CUSTODIANT MUROS EIUS. But I wis it was not on this night that I did think of the renowned Romans, or make these sanctifying reflections. True, I walked in the paths of pensive thought; but it was only to think of John-à-Blount and of the emprise we had in hand. And when we reached the lonely mill on the Kennet, a few bowshots below Sir Ingelric's castle at Speen, we hid

ourselves behind the mill and blew three blasts upon a trumpet, for this was the only signal which John-à-Blount had asked for. "And now," said our lord abbat, telling his beads, "may the saints befriend the brave boy from Maple-Durham. The token of his success will be three corresponding blasts. Let us be motionless and silent until we hear them." For a space the sound of our own brazen instrument floated along the waters, and was given back in echoes by the sleeping hills; and then for a longer space, during which an expeditious mass-priest might have said a camp-mass, nought was heard but the plash and ripple of the ever sweet and clear Kennet, and the faint moaning of some trees whose bare branches were shaken by the fresh gale which had blown away the clouds, and brought forth the lustrous and approving stars. But then, I wis, there came from the evil den the sounds of a mighty crash and clangour of arms that made us all start, and then sounds of woe and lamentation, shrieks and yells like those of the damned, which made us all shudder and cross ourselves. And, anon, upon these hellish sounds came three blasts from a trumpet, loud and shrill; and at the hearing thereof our lord abbat clasped his hands and said joyously, "The bold youth is safe, the deed is done; so now to the castle, which is ours!"

And we all ran from behind the mill to the foul den, driving our captives with us at the spear point as before. Short was the distance, and great our speed; yet before we reached the castle moat the drawbridge was down, the gate was open, and under the archway, in the midst of a company of men who had still chains and fetters on their legs,

but who held flaming torches in their hands, stood John-à-Blount with the gashful, blood-dripping head of the Wolf fixed on his lance. John had released the army of prisoners at the opportune moment, and being joined by some of Sir Ingelric's people, he had made himself master of the castle without need of any aid from us: but the Wolf and some of his evil band who could expect no quarter had made a desperate resistance, and had been slain to a man. The warder who had raised the portcullis and the few others who had aided in the emprise were now shouting for King Stephen, and Sir Alain de Bohun and the lord abbat of Reading, and the terrified captives we had with us, joined in these cries with such voice as their fears and astonishment allowed them to raise. As we all marched in at the gate the abbat said, "John, my son, I fear thou hast been somewhat too hasty and violent! I would have put some questions to that wild beast before sending him hence; yet is the Wolf better dead than alive! But, my son, I trust thou hast not allowed harm to be done unto the dark ladie of this most dark and bloody lair?"

"The evil woman is safe in her bower; I did lock her up before I unlocked the prisoners whose hearts were steeled against her," said John.

"And where," asked Sir Alain, "is the gentle flower that was not made to bloom in this horrent place?"

"There," quoth John, pointing to one of the female captives who came running across the quadrangle of the castle with the little Alice in her arms. "She is there, the true and worthy child of her gentle and martyred mother, and may she long live to make compensation to the world for

the many cruelties and crimes of her unnatural father;" and as he spake John threw far from him into a dark corner the bleeding head of the Wolf, lest Alice should be scared by the sight thereof.

The dear child was presently in the arms of the good Lord of Caversham; and though she had not seen his face for eighteen long months, and though she had not quite recovered from her great terror on being startled from her sleep by the clashing of arms and those shrieks and yells, she soon knew Sir Alain, and clung round his neck with many a fond kiss, and with many a fond inquiry after her own dear mother the Ladie Alfgiva and her companion and champion Arthur, whom she had left in sad case at Oxenford.

The first thing we did within the castle was to secure our prisoners with the chains which Sir Ingelric's unhappy captives had been wearing, and to hurl them into that horrible and feculent prison where so many good and peaceful men had long been rotting. Next we gave food to some of the released captives who had been so tortured by fast that their bones were cutting through their skin. And then we did all assemble in the great hall with a great glare of torches and tapers, and the lord abbat and Sir Alain being seated on the dais at the head of the hall in the massy chairs in which Sir Ingelric and his dame had been wont to sit in the days of their pride and evil power, that dark ladie was summoned from her uneasy bower to that august presence. A dark dame was she, and fierce as an untamed she-wolf as she came into the hall, screaming that the empress-queen and her husband Sir Ingelric would know how to avenge the traitorous deeds of this night, and the

foul surprisal of a loyal castle. These her words, and others that were more vituperative, chafed our good lord abbat, and with a solemn and severe countenance he said unto her, "Peace, woman! peace! these be not words to be heard by the company here assembled, who be all true men and faithful lieges to King Stephen. Most fit mate for a bloodthirsty and ungodly lord who hath changed his party as men change their coats, who hath never had in view ought else than his own interest, and who for these eighteen months last past hath stopped at no crime whereby he might enrich himself; dost call it loyalty to the queen or countess to turn thy castle into a den of robbers and torturers, to waste the country round about it until it looks like unto a Golgotha,—to seize, rob, imprison, and torment all manner of men, as well the secret partisans of Matilda as the open partisans of King Stephen, as well the poor and lowly as the rich and great, and as well the quiet franklins and toiling serfs, who be of no party and who only seek to live in peace, as the knights and trained men of war that go forth to battle? Call ye this loyalty and faithfulness to a party? Honourable men, alas! may have honestly differed in these unhappy disputes, but thy husband hath been but a robber, and it is for that there be so many like him in the land that these wars have lasted so long. Dost call the seizing of priests and monks upon the highway loyalty? Dost call it Christian duty and reverence to mother church to kidnap the servants of the altar and put them to the rack as thy people have done? Oh, woman, the holy water that baptised thee was thrown away! But thou shalt away hence to some sure keeping

in a lonely cell, where thou mayest have time for repentance and prayer. We did only send for thee that we might remind thee of thy many sins, and get from thee the keys of thy ill-acquired treasures, and some list or knowledge of those who have been robbed by thee, to the end that we may make restitution."

No ways humbled or abashed, the dark ladie of the castle called my lord abbat robber and housebreaker, and said that she had only levied tolls and baronial droits; that Sir Ingelric had taken away most of the money to give it to the misused and distressed queen; and that it was but a small matter that which remained in the house. And then, with great pride and insolency, she threw down upon the table one heavy key, saying that that was the key to the only treasure.

"The foul dame lies in her throat," cried one of her own people, "she hath treasure in other places; she hath gold, and silver, and jewels, aye, and church-plate stolen from the very altar, hid in most secret hiding-places; and, my lords, ye will not get to the full knowledge thereof unless ye do put her in her own crucet-house!"

Albeit, they were fully resolved to come at this great wealth, Sir Alain de Bohun shuddered at the mention of that terrible engine of torture, and the lord abbat said that such things were accursed by the church, and that verily he would never crucet a woman.

"Then will ye never get at the silver and gold!" said the man who had before spoken.

But at this juncture the repentant old warder of the castle stood up, and said that his daughter, who had been handmaiden to Sir Ingelric's wife, knew

the whole secret, having watched her mistress with feminine curiosity, and could so point out every recess and hiding-place; and at the hearing of these words the dark woman uttered a shriek, and fell to the ground as if her heart had been cleft in twain; so fearfully had she and her lord sold themselves to Lucifer, and made a god of money. The sight of blood and of the foe standing triumphant on her own hearth had not made her quail, nor had the mention of the crucet-house caused her to tremble; but the thought of losing all her accursed spoil had gone through her like a knife. We could not leave her where she was, lest some of her lately released captives should lay violent hands upon her; so we carried her to a turret-chamber, and having bound her so that she should not lay violent hands upon herself in a maniacal mood, and having placed one of her women to watch by her, we made fast that door and went in search of the treasure, being guided by the warden and his daughter. It was, in truth, but a small matter that which we found under the lock to which the dark ladie had given us the key; but, in the hiding-places, within the thick walls, and under the stone floors of the dark ladie's bower (places so invisible and recondite that of ourselves we never could have found them), were piled silver and gold, and wrought-plate and jewels, that seemed to me enough to pay a king's ransom, and that made mine eyes twinkle as I looked upon them by that light from many torches. When he had gathered it all together in a mighty great heap, in the middle of the room, our abbat made fast that door also, and hung a crucifix to the door-post, and threatened with excommunication all such as should approach the door

until ordered by him so to do. "Souls have been lost," said he, "in the getting together of that heap, and his soul will assuredly perish that touches it for his own use. It is all the property of the church, or the property of the poor, or the heavy ransom of tortured victims. The malison of heaven will go along with every part of it that is not restored to its rightful owners. So now, my children all, follow me down these flinty stairs to refresh yourselves with meat and drink; for the day is dawning in the east, and we shall have hard work at daylight. This infamous donjon must down: not a stone must be left upon another."

"I did help to build it," said Sir Alain, "but will now be more happy in destroying it! Not a nook must be left to be repaired of my false-hearted ravenous friend, or of any other wolf of his choosing."

"Humanity will bless the destruction! Tears of joy will be shed for leagues round about," said one of the released captives; "and when all dens of the like sort be a-level with the earth, England will be England again."

It was a marvellous and a provoking thing to see how well the foul robbers had been victualled and provided; gaunt hunger ranged all round them, and filled the fertile but untilled valleys with its cries and screams; but their buttery was crammed with the best of meat, their stalls were filled with beeves and sheep, their cellars were full of ale, mead, and wine, their granaries with corn, their stables with the best of horses. Rarely have I seen so sumptuous a feast as that to which we did sit down in the castle hall, with our sharp winter-morning appetites.

By the time this goodly collation was finished it was broad daylight. "So now," said the lord abbat, "will we think of carrying out these goods and chattels, and then of destroying tougher crusts than those of venison-pasties. Bring me forth the rascaille-people from the prison-house, that they may lend us their shoulders and aid us in destroying their own foul nest."

Being boyishly and unwisely curious to see with mine own eyes the abominable pit of which I had heard so much, I went with those that repaired to the house of captivity and torture, and one who had been released overnight did follow me thither to explain its horrible mysteries, as one who had full experience of them all. Misericordia Dei, into what a bolge of hell did my staggering feet carry me! And what an atmosphere was that which made my head turn giddy and my stomach sick! Deep in the bowels of the earth, within the foundations of the keep of the castellum, was a great chamber paved with the sharpest flints, and, dimly lighted from above by a few chinks, so narrow that the bats could scarce have crept through them. The noisome air, never fanned by the sweet breath of heaven, was made more foul and poisonous by accumulated filth and stagnant pools of blood, and a fetid smell of smoke. The torches we brought in to give us light to discover all the mysteries of the place burned with a sickly and uncertain flame.

"Can man live here?" said I.

"I lay dying here the full length of nine moons," said my guide.

"And what is this?" said I, looking into a short narrow chest not much unlike the coffin of a child,

but half-filled within with sharp stones and spikes of iron.

"Curses on it, that is the crucet-house," replied the man, "and therein they did thrust the body of a full-grown man, breaking his limbs and causing him exquisite torture. That was one of their processes for gratifying their cruelty or for extorting money. And this," continued the man, kicking a monstrous great beam which seemed loaded with iron, and to be heavy enough to bear down and crush two or three of the strongest men, "this is one of their sachenteges, which they would lay upon one poor man, and these iron collars with the sharp steel spikes are what they put round men's throats and necks, so that they could in no direction sit, or lie down, or sleep, for these collars be fastened by these strong iron chains to the stone walls. In my time I have seen two men and a woman perish with these hell-collars about their necks."

"And what be these sharp knotted strings?" said I, growing more and more faint and sick.

"These strings," replied the man, "they twisted round the head until the pain went to the brain. And see! these be the thumb-screws. And see above-head that pulley and foul rope! At times they pulled us up by the thumbs, and hung heavy coats of mail to our feet; at other times they hanged us up by the feet and smoked us with foul smoke until our blood and brain . . . . . "

"By our Ladie of Mercy, say no more—show me no more;" and so saying, I rushed out of the infernal place with a cold sweat upon my brow and my limbs all quivering.

"I am told," said the old captive, who followed me, "that there be still worse prison-houses than

this, and that there be many scores of them in the land."

"May they all down!" said I; "and may men in after days not believe that they ever stood! But, franklin, I do pray thee say no more, for I feel those collars on mine own neck, and the anguish at the brain!" And, in truth, I was in so bad case that I could do nothing until Philip the lay-brother did bathe my brow with some cold Kennet-water, and make me drink a cup of wine.

The evil castle was soon cleared of whatsoever it contained (not even excepting a poor maimed Jew that had been so misused in the crucet-house that he could neither walk nor crawl), and so soon as everything was taken up we began to demolish the abominable walls. Many poor men who lived in that neighbourhood came to our assistance, and being first refreshed by meat and drink, they laboured with astonishing vigour, giving joyous shouts whenever a great piece of the building was brought down. By commandment of our lord abbat the instruments of torture were all heaped together in that foul cell under the keep, and a great supply of wood, brush-wood, and straw being placed therein, fire was set to the whole, and so mighty a combustion was made that the stones cracked, and the flints seemed to melt, and every beam or other piece of timber taking fire, the greater part of the tower fell in with a terrific noise, and a most hellish smoke. While the castle was burning it was terrible to see how the impenitent dark ladie did gnash her teeth and stamp her feet, as likewise to hear how she did curse Sir Alain de Bohun and our good abbat, and all of us that were there present. Surely in that horrid frenzy she

would have died the death of Judas Iscariot if we had not bound her hands, and kept a strong guard over her. When the smoke cleared away, and we saw that the keep was nearly all down, our lord abbat distributed the victual and sheep and cattle among the famishing men who had come to help us, and who engaged not to leave the place until the moat should be filled up, and the walls all made level; and then we departed with our prisoners and all the treasure to Pangbourne, rejoicing as we went. Only no joy could be gotten into the sad heart of John-à-Blount; the commendations of that great man of war, the Lord of Caversham, did not cheer him, nor was he made the happier by our good abbat's telling him that he would provide well for him in some other manner of life than the monastic, for which he never could have had the due vocation. John thanked the lord abbat, but there was no joy in his gratitude. As I walked by his side I did try to comfort him by telling him that he had broken none of the greater vows of our order, as he was happily only in his noviciate; but he only shook his head at this my remark, and said, "Felix, it is not so much a wounded conscience and remorse, as something else that is leading me to the grave!" And then I saw that he was thinking of that foreign damsel that had led him into sin, and had then spurned his love, and I did thrice cross myself and fall to telling my beads, for verily phantasms of that other black-eyed maiden in the green kirtle came flashing through mine own weak brain, aye, lively effigies of her, both as I saw her first in her pride and beauty in our abbey garden, and as I saw her last, famine-wasted and crushed with fear in the castle-yard at Oxenford. But the saints gave

me strength to expel the visions, and I never saw those living perilous eyes again.

To me the most tender and beautiful thing in all this our great adventure and emprise was the meeting of little Arthur and Alice. Our good abbat was certainly of my mind, for he almost danced with joy at the sight thereof, and kept long repeating in his most joyous tones, "These children were made the one for the other! It is not man that can separate them, or keep them long asunder! My predecessor abbat Edward said the words, and the gift of prophecy was in him before he died."

The day being far advanced before we got back from the evil castle, we tarried that night at our poor-house at Pangbourne, keeping good watch; for albeit we knew that our great enemies were afar off, yet were we and our poor serfs but as lambs among most ravenous wolves, bears, and lions—*in medio luporum rapicissimorum, ursorum, et leonum.* A trusty messenger had been sent to Reading Abbey and the castle of Caversham the night before, and now we despatched another to bid the stay-at-home monks prepare a Te Deum, and a feast for us on the morrow.

IX.

By times in the morning, the treasure, which filled six coffers of the largest, was put into boats to be floated down Thamesis unto our abbey; and some of us going by water and some by land, we all proceeded thitherward, amidst the rejoicings and blessings of all the people. Right glad were they all for the destruction of Sir Ingelric's stronghold! Had it been the fitting season they would have carried palm-branches before us, as was used at that blessed entrance into Jerusalem; but it was dead winter, and the morning, though bright and clear, was nipping cold. The first time it was I did see our hardy lord abbat muffle his chin, in a skin or fur brought from foreign parts. A glorious reception, I ween, was that which awaited us! Our brotherhood, to the number of one hundred and fifty, formed in goodly order of procession with the banners of our church displayed, and with the prior at their head bearing our richest rood, met us at the edge of the Falbury, all singing—"Beati qui veniant,"—"Blessed are those that come in the name of the Lord; blessed are those that come from the doing of good." And our good vassals of the township, and the franklins of Reading and the vicinage, were all there in their holiday clothes, and our near-dwelling serfs in their cleanest sheep-

skin jackets, shouting and throwing up their caps; our abbey bells ringing out lustily and merrily the while. Needs not to say that we sang our best in the choir at that Te Deum, or that the feast which was ready by the hour of noon was sumptuous and mirthful. Nor was the joy less that evening in the castle at Caversham, whither I and some few others went with Sir Alain and the abbat; for the lord of Caversham being ever of a pleasant humour and ofttimes jocose, did say that forasmuch as I, Felix the novice, and Philip the merry lay-brother, did first carry Alice by night in the little basket unto the castle, to the scandal of some and to the amazement of all, so ought we now to carry back and present to the ladie Alfgiva the restored damsel; and hereat the young Lord Arthur had clapped his hands, and said so it ought to be.

And from this happy evening the bountiful ladie of Caversham grew well and strong, and the children grew up together in all love and loveliness. Somewhat squalid were they both when they were first brought home, but in a brief space of time they were plump and ruddy with health. The little maiden was then in her sixth year; the little lord, as hath been said, only in his tenth. Truly it is wondrous to think how soon they grew up into womanhood and manhood! And I the while was passing from blooming manhood to sober age; yet did I not grieve with Horatius—*Eheu! fugaces.*

When at our leisure we did examine the great treasure brought from the evil castellum at Speen, we found much money that bore the impress of the mint of our house, and divers pieces of plate which had been stolen by the countess's people out of our church. These things, as of right, we did keep;

but the rest of the plate we restored to the lawful owners thereof when we could discover them, which, sooth to say, did not happen on every occasion. Of the money which was not thought to be our own we did make two portions, and gave one to the poor and sent the other to King Stephen, who ever needed more money than he could get. But let men do ever so right and be ever so just and holy, they will still be exposed to evil constructions, and the sharp malice of evil tongues; and therefore no marvel was it that many did say we made a great profit unto ourselves out of the sacking of Sir Ingelric's castle.

And now, touching Sir Ingelric's dark wife; she was shut up for a short season in Reading Castle, and was then carried away to the eastern parts, and was there confined in a solitary and very strong house of religion that stood on the sea-shore. Of the other prisoners, some, being foreigners, were shipped and sent beyond sea, and the rest of them, being native, were sent unto King Stephen's army.

By the time we had returned unto our abbey, from Oxenford, it was hard upon the feast of the Epiphany, of the year of grace eleven hundred and forty-three. At the first coming of spring the king, who had been to London and the eastern parts to collect a great force, marched through Reading and tarried a few hours at our house, without doing any notable damage thereunto, excepting always that he did *borrow* from us all the coined money in our mint, which he did intend to repay so soon as the country should be settled. But it grieved us much to learn that he, too, had hired and brought into England great tumultuary companies of Fle-

mings and Bourguignons and other half-baptized, unholy, ungodly men, who had no bowels of compassion for the people of England, no respect for our holy places, but an insatiate appetite for plunder. And these black bands, on marching away to the westward, brake open divers nunneries and burned sundry towns and churches, maugre all that the legate bishop of Winchester, who was with his brother the king, could say or do to prevent them. This sacrilege brought down vengeance and discomfiture upon the king's cause, and did drive away from his banner for that time our good Lord of Caversham. Matilda and her princely boy Henry remained in Bristowe Castle, or about that fair western country by the shores of the broad Severn, or on the banks of the Avon; but some of her partisans had made themselves formidable at Sarum; and to check the incursions of these the king turned the nunnery at Wilton into a castle, driving out the chaste sisterhood and girding their once quiet abode with bulwarks and battlements. But while he was upon this ill-judged work the great Robert, Earl of Gloucester, on the first of the kalends of July, fell suddenly upon his encamped army, and by surprise and superiority of force did gain a great victory over King Stephen. The king with his brother the bishop fled with shame, and the earl's men took the king's people and his plate and money-chest, and other things. Among the men of name that were taken at Wilton was William Martell, the great favourite and sewer to the king, who was sent to Wallingford Castle, that terrible stronghold of Brian Fitzcount, which few men could mention without turning pale. Thus sundry more years passed with variable successes,

and every year heaped on each side fresh calamities, to the great ruin of the whole land. And still both parties brought over their hungry bands of adventurers, and still many of our great men, caring neither for one party nor for the other, continued their castle-building and their plundering for their own account, and still the poor and despairing people of England said that Christ and his saints were asleep. Villages and hamlets were fast disappearing, and that our towns were not *all* sacked and burned in these nineteen years of war, and that the substance of every man was not taken from him, was owing to the prayers of the church, and to the leagues and confederations which the franklins and free burghers did make among themselves, binding themselves by a solemn covenant each to assist the others. At first those who were men of war did laugh at these leagues, but after they had sustained many a check and defeat they were taught to respect the valour of our free men. I have known the weaver quit his shuttle and go forth to battle with sword and spear, and bring back captive from the field a knight and great lord; and when numerous deeds of the like sort had been done by the honest folk who took up arms only for the defence of their own houses and properties and lives, the great lords and powerful men did either avoid these townships, or treat them with more gentleness and justice.

It was in this year, at the fall of the leaf, that John-à-Blount died at Maple-Durham, and was buried there. After that our indulgent abbat had confessed him and shrieved him (upon penances duly performed by the said John), and had quitted and fully released him from the cucullus, the poor youth again put on the steel cap, and went to

Caversham to serve as one of the garnison of that good house. Good were the lord and the happy little lordling unto John, and I ween the Ladie Alfgiva had a great care taken of him when she saw how sad he was, and how fast wasting. But neither cook nor leach, neither generous wine nor comfortable words, could restore strength, or infuse hope, or induce a composure and tranquillity of mind, or keep poor John any long season among us. His heart seemed broken within him; and there was a flush on his wasted cheek, and then a terrible coughing. So at last my whilome companion being able to do nothing, quitted Caversham and went to Maple-Durham, that he might die there among some of his kindred, and be buried under the sward by the wattled hillock which marked the grave of his father. That young Angevin Herodias was as much John's murtheress as she could have been if she had put poison in his meat, or a dagger into his heart. May his soul find peace, and her great sin forgiveness! We did most of us weep as well as pray for poor John-à-Blount.

In the year next after the battle at Wilton, King Stephen gained a great victory in the meadows which lie near to the abbey of Saint Albans, and our Lord Abbat Reginald did plant a goodly vineyard on the slopes by the side of our house at Reading, and did make an orchard a little beyond Kennet. Many other battles were there in this same year of woe; and that great partisan of the countess, Robert Marmion, was slain in a fierce fight at Coventry; and Geoffrey Mandeville, Earl of Essex, was slain at Burwell; and Ernulphus, Earl Mandeville's son, was taken after his father's death and banished the land. There

seemed no end to these slayings and banishings and imprisonings in foul prisons. Verily those who made the mischief did not escape from its effects! The cup of woe they mixed for the nation was put to their own lips; turn and turn about they nearly all perished or suffered the extremities of evil fortune! None gained, all lost in the end, by this intestine and unnatural war.

In the year of grace eleven hundred and forty-five King Stephen again passed by Reading, and went and laid close siege to Wallingford Castle; but he could not prevail against that mighty robber and spoiler Brian Fitzcount: and on the feast of St. Benedict, at the close of this same year, I, with the saints' aid, having completed my noviciate, took the great vows and became a cloister-monk, with much credit and applause from the whole community, the sweetmeats and all delicate cates being furnished for that feast by the bountiful Ladie Alfgiva, and both Sir Alain de Bohun and his son Arthur being present at the feast. That night there came from the plashy margent of Thamesis a meteor of rare size and brightness, and it stopped for the space of an Ave Maria over our house, and shined in all its brightness upon the tower; as was noted by all the brotherhood, who did please to say that it was a good omen, portending that I should rise high in office, and be an ornament and shining light to the house: and truly since then I have passed through offices of trust and honour, and my name hath been made known unto some of our order in foreign parts, and I am now by the grace of our ladie sub-prior of this royal abbey of Reading. Also is it to be noted that in this important year we, the monks of Reading, were

enabled to keep our great fair in the Falbury, on the day of St. Lawrence and the three days next following, according to the particular charter of privilege granted by our founder Henricus Primus, who commanded in the aforesaid charter that no people should be hindered or troubled either in their coming to the fair or in their going from it, under heavy penalties to be paid in fine silver. And the wise Beauclerc had thus ordered, for that the men of Newbury having a fair of their own about the same season, for the sale of cattle and much cheese, were likely to waylay and stop such as were coming to our fair, as in verity they afterwards did, despite of our charter and to the peril of their own souls. But the castle-builders and the robbers that were liege-men unto them, had done the Fair-wending franklins much more harm than had been done them by the wicked men of Newbury; and in this sort our fair of St. Lawrence had been thinly attended for some years, and had not brought to our house in tolls, fees, and droits, one-half so much as the value of the alms we distributed upon that saint's day.

In the year which followed upon my vows, the husband of Matilda, the Count of Anjou, much grieving for the long absence of his son Henry, and seeing that the presence of one so young did no good to his mother's cause in England, entreated that he might be sent back into Anjou, and young Henry was sent thither accordingly. It had been well for England if the count had gotten back his wife also, but he was too glad to leave Matilda where she was, for there had not been for many a year any love between them, and from the day of his marriage with her until Ma-

tilda's return to her own country to wage war in it, the count was said never to have known a day's peace. During his long abode in Bristowe Castle the boy Henry had been carefully nurtured and instructed by his uncle the Earl of Gloucester, and by some teachers gathered in England and in foreign parts; and, to speak the truth of all men, the said earl was well nigh as learned as his father the Beauclerc, and a great encourager of humanizing letters. That great earl was also much commended by his friends for his constancy to the cause of his half-sister Matilda, and for his perseverance in all manner of fortunes, and for the equanimity with which he bore defeat and calamity; but, certes, it had been better for us if his perseverance had been less, and if his equanimity had been disturbed by the woes and unutterable anguishes the people of England did suffer from his so long perseverance. But the hand of death was now upon him, and the great earl died soon after the departure of Henry Fitz-empress, and was buried at Bristowe in the choir of the church of St. James, which he had founded. And no long while after the departure of her son and the death of her valorous half-brother, the countess, to the great trouble of her husband, quitted England and went into Anjou; and King Stephen, surprising and vanquishing his enemy the Earl of Chester, who had gotten possession of Lincoln town, did triumphantly enter into that town and abide there, which no king durst do before him, for that certain wizards had prophesied evil luck to any king that went into Lincoln town. Being thus within Lincoln, and somewhat elated with the smiles of capricious fortune, King Stephen sum-

moned the great barons and magnates of the land unto him, and at the solemnization of the Nativity of our Lord, he wore the regal crown upon his head, or, as others have it, he was re-crowned and consecrated anew in the mother church at Lincoln; and having the crown of England, to all seeming, firmly fixed on his brow, he caused the magnates all to swear allegiance to his son Prince Eustace as his lawful successor in the realm. No great man gainsayed the king, but all present made a great show of loyalty and affection as well to the son as to the father. Many there were of them who had no truth or steadiness in their hearts; but Sir Alain, our good Lord of Caversham, was there, and likewise the young Lord Arthur, and it was with a faith as pure and entire as that of a primitive Christian that the nobles twain placed their hands within the hands of Prince Eustace and vowed to be his true men for aye. And as it was now time that Arthur should enter upon a more active life, and put himself in training for the honours of knighthood, and as Prince Eustace conceived much affection for him, as did all who ever knew the hopeful youth, Arthur was left in the family of the prince to serve him as page and esquire. Yet was the young lord's absence from among us very short, for Prince Eustace came nigh unto Reading to prepare for the laying of another siege to Wallingford Castle, which still lay upon the fair bosom of the country like a hugeous and hideous nightmare, and whensoever it was not beleaguered the wicked garnison went forth to do that which for so many years they had been doing. Brian Fitzcount, the lord of Wallingford, Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, and others not

a few, had gone beyond sea with the countess; but they meditated a speedy return with more bands of foreign marauders, and many of their similars and fautors shut themselves up in their home-castles, which were spread all over the country. These things prevented the entire blessing of peace; yet was England more tranquil than she had been since the Beauclerc's death, and by a succession of sieges Stephen would have gotten the men of anarchy within his power if other accidents had not happened.

As the king (who had long and grievously mourned for the license and castle-building he had permitted at the beginning of his reign, in the hopes of attaching the great lords to his interest) openly showed his resolution to curb the excessive power and fierce lawlessness of the feudal lords, a great outcry was raised against him, and divers of the lords of his own party began to plot and make league with the barons of Matilda's faction. Others fell from his side because he could give them no money or fiefs, unless he robbed other men or laid heavy tallages upon the poor people. As these selfish men deserted him, Stephen exclaimed, as he had done before, "False lords, why did ye make me king to betray me thus! But, by the glory of God, I will not live a discrowned king!" And so much was granted to him in the end, that Stephen did die with the crown upon his head. Peradventure might the king have had the better of his secular foes if in the midst of these troubles he had not quarrelled with the clergy and braved the wrath of the holy see. By the death of one pope and the election of another, the king's brother, the Bishop of Winchester, had ceased to be legatus à

latere, and the legatine office had passed into the hands of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, who had ever leaned to the Angevin party. The said lord archbishop was no friend to our Lord Abbat Reginald, or to any of our community, but it becomes not me to rake up the ashes of the dead, or to disturb with a reproachful voice the grave of the primate of England; and it needs must be said that the king was over violent in his regard, and undutiful to our father the pope. For it must ever be acknowledged that the triple crown of Rome is more than the crown of England, and that the head of the holy Roman Apostolic and Catholic church hath a power supreme in spiritualities over all the kings of Christendom. Nevertheless did King Stephen in an ill hour give a doom of exile against the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, for that he had attended at the bidding of the pope, but without consent of the king, a great council of the church in the city of Rheims, in France. Instead of submitting to this sentence, the archbishop went and put himself under the protection of Hugh Bigod, the powerful Earl of Norfolk, who was of the Angevin faction, and then put forth a sentence of interdict against King Stephen, and all that part of the kingdom which obeyed the *usurper*. In the west country, and in some parts of the east and north, the priests shut up their churches and refused to perform any of the offices of religion. Good men went between the king and the primate, and after two years a reconciliation was brought about, Stephen agreeing to be the most bountiful king and the best friend of the church that the church had ever yet known in this land. Yet when Archbishop Theobald was called upon to recognise and anoint Prince Eustace

as heir to the throne, he refused to do it, saying that he was forbidden by our lord the pope, and that Stephen, being a usurper, could not, like a legitimate sovereign, transmit his crown to his posterity. The king, unto whom the archbishop had taken the oath of allegiance, waxed wroth, and threatened the archbishop with a punishment sharper than banishment; but, when the first passion of anger was over, he did nothing. Men censured the archbishop at the time, but they afterwards thought he had taken the wisest course for putting an end to this long war. In the interim Henry Fitz-empress had been again in our island. In the year eleven hundred and forty-nine, having attained the military age of sixteen, Henry Plantagenet came over to Scotland with a splendid retinue, to be made a knight by his mother's uncle, King David. The ceremony was performed with much magnificence in the city of Carlisle, where the old Scottish king did then keep his court; and most of the nobles of Scotland and many of our great English barons were present at the celebration, and did then and there make note of the many high qualities of the truly great and ever to be remembered son of the Countess Matilda. All manner of honours and power alighted on the head of Henry Plantagenet soon after his being knighted at Carlisle. The death of his father Geoffrey left him in full possession of the dukedom of Normandie, which he had governed for him, and of the earldom of Anjou, which was his own birthright; and in that lucky year for the house of Plantagenet, the year of our redemption eleven hundred and fifty-two, by espousing Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry acquired that great dame's rights to the earldom of

Poictou and the great duchy of Aquitaine. Henry was thus the greatest and richest prince in all the main land of Europe, and albeit he was only in his twentieth year, he already knew the arts of government and of war better than any of his neighbours. A great prince was he from his cradle: he was born to command.

Et interim, Eustace, the son of Stephen, being nearly of the same age as the son of Matilda, had become a very worthy soldier, and our young Lord of Caversham had grown up with him, and improved under him. They had miscarried in the siege of Wallingford Castle, because that house of the devil was so exceeding strong, and because they were called off to another more urgent enterprise; but in other quarters they had been more successful, beating divers of the castle-builders in the field, or taking them in their dens. Every castle that they took was burned and destroyed, like Sir Ingelric's castellum at Speen. They brought many offerings to our shrines, for they were much in our part of the country, to keep in check the Angevin party to the westward; and whenever he was not engaged in these duties of war, the young Lord Arthur came to his home. The winter season allowed him the longest repose, and thus it befel that the Ladie Alfgiva and that little maiden which I and Philip, the lay-brother, did first convey to Caversham, became sad instead of gay at the advance of spring. But Alice was no longer the little maiden that could lie perdue in a basket, and there had already been many discourses and conjectures as to the day when she and the young Lord Arthur would be made one by holy church; for the great love that had been between them from the

days of their childhood was known to all the country side. Strange it was, but still most true, that Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe never had made any attempt to recover his fair and good daughter. Great endeavours he made to get back that dark ladie of the castle, his wicked and impenitent second wife, and he had at last, by means, it was said, of the Archbishop of Canterbury, obtained her release from the nunnery on the eastern coast; but he had never set on foot any treaty, nor, as far as could be learned, had ever made any inquiry touching the gentle Alice, who in her heart could not think without trembling and turning pale of her dark, stern step-mother, and the days she had passed with her in that foul donjon at Speen.

Though his hair had grown grey and scant under the cap of steel, and his soul panted for peace as the hunted hart doth for running waters, Sir Alain de Bohun kept the field almost as constantly as his son; and his constancy to King Stephen knew no abatement. So much virtue and steadiness could not be understood in those changeable and treacherous times; and as it was thought that he put a monstrously high price upon his services, and was true to one side because he had not been sufficiently tempted by the other, in the course of the year eleven hundred and fifty-two there came a secret emissary to offer him one of the greatest earldoms in England, and one of the richest and noblest damsels in Anjou as a bride for his son. Sir Alain bound the emissary with cords, like a felon spy, and sent him and his papers and credential signets unto King Stephen. No mind was ruffled in Caversham Castle upon this occurrence except the tender mind of Alice, who bethought her that she

was but a poor portionless maiden, the daughter of a proscribed man whose estates had long been confiscated and held by the king; but Arthur saw and soon chased away these vain grievings. His father had manors and lands enow, and he wished never to be greater or richer than his father, and Alice was rich in herself, and she was his own Alice, and a greater treasure than any that dukes or kings or emperors could bestow. Let there be peace; let there only be peace in the land for the herdsman and the tiller of the soil, and the industrious vassals, and what earthly luxury or comfort would be wanting in the house at Caversham? Fools might contend for more, and barter their souls away to get it, but his father's son would never be this fool.

I was myself at Caversham at the time of these occurrences, and it was not long after that I became sub-sacrist in our abbey, and did build at mine own cost a new rood-loft in the church.

Also in this year deceased, to King Stephen's great grief, the good Queen Maud, and she was buried at Feversham in Kent.

X.

BEFORE the swallows made their next return to our meads and river sides, the flames of war were again kindled in our near neighbourhood. When that I heard Sir Ingelric had stolen back into the island with an Angevin band, and that Brian Fitzcount, through the treachery of some of King Stephen's people, had been allowed to win his way into his inexpugnable castle at Wallingford with great supply of munitions of war, I did foresee that the year eleven hundred and fifty-three would be a year of storm and trouble to Reading Abbey, and to all the country besides. Sir Ingelric's return was soon notified to us by the burning of divers villages between Reading and Speen, and by the sudden plunder and devastation of some of our own outlying manors; and while we were grieving at these things, news was brought to us that Brian Fitzcount had called upon all the castle holders in the west to take up arms, not for the Countess Matilda, but for her son Henry; and that the said Sir Brian had ravaged well nigh all the country from Wallingford to Oxenford, making a great prey of men and cattle.

Sir Alain de Bohun and our stout-hearted Abbat Reginald collected such force as they could, and marched in quest of Sir Ingelric; but that cruel knight fled at their approach, and then retreated

into the far west. King Stephen made an appeal to the wealthy and warlike citizens of London, who were ever truer to him than were his great barons, and being well furnished with arms and men, and the great machines proper for the sieges of strong places, the king went straight to Wallingford with a determination not to remove thence until he had reduced that terrible castle. This time he came not unto our abbey, but the lord abbat sent some of our retainers to assist in the great siege; and as all the lords that were true to the king marched with the best of their vassals to Wallingford, a great army was collected there. Of the people of that vicinage, every free man that was at all able to work repaired to the king's camp, and offered his labour for the capture and destruction of Brian Fitzcount's den. A deep trench was speedily cut all round the castle, and such bulwarks and palisadoes were made that none could come out of the place or enter therein; and catapults were in readiness to batter the walls, and mines were digging that would have caused the keep to totter and fall. Certes, the emprise was close to a successful issue, when tidings were brought that Henry Plantagenet had landed in the south-west with one hundred and forty knights, and three thousand foreign foot soldiers, that all the great barons of the west were proclaiming him to be the lawful king of England, and were joining his standard, and that he was moving with a mighty force to lay siege to Malmesbury. King Stephen had found no more faith abroad than he had found at home. Ludovicus, the French king, having many weighty reasons to mislike and fear Henry Plantagenet, had made a treaty of alliance with

Stephen, had affianced his daughter Constance to Prince Eustace the son of Stephen, and had engaged to keep the powerful Angevin at home by threatening Anjou and Normandie with the invasion of a great French army; but, instead of a great army, the French king sent but a few ill-governed bands; and when these had been discomfited in a few encounters, Ludovicus listened to proposals of peace, and abandoned the interests of Stephen. And that great English earl, Ranulph, earl of Chester, whom King Stephen had driven out of Lincoln, went over to Anjou to invite Henry into England, and to engage soul and body in his service; first taking care to obtain from that young prince a deed of charter conveying to him, the said Earl Ranulph, in *foede et heriditate*, the lands of William de Peveril, and many fiefs and broad manors in Cheshire, Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire, and elsewhere, together with sundry strong castles which the said earl hoped to keep—but did not. Forced was King Stephen to raise his siege of Wallingford Castle, and to evacuate and destroy the wooden castle of Cranmerse which he had raised close to Brian Fitzcount's gates. He had scarcely drawn off his people, and begun a march along the left bank of Thamesis above Wallingford, ere Henry Plantagenet, having gotten possession of Malmesbury and of many strong castles, which the castle-builders, not foreseeing that which was to happen, had given up to him, appeared on the right bank of the river with his great army of horse and foot. The Plantagenet was of an heroical temper; and Stephen, who had fought in so many battles, was yet as brave as his young rival, and was transported with wrath at seeing how many barons who had repeatedly sworn

allegiance to him were in array against him; moreover, Prince Eustace was with his father, and, like a valorous and passionate youth, was eager for the fight; and of a certainty there would have been a terrible and bloody battle, if battle could have been joined at the first confronting of these two forces; but a heavy and long-continuing rain had swollen all the rivers and brooks, and had poured such a volume of water into Thamesis that there was no crossing it. Therefore lay the two mighty armies opposite to each other for the space of several days; and during that interval certain of our prelates bestirred themselves as peace-makers, and sundry great lords on either side said that verily it was time this unnatural war should have an end. But Henry Plantagenet did want for his immediate wearing the kingly crown of England, and Stephen had vowed by the glory of God to keep that crown on his head until his death, and none durst speak to him of a present surrender of it. When the waters somewhat abated the king marshalled his host, as if determined to come at his foe by crossing the river at a ford not far off; but upon mounting his war-horse, which had carried him in many battles, the steed stumbled and fell, not without peril to his rider. The king mounted again, laughing as at a trifling accident; but when the horse fell a second time under him, his countenance became troubled. Nevertheless he essayed a third time, and for a third time the steed fell flat to the earth as though he had been pierced through poitrail and heart by an arrow. Then did the king turn pale, and his nobles 'gan whisper that this was a fearful omen.

"By our Ladie St. Mary," quoth Prince Eustace, "the steed hath grown old, and distemper hath

seized him during his days of inactivity in this swampy and overflooded country! This is all the omen, and the death of the poor horse will be all our loss."

And the resolute young prince would have mounted his father on another steed, and have marched on to the ford, and then straight to battle. But the Earl of Arundel, being much inclined to peace, and a bold and eloquent man, took advantage of the consternation which the omen or horse-sickness had created in the king's army, and going up to Stephen, he did advise him to make a present convention and truce with Henry Plantagenet, affirming that the title of Duke Henry to the crown of England was held to be just by a large part of the nation, and by some who had never been willing to admit his mother to the throne; that the country was all too weary of these wars, and that the king ought by experience to know the little trust that was to be put in many of his present followers. "But I will not die a discrowned king," said Stephen. "Nor shalt thou," replied the great Earl of Arundel.

After many entreaties and prayers, the kingly mind of Stephen yielded so far as to allow a parley for a truce; and Henry Plantagenet, not being less politic than warlike, entered upon a convention, and then agreed to confer with Stephen.

The place for conference was so appointed that the river Thamesis, where it narrows a little above Wallingford, parted the two princes and the great lords that were with them; so that from either bank King Stephen and Duke Henry saluted each other, and afterwards conversed together. The conference ended in a truce, during which neither party

was to attempt any enterprise of war, but both were to discuss and amicably settle the question of Duke Henry's right to the crown upon the demise of Stephen.

Prince Eustace had not been a prince if he had quietly submitted to an arrangement which went to deprive him of the succession to a great kingdom: he burst suddenly away from the king's camp, calling upon those who had taken the oaths to him to follow him to the east. Not many rode off with him; but our young Lord Arthur, feeling the obligations of his replicated vows and the ties of duty and friendship, would not quit his master; nor did his father Sir Alain, who had placed him in the prince's service, make any effort to restrain him. As for the good lord of Caversham himself, he returned to his home with the double determination of observing the truce, and of not giving up his allegiance to King Stephen, unless the king should voluntarily release him therefrom; for, much as he sighed for the return of peace, Sir Alain prized his honour, and did never think that a good settlement of the kingdom could be obtained through falsehood and perjury. But woful apprehensions and sadness did again fall upon the house at Caversham, for the course taken by Prince Eustace was full of danger to him and his few adherents, and it was reported that his great anger and desperation had driven him mad. But short was the career of that hapless young prince, who, though born to a kingdom, lived not to see anything but the calamities thereof. I wis those men who had most flattered him, and had taken oaths to him as to the lawful heir to this glorious crown of England, did speak most evil of him in the days of his adversity,

and after his death. I, who knew him and conversed with him oft times, did ever find him a youth of a right noble nature, valorous and merciful like his father, and as devout and friendly unto the church as his mother Queen Maud. Yet may I not deny that in his last despair he did some wicked deeds which sorely grieved our young Lord Arthur, who could not prevent them, and who yet would not abandon him in this extremity of his fortune. Coming into the countries of the east, and finding few to join him, he burst into the liberties of St. Edmund, and into the very abbey of St. Edmund, king and martyr, and demanded from the Lord Abbat Ording, and the monks of that holy house, money and other means for the carrying on of his heady designs; and when that brotherhood, as in duty bound, and like men that were unwilling to be wagers of new wars, did refuse his request and point out the unreasonableness and ungodliness of them, he ordered his hungry and desperate soldiers to seize all the corn that was in the abbey, and carry it into a castle which he held hard by, and then to go forth and plunder and waste the lord abbat's manors. The corn was carried to the castle, but before further mischief could be done the soul of Prince Eustace was required of him; for that very day, as he sat at dinner in his castle, he dropped down in a deadly fit, and was dead before the kind Arthur could get a monk to shrive him. The Countess Matilda, I ween, had done worse deeds at Reading than Eustace did at St. Edmund's Bury, and, certes, the patrons and protectors of our house, our Ladie the Virgin, and St. James, and St. John the evangelist, were not less powerful to punish than St. Edmund the king and

martyr; nevertheless Matilda was let live, and the young Eustace perished in his prime. But these things are not to be scanned by mortal eye, and the judgments of heaven are not always immediate, and it might not have been so much in vengeance for Eustace's great sin in robbing the monks of St. Edmund's Bury of their corn, as in mercy to the suffering people of England, that the son of King Stephen was so suddenly smitten and removed. The monks of St. Edmund did, however, give out that it was their saint who slew him for his sin, causing the first morsel of the stolen victual he put into his mouth to drive him into a frenzy, whereof he died. Others there were who accounted for his opportune death by alleging that some subtile poison had been administered to him; but of this was there never any proof. Our young Lord Arthur, without denying the great provocation he had given unto St. Edmund, did always think that his brain had been touched ever since his father held the conference above Wallingford with Duke Henry, and that a great gust of passion killed him. But whatever was the cause of his death, and however sad was that event in itself, he was surely dead, and it was just as sure that the kingdom would be the better for it. If few had followed him while he was alive, still fewer stayed to do honour to his remains; but Arthur, with a very sincere grief, and with all respect and piety, carried the body of his master to the sea-side, and thence by water into Kent, and saw it interred at Feversham by the side of Queen Maud, with all the rites and obsequies of holy church. Fidelity could not go beyond this; the great arbiter, Death, had freed him from his allegiance and vows to the

prince, and so from the honoured grave in Feversham Abbey, Arthur de Bohun rode with all possible speed unto Caversham. So true was it, that nothing that man could do could keep Alice and him long asunder.

Many of our wicked castle builders, who had not always respected the truce of God, would not now be bound by the truce concluded between two mortal princes; and when the term of that suspension had expired, some of the barons on either side would have renewed the war on a grand scale, and have carried it into all parts of the kingdom. Some few sieges were commenced, and some hostile movements made in the field, by King Stephen and Duke Henry; but since the unhappy death of Prince Eustace, the king cared not much about keeping the crown in his family, for he had but one other lawful son, and this son, the gentle-tempered William, was only a boy, and was without ambition; for his eyes had not been dazzled by any near prospect of the crown, and none of the baronage had ever sworn fealty to him. And thus, when the peace-makers renewed their blessed endeavours, King Stephen was easily induced to agree that Duke Henry should be his successor in this kingdom, provided that he left him a peaceable possession of the disputed throne for the term of his natural life, and bound himself to fulfil a few other engagements. The king's brother, the Bishop of Winchester, did now join with his old enemy, Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, in urging this accord, and on either side the great barons recommended the adjustment; for all were weary of the war except a few desperate robbers, whose crimes had been so numerous that they could not

hope to escape punishment at the return of peace. Another great council of barons and prelates was, therefore, called together at Winchester; and in that royal and episcopal city, on the seventh of the Kalends of November, in this the last year of our woe, eleven hundred and fifty-three, the agreement was finished, and a charter naming Henry heir to the throne was granted by Stephen, and witnessed by Theobald the archbishop, the Bishop of Winchester, eleven other bishops, the prior of Bermondsey, the head of the knights Templars, and eighteen great lay lords. And a short season after this, the king and the duke travelled lovingly together to Oxenford, where the earls and barons, by the king's commandment, did swear fealty to the duke, saving the king's honour, so long as he lived; and the Plantagenet did pledge himself to behave to Stephen of Blois as a duteous and affectionate son, and to grant to him, all the days of his life, the name and seat of the kingly pre-eminence. In the presence of the best of our baronage, the king and duke did then confer about other state matters, and did fully agree and concur in this—that there must be an end of castle-building and castle-builders, that the donjons which remained must all down, and that the vengeance of the law must fall upon the robbers, whether they had been, or had pretended to be, followers of Matilda, or Stephen, or Duke Henry himself; for, being now acknowledged heir to the crown, Henry wished not to come into a wasted and impoverished land, and well he knew, at all times, that the prosperity of the people maketh the wealth, and power, and glory of the ruler. Those castles in the west, which had been given up to him by their builders, were presently

levelled with the earth; and even Brian Fitzcount was warned that he must quit his strong house at Wallingford, or abide the most fearful consequences. Some of the cruel oppressors of their country came in of their own will, and submitted to King Stephen and the law; but others held out stiffly, denying all allegiance whether to the king regnant or to Duke Henry as his successor; and in this sort the poor people in divers parts continued to be harrowed, and plundered, and captured, and tortured, as in the foregone time. Nay, some of our wicked barons, making league with the rapinous princes and wild chiefs of the Welsh mountains, did continue to keep the open fields in the western parts, and to desolate the land from the river Severn even unto the river Mersey.

Many were the private discourses which King Stephen held with the hopeful Plantagenet, for Stephen's heart was all for the commonalty of England, and he trusted that he could give such instruction and advice to Henry as would aid that prince in making his future government firm, and, at home, pacific, and in that sort a blessing to the people. But the Plantagenet had solemnly pledged his faith by treaty and by oath to leave unto Stephen, so long as he should live, the full exercise of the authority royal, and this could hardly have been if Henry had tarried in England; and, moreover, matters of high concernment called for the return of the duke to Anjou and Normandie. So, in the spring season of the year of grace eleven hundred and fifty-four, after some long consultations held at Dunstable to treat of the future state and peace of the kingdom, the king accompanied the duke to the sea-coast, and, with a loving leave-taking of Stephen,

Henry embarked and sailed over to Normandie. Foul rumours there were, as that Stephen's young son with a party of Flemings would have waylaid the duke on Barham downs, and have there slaughtered him; but I wis all this was but a fable, for the boy William was too young for such matters, and being of a gentle and unambitious nature, and too well knowing that the crown of England had been a crown of thorns to his father, he was more than content with the lands and honours secured unto him by the Charta Conventionum.

Also was it nigh upon the time that William, archbishop of York, a kinsman of King Stephen, who had been deprived by the pope in the year eleven hundred and forty-seven, and who had been reinstated after the truce concluded at Wallingford, suddenly departed this life at York, and was buried with great haste and little ceremony in that minster. And here too there were evil reports spread through the land as that Archbishop William had been poisoned. Having no light wherewith to penetrate the darkness of this mystery, I will not affirm that King Stephen's kinsman was so disposed of; but verily the malice of men's hearts was great, and there was much secret poisoning in these times!

Stephen being thus left to govern by himself, sundry of our great men, having from that which they had seen and heard of Prince Henry come to the conclusion that if he should be king he would keep a bit in their mouths and keep a strong rein in his own hands, did repair to the king who had so often been betrayed by them, and did strongly urge him to break the treaty and trust to war and the valour and faith of his vassals for the continuance of his family on the throne. But Stephen

having a respect for his oaths (which mayhap was the greater by reason of a sickness that was upon him), and knowing the trust that was to be put in the faith and steadiness of these men, said, "There hath been war enough, and too much woe!" and he would not give his ear unto them, but did command forces to be gathered for putting down the castle-builders and the robbers that had allied themselves with the Welsh.

And of a surety in these his last days King Stephen betook himself wholly to repair the ruins of the state, and heal the great afflictions of the church. He made a progress into most parts of the kingdom to reform the monstrous irregularities which had arisen by long war, to curb the too great baronial power, to get back to our abbeys and churches the things whereof they had been despoiled, and to speak and deal comfortably with all manner of peace-loving men. Some castles he reduced by force, others he terrified into submission, and others were taken by a few good lords like Sir Alain de Bohun. In all these occurrents nothing was heard of our impenitent neighbour Sir Ingelric, save that his wife the dark ladie of the castle had died, and that he himself was thought to have gone into the west. Of that greater and far more terrible chief, Brian Fitzcount, we did hear enough and more than enough, for in despite of the joint commandment of King Stephen and Duke Henry, he kept possession of his castle at Wallingford and continued his evil courses in all things. Yea, at a season when we did apprehend no such doing, one of his excommunicated companies, stealing by night down the vale of Thamesis, did set fire to our granaries at Pangbourne, and maim our cattle, and

so sweep our basse-court that we had not left so much as one goose wherewith to celebrate the feast of St. Michael. The better to put down these atrocious doings, King Stephen called together within the city of London a great and godly meeting of barons and prelates and head men of towns; and sooth to say the spirit of peace and love presided over that great council, and many proper methods were taken by it and good laws passed. I, who went unto London city with our lord abbat, did see with mine own eyes the respect which was now paid unto the eldermen of great towns and boroughs; and likewise to the franklins, whether mixed by the marriages of their fathers or grandfathers with Norman women, or whether of the old and unmixed Saxon stock, the number of these last being as a score to one; and then did I say to myself that if these things continued, the day might arrive when the burghers and free plebeians of England might be something in the state. Nay, I did even dream that in process of time the collar might be taken from the neck of our serf, and the cultivator of the soil be no longer a villein, but a free man. But I concealed this my bright vision, lest it should expose me to censure and mockery.

When this great council at London was broken up King Stephen made repair unto Dover to meet and confer with his ancient ally and friend the Earl of Flanders. The king was well attended, and among the best lords of England that went with him was our neighbour Sir Alain de Bohun. We, the monks of Reading, or such of us as had gone to the great city, journeyed back to our abbey, in a great fall of autumnal rain; and when, at the end of three days,

we in uncomfortable case did reach the abbey, we found that the swollen river had swept away good part of the mill which we had built on the Kennet, at a short space from our house, and had otherwise done us much mischief. Also was there seen a great falling star, and there were heard in the heavens, on one very dark and gusty night, some dolorous sounds, as of men wailing and lamenting. In a few days more some sad but uncertain rumours did begin to reach our house; but it was not until one stormy night in the early part of November, when Sir Alain de Bohun on his way homeward stopped at our gates, that we knew of a certainty that which had befallen. Ah, well-a-day, King Stephen was dead! He who for well nigh nineteen years had not known one day's perfect peace was now, inasmuch as the world and mortal man could affect him, at peace for ever! And may God have mercy on his soul in the world to come! After the politic conferences with the Earl of Flanders, and the departure of the said earl for his own domimions, the king was all of a sudden seized with the great pain of the Iliac passion, and with an old disease which had more than once brought him to the brink of the grave; and so, after short but acute suffering, he laid him down to die, and did die in the house of the monks of Canterbury, on the five and twentieth day of the kalends of October. *Sic mors rapit omne genus.* And our true-hearted lord of Caversham, who was true unto death, and who had tenderly nursed the dying king, conveyed the body to Feversham, and placed it in the same grave with his beloved wife Maud, and his son Stephen, in the goodly abbey which he and

his queen had built and endowed in that Kentish township; and having in this guise done the last duty to his liege lord and king, and being by death liberated from the oaths of fealty and allegiance, which he had never broken by word or deed, Sir Alain, caring for none of the honours and advancements which other lords were ready to struggle for at the coming in of a new king, came quietly home, only hoping and praying that his country would be happy under Henry Plantagenet.

King Stephen being gone, much evil was said of him on all sides and by all parties: yea, his own partisans, in the expectation that such words would be grateful to the ear of the new king, did affect to murmur and lament that he should so long have kept the great Henricus from the throne; and, generaliter, the great men did burthen the memory of Stephen with the past miseries of the people of England, of which they themselves had been the promoters. I have said it: the defunct king, in the straits and troubles into which he had been driven by the greed, ambition, and faithlessness of the baronage, had ofttimes done amiss, and, specialiter, had much travailed churchmen: yet be it remembered that he built more royal abbeys than any king that went before him; that he founded hospitals for the poor sick; and that during the whole of his troublous reign he laid no new tax or tallage upon the people; and that he was of a nature so mild and merciful that notwithstanding the many revolts and rebellions and treasons practised against him, he did never put any great man to death. I, Felix, who had seen how large he was of heart and how open of hand, and who had tasted of

his bounty and condescension, could not forget these things when, in a few days, after saying a mass of Requiem for his soul, we chanted in our church a Te Deum laudamus for his successor.

XI.

I HAVE said that we heard all too much of our powerful and wicked neighbour Brian Fitzcount. But now that he knew Henry Plantagenet was coming, and was one that would have power to destroy him and to put an end to all plundering and castle-building, a sudden repentance seized his time-hardened conscience. Some did much praise him for this, and greatly admired the seeming severity of his penance; but it is to be feared that he, like many others among our castle-builders and depredators, did only repent when he found that he could sin no more. So great had been his crimes, and so noted was Duke Henry for his strict execution of justice, that, notwithstanding his long adherence to Henry's mother, Sir Brian could not hope to escape a severe punishment, with forfeiture of the broad lands which had become his by marriage, and with deprivation of the great riches he had accumulated by plundering the country. In this wise no secure asylum was open to him except in the cloisters or in taking the cross. And before the Plantagenet returned into England Sir Brian Fitzcount did take upon him the cross, and giving up his terrible castle at Wallingford with all his fiefs, and abandoning all his riches—*relictis fortunis omnibus*—he joined other crúsaders and took

his departure for Palestine. His wife Maud, the rich daughter of Sir Robert d'Oyley, had before this time retired into a convent in Normandie, and there, being awakened to a sense of the wickedness of her past life, she did soon take the veil. As they had no issue, and left no knight near of kin, King Henry, soon after his coronation, took possession of Wallingford Castle and of the honour of Wallingford; and from that happy moment the troubles of the country and of our good house ceased. Such was the fate of our worst enemy; but of the scarcely less wicked Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe we still could learn nothing of certain, and the rumours which reached us were very contradictory, some saying that he had been slain by Welsh thieves, some that he had fled beyond sea, some that he had entered into religion under a feigned name, and was preparing to take the monastic vows in the Welsh house at Bangor, and some asserting that he had gone with a desperate band into Scotland to take service with that king and aid him in subjugating the wild mountaineers of the north. Nay, there was still another report common among the poor country folk that dwelt upon Kennet near Speen, and it was to the effect that Satan had carried him away bodily. In short, none knew what had become of him, but all prayed that they might never see his face again.

Henry Plantagenet was busied in reducing the castles of some of his turbulent barons in Normandie when he received the news of King Stephen's demise. Being well assured that none in England would dare question his right to the vacant throne, and being moreover a wise prince, who always finished that which he had in hand be-

fore beginning any new thing, he prosecuted his sieges, and ceased not until he had reduced all the castles. Thus it was good six weeks after the death of Stephen, and hard upon the most solemn festival of the Nativity, when Henry came into England with his wife Eleanor and a mighty company of great men. He was received as a deliverer, and there was joy and exultation in the heart of every true Englishman at his coming. A wondrously handsome and strong prince he was, albeit his hair inclined to that colour which got for his great-uncle the name of Rufus or Red King. His forehead was broad and lofty, as if it were the seat of great wisdom, and a sanctuary of high schemes of government. His eyes were round and large, and while he was in a quiet mood, they were calm, and soft, and dovelike; but when he was angered, those eyes flashed fire and were like unto lightning. His voice!—it made the heart of the boldest quake when he raised it in wrath, or in peremptory command; but it melted the soul like soft music when he was in the gentle mood that was more common to him, and it even won men's hearts through their ears: it was by turns a trumpet or a lute. Great, and for a prince miraculous, was his learning, his grandfather, the Beauclerc, not having been a finer scholar: wonderful was his eloquence, admirable his steadiness, straightforwardness and sagacity in the despatch of all business. He breathed a new life, and put a new soul into the much worn and distracted body of England. There shall be peace in this land, said he; and peace sprang up as quick as the gourd of the prophet: there shall be justice among men of all degrees; and there was justice. Having taken the oaths

to be good king and lord—to respect mother church and the ancient liberties of the people, the great Plantagenet was solemnly crowned and anointed in the royal city of Winchester on the 19th of the kalends of December, by Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury; and Eleanor, his wife, was crowned with him. In the speech which he did then deliver, he boasted of the Saxon blood which he inherited from his grandmother, Queen Maud, of happy memory, who descended in right line from Alfredus Magnus; and these his royal words did much gratify the English people, without giving offence to the lords and knights of foreign origin, who, by frequent intermarriages, had themselves become more than half Saxons, and who had long since prided themselves in the name of Englishmen, and would, in truth, be called by none other name. And full soon did Henricus Secundus make it a name of terror to Normandie, to the whole of France, and all circumjacent nations; and now that I write, in his happy time, hath he not filled the highest offices in church and state with men of English birth, and with many of the unmixed Saxon race? From his first entrance into the government of this realm, he was principally directed in matters of law and justice by our great lord archbishop, Thomas à Becket, then only archdeacon of Canterbury, provost of Beverley, and prebendary of Lincoln, and St. Paul's, London; and our Lord Thomas, as all men do know, is the son of Gilbert à Becket, merchant of the city of London.

King Henry kept his Christmas at Bermondsey; and it was from that place that he issued his royal mandate, that all the foreign mercenaries and companies of adventure that had done such terrible

mischief in the wars between King Stephen and Matilda should depart the land within a given time, and without carrying with them the plunder they had made. Divers of these men had been created earls and barons, and still kept possession of fiefs and castles, but they nearly all yielded for the great dread they had of the new king, and so got them out of England by the appointed day, as naked and poor as they were when, for our sins, they first came among us; and many a Fleming and Brabanter, Angevin and Breton, from being a baron and castle-builder, returned to the plough-tail in his own country. As the spring season approached, our great king repaired unto Wallingford Castle, and there convened a great council of earls, bishops, abbats, and some few citizens of note and wealthy franklins. It was a pleasant and right joyous journey that which I had with our Lord Abbat Reginald, and Sir Alain de Bohun, and my young Lord Arthur. Already the hamlets which had been burned began to rear again their yellow-thatched roofs in the bright sun; the wasted and dispeopled towns were already under repair; the shepherd, with his snowy flock and skipping lambs, was again whistling on the hill sides like one that had nought to fear; the hind was singing at his labours in the fertile fields; the farmer and the trader were travelling with their wains and pack-horses, from grange to market and from town to town, without dread of being robbed, and seized, and castle-bound; skiffs and barks were ascending and descending the river with good cargaisons, and without having a single lance or sword among their crews; the trenches cut in the churchyards were filled up, the unseemly engines of war were taken

down from the church towers, and the church bells, being replaced, again filled the air with their holy and sanctifying sounds. Even the wilderness and the solitary place partook of the spirit of this universal peace and gladness: there was sunshine in every man's face, whether bond or free. In summa, it seemed, in truth, a time when the wolf dwelt with the lamb, and the leopard lay down with the kid, and the lion with the fatted calf; when the iron of the great engines of war was turned into a ploughshare, the sword into a pruning-hook, and the lance into a pastoral crook. I, who did well remember the sad state of things only a few months agone, did much marvel that a country could so soon recover from the horrors of war, and the depth of a universal anarchy and havoc; and did, with a melting heart and moistened eye, offer up my thanks to the Giver of all good things that it should be so.

It was at Wallingford that I did see, for the first time, our far-renowned Thomas à Becket. There was no seeing him without discerning the great heights to which he was destined to rise, even more by his natural gifts than by the king's favour. At this time he numbered some thirty-six or thirty-seven years; and from his childhood those years had been years of study or of active business, as well of a secular as of an ecclesiastical kind. A handsome man was he at that season, and blithe and debonnaire, and, mayhap, a trifle too much given to state affairs, and the pomps and vanities of this world, for a churchman: but, oh, John the Evangelist, what a mind was his! what readiness of wit and reach of thought! And what an eagerness was in him to raise his countrymen to honour, to make his country

happy and full of glory, and to raise the church in power and dignity! "*Angli sumus*, we be Englishmen," said he to our lord abbat, "and we must see to raise the value of that name." Great and long experienced statesmen there were in this great council at Wallingford, men that had travailed in negotiation at home and abroad, and that had grown grey and bald in state offices; but verily they all seemed children compared with the son of our London merchant, and they one and all submitted their judgment to that of Thomas à Becket, who had barely passed the middle space of human life. Numerous were the wise and healing resolutions adopted in that great council, the most valuable of all being, that the crown lands which King Stephen had alienated, in order to satisfy his rapacious barons, should be resumed and re-annexed to the crown; and that not one of the eleven hundred and more castles, which the wicked castle-builders had made in Stephen's time, should be allowed to stand as a place of arms. Some few were to remain to curb the Welsh and Scots, or to guard the coast; but these were to be intrusted to the keeping of the king's own castellans: of the rest, not a stone was to be left upon another. This had been decreed before, but time had not been allowed King Stephen to do the work; and so easy and over indulgent was he, that it is possible the work would not have been done for many a year if he had continued to live and reign.

Even in these sun-shining days there were some slight clouds raised by the jealousies and ambitions and craving appetites of certain of our great men, who sought to raise themselves at the cost of others.

Certain magnates whose names shall not soil this pure parchment—certain self-seeking men who had been allied with Brian Fitzcount and Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe, and who, like Sir Ingelric, had shifted from side to side, tried hard to fill the ears of King Henry and his secretarius Thomas à Becket with tales unfavourable to Sir Alain de Bohun and his son Arthur; as that they had made war against the king's mother, and had oppressed and plundered the lords that were favourable to her cause, and had ever been the steadiest and most devoted of all the partisans of the usurper Stephen. But neither the king nor à-Becket was to be moved by these evil reports. "I do see," said the sharp and short-dealing secretarius, "that all the good and quiet people of his country bear testimony in favour of the Lord of Caversham and his brave son: I do further see (and here à-Becket, with a light and quick thumb, turned over great scrolls of parchment which had affixed to them the name and seal of King Stephen) that in the nineteen years he so faithfully served the late king, the said Sir Alain de Bohun hath not added a single manor, nay, nor a single rood of land, to the estates bequeathed unto him by his father or inherited through his wife; and also do I see that he hath aspired after no new rank, or title, or office, or honour whatsoever, but is now, save in the passage of time and the wear of nineteen years' faithful and at times very hard service, that which he was at the demise of Henricus Primus; and having all these things in consideration, I do opine that the Lord of Caversham hath ever followed the dictates of a pure conscience, and hath ever been and still is a man to be trusted

and honoured by our Lord the King Henricus Secundus."

"And I," quoth the right royal Plantagenet, "I who am come hither to make up differences, to reconcile factions, to heal the wounds which are yet bleeding, and to give peace to this good and patient and generous English people, will give heed to no tales told about the bygone times. The faith and affection which Sir Alain de Bohun did bear unto my unhappy predecessor, in bad fortune as well as in good, are proofs of the fidelity he will bear unto me when I have once his oath. My lords, there be some among ye that cannot show so clean a scutcheon! What with the turnings from this side to that and from that to this, and the castle-buildings and other doings of some of ye, I should have had a wilderness for a kingdom! But these things will I bury in oblivion, and this present mention of them is only provoked by ill-advised discourses, and the whisperings and murmurings of a few. But let that faction look to this—I am Henry Plantagenet, and not Stephen of Blois! With the laws to my aid I will be sole king in this land, and be obeyed as such! The reign of the eleven hundred kings is over! Let me hear no more of this. By all the saints in heaven and all their shrines on earth! I will hold that man mine enemy, and an enemy to the peace of this kingdom, that saith another word against Sir Alain de Bohun, or his son, or any lord or knight that hath done as they have done in the times that be past."

And so it was that our good Lord of Caversham was received by the king, not as an old enemy but as an old friend, and was admitted to sit with the

greatest of the lords in consultation in Wallingford Castle, and there to give his advice as to the best means of improving the condition of his country. And a few days after this, when Sir Alain and his son Arthur had taken the oaths of allegiance and fidelity unto King Henry and his infant son, the king with his own hands made our young Lord Arthur knight, giving him on that great occasion the sword which he had worn at his own side, and a splendid horse which had been brought for his own use from Apulia in Italie, out of the stables of the great Count of Conversano, who hath long bred the best horses in all Christendom, to his no small profit and glory.

Upon the breaking up of the council of Wallingford our great Plantagenet prepared to march into the west with a well furnished army, in order to reduce by siege the castles of Hugh Mortimer and a few other arrogant barons who had the madness to defy him. Before quitting Brian Fitzcount's great house, the king said to Sir Alain de Bohun, "For forty days, and not longer, I may have my young knight Sir Arthur with me. Unto thee, in the meantime, I give commission to level every castle whatsoever that hath been left standing in this fair country of Berkshire.

Seeing our lord abbat start a little at these words, the king said, in his sweetest voice, "Aye, my lord abbat, even Reading Castle must down with the rest; but ye will not feel the want of it, for with God's help none shall trouble thy house, or cause the least mischief to thy lands or vassals while I am king of England; and as a slight token of my trust and esteem, thy good and near neighbour Sir Alain shall keep his battlements standing.

It were a task worthy of thee, good my lord, that thou shouldest even go with Sir Alain on his present mission, and sprinkle some holy water on the ground where these accursed castles have stood, and build here and there a chapel upon the spots."

Our abbat, who ever much affected the society of Sir Alain, and who loved the good work in hand, said he would perform this task; and for this the king gave him thanks.

"Before I go hence," said the king to the Lord of Caversham, "is there no grace or guerdon that thou wouldest ask of me?"

Sir Alain responded that he and his son had had grace and guerdon enow.

"By our Ladie of Fontevraud," quoth the king, "I have given thee nothing, and have only given thy son a horse and a sword and his knighthood. Bethink thee, good Sir Alain, is there no thing that thou canst ask, and that I ought to give?"

Sir Alain smiled and shook his head, and said that there was nothing he could ask for.

"By the bones of my grandfather," quoth the king, "thou art the first man I ever found in Anjou, Normandie, or England, of this temper of mind! But I have a wish to give if thou hast none to take; I charge thee with a service that is important to me and the people, and that must cost thee somewhat ere thou shalt have finished it; and, therefore, would I give thee beforehand some suitable reward. . . . . What, still dumb and wantless?"

Here our lord abbat, bethinking himself of sundry things, whispered to his neighbour, "Sir Alain, say a word for Sir Arthur's marriage with the

gentle Alice, and ask the king's grace for a free gift of the forfeited lands which once appertained to Sir Ingelric."

"Beshrew me," quoth the Lord of Caversham, "I never thought of the king's consent being necessary to my son's marriage. I thank thee, lord abbat, and will speak to that point." Yet when he spake, all that he told was the simple story of the nurture which had been given in his own house by his sweet wife to the fair daughter of Sir Ingelric, and of the long and constant love which had been between that maiden and his only son, and all that he asked was that the king, as natural guardian of all noble orphans, would allow the marriage.

The eyebrows of the Plantagenet kept arching and rising in amazement, until Abbat Reginald thought that they would get to the top of his forehead, high as it was. When he spake again, which he did not do for a space, he said, "And is this formula, that costs me nothing, all that thou hast to ask from the King of England, Duke of Normandie, and Earl of Anjou, Poictou, and Aquitaine?"

"Verily," replied Sir Alain, "'tis all that I can think of, and for that one favour I will ever be your bedesman."

"Sir Alain," said our abbat, tugging him by the skirt, "thou hast said no one word touching the lands of Sir Ingelric."

"We need them not," said the high-minded old knight, "we be rich enow without. If Sir Ingelric were alive and penitent, I might, in this happy time of reconciliation and oblivion of past wrongs, ask the fiefs for him; but as it is, let them go, or let the king keep them—he may need them more than I."

"Well!" quoth the Plantagenet, "I see thou hast taken counsel. So now, my trusty Sir Alain, tell me what guerdon I shall give thee for the services with which thou art charged."

"My liege lord," quoth the lord of Caversham, "I, who in the times that are past have so often done that which liked me not for no fee or reward, but only in discharge of the oaths I had sworn, would not now ask a guerdon for the performance of a task so grateful unto me. Let my son espouse the fair Alice, and I am more than content."

But the king, who had been turning things over in his mind while our abbat had been counselling Sir Alain, now called in Sir Arthur de Bohun, and said to him thus:—"Sir Knight of mine own making, I, the king, do give unto thee the hand of that little ladie Alice thou wottest of; and I do confer as a dower upon the said ladie Alice all the manors, honours, and lands whatsoever that were by her mother conveyed to Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe. It were not well that so noble a damsel should go portionless to her husband. Ye may be people of that rare sort that would care not for the fiefs, but the noble maiden might feel it. The less we say of her unnatural sire Sir Ingelric the better for him and for us. Whether he be dead or alive, the lands which were his through his two marriages are confiscated. It were but a common act of justice to give back to the maiden that which was her mother's, and I would as my free gift add the lands of the second marriage. A-Becket shall see to it, and draw up the grant before we go hence. Sir Arthur, I hail thee lord of Speen, and wish thee joy with thy bride. These forty days of war will soon be over, and with thy ladie's prayers to help

us, we may finish with this mad Hugh de Mortimer in much less time."

Arthur knelt at the feet of the Plantagenet, and kissed his royal hand, and said it was too much grace and over much greatness; and both father and son joined in telling the king that the lands of the mother of Alice would be more than enough without the inheritance of the dark ladie.

"Of a truth," said Sir Alain, "I should fear that that evil heritage would come to us burthened with a curse; for it was ill acquired by the father of the dark ladie, and was ever by her misused."

"Well," quoth the king, "we will keep part of those lands in our own hands, and give a part to the abbat and monks of Reading, who will know how to remove the curse with masses and prayer, and almsgiving to the poor."

It was now the turn of our lord abbat to give thanks, which he did like the noble and learned churchman that he was. And all these things being pre-arranged, Thomas-à-Becket penned the royal grant for the fair Alice, and a new charter for our house; and the king signed and sealed the twain. By the charter he confirmed all preceding charters and donations. And he gave to the abbey two good manors which had belonged to the dark ladie, together with permission to enclose a park, in the place called Cumba, for the use of the sick, whether monks or strangers. And very soon after, upon his returning out of the west country, the king, by a particular charter, gave the monks of Reading licence to hold a fair every year on the day of St. James and the three following days, and confirmed our old right to a Sunday market at Thatcham, commanding the inhabitants of the

country to attend the said market, and the jealous men of Newbury not to hinder them or molest them. He also made us a grant of forty marks of silver, to be paid annually out of his exchequer until he should be enabled to secure unto us a revenue of the same value in lands. Verily, we the monks of Reading did no more suffer for that which we had done in the past time than did our noble neighbours of Caversham. When that the great men saw in what high esteem Sir Alain and Sir Arthur were held by the king, they spake to them cap in hand, and vexed their wit to make them fine flattering speeches; yea, the very lords who had essayed to work their ruin did now make them big professions of friendship.

So the Plantagenet departed and went unto Gloucester and Bridgenorth with his great battalia and engines of war, and the lord abbat and I, Father Felix, went with Sir Alain de Bohun to perambulate and perlustrate the country of Barkshire, bearing with us the royal mandate to all heads of boroughs and townships and all good men to assist in rooting out the foul donjons which disfigured the fair country like blots of ink let fall upon a pure skin of parchment. Expeditive and very complete was the work we made; for even as at Speen the country people of their own free will came flocking to us with their pickaxes and mattocks on their shoulders; and so soon as a castle was levelled, our lord abbat, in pontificalibus, did sprinkle holy water upon the spot to drive away the evil spirits that had so long reigned there; and did, in the tongue of the people, as well as in Latin, put up a prayer that such wickednesses might not be again known in the land. Divers strange things

and many recondite holes and corners, and most secret and undiscoverable chambers, were brought to light in the course of these demolishings; but it was not until we broke down and took to pieces a castle near Shrivenham, on the confines of Barks, an outlying and little known place, that we laid open to the light of day a very tragic spectacle, which was in itself a conclusion to a part of this my narration. Upon our coming to it, this castellum, like all the rest, was deserted, the drawbridge being down, and the portcullis and all other gates removed by the serfs of the neighbouring manors, who had made themselves good winter fires of the wood thereof. Nay, some poor houseless men had for a season dwelt within the keep, and penned their swine in the courtyard; but they had been terrified thence by unaccountable and horrible noises at midnight; and these men and their neighbours declared that it was the most accursed place in all the country. It was a wonderful thing to see how fast those walls toppled down, and how soon the deep moat was filled up. When the thick southern wall of the square keep was all but levelled, Sir Alain de Bohun's people came suddenly upon a secret chamber which had been contrived with much art and cunning within the said wall. The men reached it by demolishing the masonry above, but the access to it had been through a crooked passage which mounted from a cell underground, and then through a low narrow doorway, the door of which contained more iron than oak, and closed inward with certain hidden springs, the secret whereof was not to be apprehended by any of us until the door was knocked down and taken to pieces. Within this dark and narrow chamber was

revealed a great heap of gold and silver, being well nigh as much as we had found at Speen; and, prone upon this heap, with the face buried among the gold and silver pieces, and with the arms stretched out as though he had died in the act of clutching the heap, was seen the body of a knight in black mail. At the first glance Sir Alain's people and the serfs that were helping them cried out joyously, "Gold! gold!" but then they took the knight in his armour for some scaled dragon or demon that was guarding the treasure, and they ran away, crying "Diabolus! It is the devil!"

As it especially concerned monks to deal with the great dragon, and lay evil spirits, Abbat Reginald and I, Father Felix, with an acolyte, who was but of tender age, and truth to say, sorely afeared, hastened with Sir Alain to that pit within the wall.

"By the blessed rood!" said the Lord of Caversham, as he looked down into the hollow space—"That is no living devil, but the dead body of Sir Ingelric of Huntercombe! I know him by that black mail of Milan, and by the rare hilt of that sword, which I did give him when we were sworn friends and brothers."

"This is wonderful, and I see the finger of Heaven in it," said our abbat, crossing himself: and we all crossed ourselves for the amazement and horror that was upon us. The meaner sort, who had fled from the dead knight, now bethought themselves of the glittering gold, and came back to the edge of that narrow pit; and when we, the monks, had thrown some holy water therein, and caused our acolyte to hold the cross over the gap, two of Sir Alain's men-at-arms descended, and re-

ascending, brought forth the body and laid it at our feet upon its back, and with its face turned towards the heavens. Jesu Maria! but it was a ghostly sight! From the little air that had been in that narrow cell, and from the great siccity or dryness of the place, betwixt stones, flint, and mortar, the body had not wasted away, or undergone the rapid corruption of the damp grave; and albeit the face was all shrivelled and shrunk, it was not hard to trace some of the lineaments of the unhappy Sir Ingelric. Within the cavity of the mouth were pieces of coined gold, as tho' he had set his famishing teeth in them; and within his clenched hands, clenched by the last agony and convulsion of death, were pieces of gold and silver. On the brow was the well-known mark of a wound which that unhappy knight had gotten in his early days in fighting for King Stephen; the Agnus Dei, and the little cross at the breast, were those of Sir Ingelric, and were marked with his name; and the blade of the sword bore the conjoined names of Sir Ingelric and Sir Alain. Having noted and pointed out all these things, Abbat Reginald, after another and more copious aspersion of the blessed water, which is holier than the stream which now floweth in Jordan, raised his right hand and said, "My children, there is a dread lesson and example in that which lieth before us! Crooked courses ever lead to evil ends, albeit not always in this nether world. But here is one that hath reaped upon earth the fruit of his crimes, and that hath perished by the demon that first led him astray—aye, perished upon a heap of gold and silver, and of famine, the cruellest of deaths, and in a miser's hole—a robber's hiding-place—unpitied, unheeded, un-

confessed, with the fiend mocking him, and bidding him eat his gold, and with the interdict of holy mother church and the curses of ruined men pressing upon his sinful soul. And was it for this, oh Sir Ingelric, that thou didst soil thy faith, and betray thy king and friends, and waste the fair land of thy birth, and rack and torture the poor? Take hence the excommunicate body and bury it deep in unconsecrated earth; but remember, oh my children, all that which ye have this day seen!"

The gold and silver we removed and put into strong coffers, in order that we might use them with the same justice and regard to the poor that we had used with the treasure found in Sir Ingelric's own castle at Speen.

When we came to make inquiries among the people of those parts, and to put their several reports together, we made a good key to the awful enigma and mystery of Sir Ingelric's death. That castle by Shrivenham had been made by one of the very worst of the castle-building robbers, who had never raised any standard but his own over his donjon keep. In the autumnal season of the year preceding that in which we came to destroy the place, and at the time when the joint orders of King Stephen and Henry Plantagenet were sent forth against the castle-holders, there suddenly appeared at Shrivenham a band that came from the westward, and that were headed by a knight in black mail, and with a black plume to his casque; and by some of those reaches of treachery which were common among these evil doers, the newcomers got possession of this castellum, and made a slaughter of the builder of it, and of the men that were true to him. But the new comers had

not been a day in possession of the castle when intelligence was brought them by a scout that a force of King Stephen, which had tracked them from the westward, was approaching Shrivenham; and thereupon, and for that the castle was too unfurnished with victual to withstand any beleaguer, the strangers fled from it more suddenly than they had come to it. As the vicinage was almost deserted, and as the few people fled and hid themselves, the black band had no communications with them during their brief stay; but two poor serfs who had watched their departure had described it as being full of panic, terror, and of a dread of other things besides that of the close approach of the king's force (which force never came at all); for they had heard the band bewailing that they had no longer a leader, that their chief had disappeared in the castellum, and that the devil must have carried him off bodily: and the serfs did well mark that the knight in the black mail was not among them, nor at their head, as they had seen him at their first coming. And as Sir Alain's people, in finishing their good work at the castellum, threw open the subterrain winding passage, of which mention hath been made, they found the body of an old man with a bundle of great keys at his girdle, and a long dagger sticking in his left side; and his head lay close to the strong door of the treasure chamber, and between the body and the door were picked up a strong bag and part of a long extinguished torch.

"By Saint Lucia, who presideth over man's blessed organ of sight and the glorious light of day," quoth our abbat; "by sweet Saint Lucia, I do see daylight through that dark passage. The bait of

that gold drew Sir Ingelric hither, to be taken as in a trap. He was eager to have the first hanselling and most precious bits of the treasure, or mayhap to carry off the whole, or conceal it for his own use, counting upon more time than heaven allowed him. That old unshriven traitor was, doubtless, one of the men of the castle-builder, that betrayed their master, and him Sir Ingelric slew so soon as he had led him to the chamber and opened the door, with the intent that he should not divulge unto others the secret of the hiding place. Peradventure, the old man in his death-struggles dashed out the light and pulled to the open door; or Sir Ingelric, being left in darkness, and uninformed of the fastenings, did in his great haste kick the door and so cause it to fly to, and shut for ever upon him."

We did all think that the riddle was well read by Abbat Reginald, and that this was a natural conclusion to the other and better known incidents of Sir Ingelric's dark story.

By the time we had finished with the wicked castles of Barkshire, our great and ever victorious King Henry had finished with that perverse man Hugh de Mortimer; and as we came to our house at Pangbourne on our way back to Reading, we there met the young Lord of Caversham, Sir Arthur de Bohun, who had been dismissed to his home by the king, and not without some further proof of the royal friendship, for, as it was ever in his nature to do, Sir Arthur had done manfully in the king's sieges and other emprises. It was a happy meeting to all of us, and there was no longer any public calamity to cloud or reproach our private happiness. The donjons were all down, or in good keep-

ing; and, from end to end and in all its breadth England was at peace, and none of the baronage were so daring as to resist the king and the law. *Dulce mihi nomen pacis!*—ever sweet unto me was the name of peace, and now we had both the name and the substance of it. It was therefore resolved at Pangbourne that the marriage of Sir Arthur and the Lady Alice should be celebrated on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, which was now near at hand.

Upon coming to Caversham Sir Alain de Bohun hung his shield upon the wall, intending to go forth to no more wars. Then he put into the hands of the gentle Alice the king's charter which conferred upon her the domains of her mother, telling her, in his jocose way, that as she had now so goodly an inheritance she might be minded to quit the humble house and poor people at Caversham, and get her to court to match with some great earl. And at this that fairest of maidens placed the king's charter in the hands of Sir Arthur, and with a blushing cheek and without words spoken, went out of the hall. Sir Arthur did afterwards inform her, in the gentlest manner, of the sure death of Sir Ingelric many months agone; and, albeit he had been so unnatural a father, Alice shed many tears, and made a vow to give money to the church and poor, that his sinful soul might be prayed for. The dreadful manner of Sir Ingelric's death was carefully concealed from the young bride, and hath never been fully made known unto her. She was united to Sir Arthur in our abbey church, on the happiest festival of St. Michael that our house had ever known, for the season was mild and beautiful, the harvest had been abundant, we had gotten in

all our crops without hindrance, our granaries were filled with corn and our hearts with joy; and as all of us, from the lord abbat down to the obscurest lay brother, had a surpassing affection as well for the gentle bride as for her noble mate, who had in a manner been our son and pupil, and an old reverence and love for Sir Alain and his ladie, we could not but rejoice at the great joy we saw in them. But all good people, gentle or simple, bond or free, did jubilate on this happy day; and when the bride and bridegroom returned homeward, the procession which followed them, shouting and singing, and calling down blessings upon their young heads, was so long as to run in an unbroken line from the midst of the King's mead to the end of Caversham-bridge; for our good vassals of Reading town had all put on their holiday clothes and shut up their houses, and all the people of Caversham were afoot, and Tilehurst, and Sulham, and Charlton, and Purley, and Sunning, and Speen, and Pangbourne, and every other township and village for miles roundabout had poured out their inhabitants; and not a franklin or serf, not a man, woman, or child among them all, but was feasted either by Sir Alain or Sir Arthur, or by us the monks of Reading. Methinks the sun never rose and set upon so beautiful a day! The air and the earth rejoiced, and the flowing waters; the full Thamesis and our own quick and resonant Kennet made music and thanksgiving together; and seemed it to me that I had never so loved the country of my birth, and the fair scenes in which my life had been past from infancy to ripe manhood; and yet had I ever loved that fair country above all that mine eyes had seen in much travelling. *Natale solum dulcedine cunctos*

mulcet. Oh native soil, thou softenest man's heart, and fillest it with love of thee!

Now did the Ladie Alice more than verify the happy prediction which our good Abbat Edward put forth in the stormy time, to wit, that the little maiden which came to our house in the basket, and which I, Felix the novice, and Philip the lay-brother did convey by night unto Caversham, would make amends for the ingratitude and treasons and other wicked doings of her father. Betwixt that merry wedding-day and the day that now is, there have been nine long years, and they have all been years of peace and happiness to the good house at Caversham, with that increase and multiplication which God willed when the world was in its infancy and all unpeopled.

Happy, too, hath been our house at Reading, and great the increase of the abbey in beauty and splendour. Some few griefs and trials we have had; for earth, at the happiest, was never meant to be heaven; and we all live to die, and must die to live again. The good and bountiful Lord Abbat Reginald deceased on the fourth of the kalends of February, in the year of grace eleven hundred and fifty-eight; but he died full of years and honour, and verily, the Lord Abbat Roger that now is, hath been approved his very worthy successor. As our wealth increased under the blessed peace, and the sage government of our great king, and the favour of our Lord Thomas à Becket, for some while chancellor of the kingdom, and now and for the two years last past, by the grace of God, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England, we of the chapter did begin to think that our church was not sufficiently lofty and spacious, and that wondrous

improvements might be made in it, if we devoted to the task some of our superfluous wealth. And six years agone, when our Lord Reginald was in the twelfth year of his government over us (may our Ladie the Virgin, and St. John and St. James ever have him in their holy keeping), we made a beginning; and the year last past, being the year of our redemption eleven hundred and sixty-four, we finished our great church, which hath been so much enlarged and altered that it may be called a new church; and Rex Henricus Secundus being present with ten suffragan bishops, and great lay barons too many to count, our Lord Archbishop Thomas did consecrate it with that solemnity and magnificence which he puts into all his doings: and on the very day on which the archbishop consecrated our church, the king, keeping his royal promise, granted us a land revenue of forty marks of silver out of the manor of Hoo in Kent, by assignment of Sir Robert Bardolph, the lord of that manor.

And our mighty and ever victorious king, who is no less a friend to learning and learned men, nor less a patron of the church than was his grandfather the Beauclerc, hath ordered books to be bought for the enriching of our library, and hath given us another charter confirming our liberties and immunities, and enjoining all the kings that may come after him to observe the same, and calling upon the Lord to snatch them out of the land of the living, together with their posterity, if they or any one of them should seek to infringe our charter, or lessen our rights and properties. "*Quam qui infringere vel minuere presumpserit, extrahat eum dominus et evertat de terra viventium cum omni*

posteritate sua." These be the king's very words in the second great charter he hath given us.

Here I surcease from the pleasant labours which have amused the few lonely hours that my various duties left me. There cannot be a better time to stop and say *vale!* Henricus Secundus is king; Thomas à Becket is primate; Roger is lord abbat of Reading; and I, Felix the Sunningite, and novice that was, am poor sub-prior; and every monk of the house is a man of English birth. It hath been noted of late, that our prior declineth apace; and there hath been a talk among the cloister monks that I best merit that succession, which would place me next in dignity and greatness to the mitred lord abbat of this royal abbey. But, alas! what is increase of dignity but increase of care! I do hope that our good prior may live all through this winter; albeit, it is a very sharp one, and old men be falling fast around us.—*Vale et semper Vale!*

THE END.

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THE

DUTCH IN THE MEDWAY.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'THE CAMP OF REFUGE.'

UPNOR CASTLE.

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THE

DUTCH IN THE MEDWAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE NAVY-OFFICE.

EXPECTING the reader to follow us, we take a walk through the city of London, and stop at a large ugly pile of building which stands not far from Tower Hill and the water-side. This building is the old Navy-Office of the time of Charles II. It occupies the site of Lumley House, formerly a monastery belonging to the order of friars called the Brothers of the Holy Cross, whose Latin designation — FRATRES SANCTÆ CRUCIS — has been awkwardly Anglicised into *Crutched Friars*. It is a place which has witnessed many changes. At the Reformation Henry VIII. made a grant of the house to that delight of the muses and of mankind, Sir Thomas Wyatt, the friend of the accomplished Earl of Surrey, and here Wyatt once lived, and meditated, and wrote. At a later period the great hall of the friars had been converted into a glass-house for the blowing of drinking-glasses. The greater part of the buildings had been consumed by fire, through the carelessness of the glass-blowers, whose trade had so intimate a connection with

drink: yet the present building—or the Navy-Office—does rather more than occupy the site of the monastic edifice, for it includes whole portions of the dwelling of the Friars, and notably parts of the cloisters, and the whole of the ancient gate of the monastery, which now, even as in the olden time, has a wicket in it, and a grated aperture with a sliding-board behind it.

But in front of this gate we find not a group of monks of the order "Sanctæ Crucis," but a crowd of rough English sailors with pieces of paper and tickets in their hands, and with an expression of great dissatisfaction and anger upon their countenances. One of these men advances right up to the gate, and, after ringing a great bell by the side of it, he beats impatiently with his horny fist upon the wicket. A porter, not in a cowl, but wearing a blue cap, moves the sliding-board, peeps through the small iron grating, and instead of opening the wicket, says, in no very gentle tone, "What! here again! back so soon! What would ye now?"

"Master Strong," says the sailor, "we would change these tickets for money—we cannot get money, or the money's worth for them—we lack bread, and would have it, as we have earned it by hard service in the king's ships; our men's wives and children be starving! But, first of all, we would have speech with their honours."

"Will Gaff," says the porter, "I may not open the door; I cannot admit thee and thy noisy crew. Much trouble befel me the last time I did so. There is no Board sitting to-day: their Honours are all away to Whitehall to see the King's majesty and his highness the Duke play a match a bowls."

"Nay," says Will Gaff, "their Honours told us

last week that there would be a Board to-day, and that measures would be taken to give us money instead of these tickets, which the very Jews will no longer take even at the rate of a crown for the pound."

"True," says the janitor, "there was to have been a Board this afternoon; but their honours heard of this great bowling-match, and could not but go to it."

"Ay, ay! sport before duty—pleasure before business! that seemeth now the rule with all men in office! and thus it befalleth, Master Strong, that the affairs of the country go amiss, and we poor mariners, who fight for the country, be left to starve."

"Art turning fanatic and leveller? Hast been bitten by some preaching Fifth Monarchy man? Have a care, Will Gaff, or perchance thou mayest get an overhauling for high treason, and die the death of Venner!"

"Avast there, Master Strong, avast! No fanatic am I, or leveller—though I am levelled enow myself, by poverty and want—I never bear up for a conventicle. No preachings have I heard since I was afloat in the 'Royal Charles,' where the chaplain told us to fear God and honour the king. God bless his majesty, say I, and God bless the duke, with all my heart—

"God bless King Charles, the Duke of York,
The Royal Family."

And I do say it with all my heart! and I would die for the King's majesty and our Lord High Admiral, if they would but put away their evil and corrupt counsellors, and pay us our dues, and put our fleets in condition to drive these Dutch from our seas."

While Will Gaff was saying these words a tall, thin, sour-visaged sailor in the crowd said to some who were nearest to him, "Will is too mealy-mouthed; what does he mean with his kings and dukes? will his god-blessings turn these tickets into dollars? The King has fallen a thousand leagues to leeward of the path of righteousness; he thinks of nothing but his misses; and the Duke, though the head of the navy and Lord High Admiral, is little better than the King, and is a rank Papist to boot." Some of the men who heard this sour speech assented to it with nods and shakes of the head and low groans; but others whistled between their teeth, and looked as if they thought that Joel Wyke was going a little too far in the wind's eye.

Master Strong, the porter, being mollified by Will Gaff's last speech, said, in reply to it, that albeit their Honours were all away, Mr. Clerk Pepys was within, working hard, as was his wont, in his office; and that it might be that *he* would condescend to talk with Will about the money-tickets, if Will would only come in alone. The frank-hearted seaman begged Strong to go and see how the Clerk stood affected. The porter closed the little grating and went into the interior of the building. While he was absent some of the sailors in the crowd said that they ought all to go in, and explain their great want, as they had done before; that the Clerk of the Navy ought to have an open ear for every honest man in the service. Others at the same time said that there ought to be at least a deputation, as one man for every ship's crew; and the latter proposition was strongly urged by Joel Wyke, who was very proud of his

speech-making abilities, and who, from his frequent exercise of them, had gotten the name of "Speaker Joel," together with the reputation of being quite a sea-lawyer. While Joel was haranguing in a loud shrill voice, and with a nasal twang which savoured strongly of the conventicle, Master Strong, the door-keeper, returned to the gate, and told Will Gaff, through the grating, that the clerk would see him. But Joel Wyke came to the wicket and told Master Strong that the sailors of the fleet did not think it fit to trust their case to the pleading of one young man, and had come to the resolution that a deputation must see Mr. Pepys and confer with him. The doorkeeper, who knew his man, said that this could not be, and that Joel was a pert knave for proposing it—yea, a pert knave and a fanatic. The sea-lawyer waxed very wroth, his face becoming as red as the deep yellow of his complexion would allow: he threatened assault and battery—spoke of pulling the porter's nose through the iron grating, of bursting open the wicket, of breaking down the big gate with sledge-hammers and axes; but Will allayed the storm by proposing that, in lieu of a deputation of many seamen, Joel Wyke should be joined in commission with him, and that they two should go in and have speech with Mr. Pepys. The mob, who were evidently divided into two parties, the one looking to Gaff as their chief, and the other regarding Wyke in that light, soon agreed that they would be satisfied with this arrangement. Strong went again into the innermost part of the edifice, where Pepys was not writing, but trembling, for the official's nerves were not heroically strung; and as none knew better than he the wrongs which had been done by a

thoughtless, extravagant, and profligate government to the seamen of the royal navy, and the deep distress in which the sailors and their families had been lying for many, many months, he apprehended some act of violence from their desperation. It was a year ago or thereupon, since Pepys was terrified out of his wits, and almost deprived of his supper, by an insurrection of sailors' wives, who, to the number of three hundred and more, screamed for money to buy bread. Mrs. Pepys had a delicate venison pasty for supper that night, but was afraid to send it to the baker's to be baked, apprehending that the famishing women would offer violence to it. The pasty, however, was sent and brought back in safety—for Pepys was a lucky man. He, however, thought it better now to grant a parley than provoke a storm; and he rather readily consented to receive the two deputies instead of one, but beseeched the porter, who was *strong* by nature as well as by name, to hold hard by the wicket when it was opened, and not admit more than those two. And, to support the janitor, Pepys sent his under-clerk Mr. Hater, who would much rather have seen his principal go himself.

Not relying entirely upon his own great bodily strength, and counting for the little that it was worth the assistance of the under-clerk, Strong, when he returned to the grating, made an appeal to the honour of the sailors, and concluded a paction with them, by which they agreed to keep on the other side of the street when the wicket should be opened to admit their two delegates. Upon these conditions, which were faithfully observed by the seamen, the wicket was unbarred, and Will Gaff and Joel Wyke were admitted. They stayed within

for a very long time, for Speaker Joel must needs make one of his longest speeches to the smart clerk, whose confusion and fright he much enjoyed. The mob outside became impatient, and began shouting and calling for Will and Joel with so loud a chorus that it could be heard in every part of the edifice. At last, as it was growing towards dusk, the two delegates came forth into the street. Will Gaff had a smile upon his face, betokening that he, upon the whole, was satisfied with the interview; but Joel Wyke looked as sour as he did before he went in. The sailors gathered round them, eager to know what Mr. Pepys had said, and whether he gave them any immediate hope of getting their money, and fresh employment aboard. Will declared that Mr. Pepys was a very fine gentleman, and the sailors' friend; that he was as sorry as they were themselves at having no money to give them, and no control over the navy-chest; that he had promised to speak not only with their Honours of the Board, but also with the Duke and the Lord High Admiral, and otherwise do all that he possibly could do in order to get the seamen's tickets changed into silver coin; and hoped that before the world was a week older all their just demands would be satisfied, and profitable employment found for them on board the King's ships in the Medway. "His Honour," subjoined Gaff, "saith that he worketh hard for the navy, and hath but little pay or emolument himself; that he is but a poor man who began the world with nothing, and is still struggling with difficulties, finding it very hard to make the two ends meet. Nevertheless he hath put his hand into his pocket, like a gentleman as he is, and hath given me a golden jacobus, wherewith I propose that we adjourn to the

Anchor tavern and drink his honour's health, though it be but in a drop of drink a man."

Very different was the harangue of Speaker Joel. That sea-lawyer declared that no good had been done; that no faith was to be put in the promises of a fawning, wheedling, coat-turning rogue like Pepys, who cared not how many honest and righteous sailors starved, provided he could enrich himself by partaking in the plunder, and furnish himself amply with the means of gratifying his passion for fine clothes, fine company, ungodly plays, masques, and dances, and other unholy sports, which had been put down and prohibited in the days when there was a just judge in Israel, or when this land was governed according to the Gospel, in wisdom and righteousness. "We," subjoined Joel, "we misused mariners, who have shed our blood in battle, have jackets that are tattered and torn, and few of us have any shirts under our jackets, or any shoes to our feet; but this servant of the navy, who is appointed and paid by the country only to take care of our interests, is clad like Dives in fine linen and costly raiment; he walks about the world in velvets and satins and silks, with all the new-fangled fopperies brought over from France: the very wig on his head hath cost more money than the Wapping Jews would give us for all our clothes put together. The price is monstrous! the wig itself is monstrous! It comes from that land of papistry and idolatry where men be satisfied with nothing that nature sends them; where men cut off their own hair in order to wear the hair of other people. Verily this peruke, or periwig, smells as strongly of Popery as the devil does of brimstone. Nothing

can go well with England or with us so long as the chief clerk to the navy wears such a wig. Verily it is curled, and twisted, and powdered, and bulged out, so as to look like a lion's mane. But we have never beaten the Dutch since these French wigs came among us! We poor sailors may be as hungry as we are naked, but Mr. Secretary fares sumptuously every day, feasting at home with that fine city madam his wife, or feasting in ordinaries or cook-shops, with dissolute cavalieros, and robbers of the nation like himself. And yet for all this outlay he is very rich. How greatly, therefore, must he rob the navy and us poor mariners! Without fearing the fate of Ananias, he swore unto me that he is poor—very poor; that he hath no money to give; and that at this moment the coffers of the Admiralty be entirely empty. He hath given unto Will Gaff (for my part I scorned the gift) one jacobus to be divided among ye all that be here. This will not make a farthing a-piece if the coin is a good one; and I have my suspicions that it may be clipped. We must deal otherwise with this Mr. Pepys, and with those who are above him, than we have hitherto done, or we shall get not a rap of our pay, but be left starving as we are with these tickets, which Beelzebub invented, in our hands or pockets. But what do I say, pockets?—there is no having pockets without having clothes, and we shall soon have neither jacket, vest, nor breeches. Ah, my shipmates! Ah, my brethren all! it was not thus with us in the by-gone days, when we were regularly paid, not in paper, but in cash; when we had plenty of clothes, and plenty of pockets, and pockets well-lined with piastres, reals, and doubloons, taken

from the idolatrous Spaniards and the other worshippers of the scarlet whore of Rome! But there was holiness then in the land and in this court of England; no Sabbath-breaking was allowed either at sea or ashore, and therefore were our arms always blessed, and therefore did we never storm a place on the Spanish Main without taking it, with great booty to ourselves, and a great slaughter of the Papishes. I sailed with Captain Sawkins in the Gulf of Panama, when he blew out a man's brains on the quarter-deck for only touching a dice-box on the Lord's Day."

"Stop, Joel Wyke!" cried one of Will Gaff's party. "Hold hard there! That Sawkins thou namest of was a blue-light, a canting, psalm-singing son of—what I won't mention, and nothing else but a flibusteer and robber! We have had enough, O Joel, of thy hard bundle of oakum, so let Will Gaff spin us a yarn!"

But the sea-speaker would not be stopped, and being enraged at the interruption and at the preference given by many to the oratory of Gaff, he went on more furiously than ever. While he was ranting and foaming at the mouth (ranting and foaming the more because many of Gaff's friends whewed and whistled at him), the shades of evening closed in, and the uproarious London apprentices broke loose from their shops, warehouses, and workshops; and many of them came trooping down to Crutched-friars, in the hope of enjoying a good sailor riot, and of joining in it out of sheer love of mischief. These mad-cap apprentices, indeed, sought the scene of disturbance as anxiously as the older and sedater citizens avoided it. They all knew the cause of complaint, for the government

had been paying the seamen of the royal navy with tickets instead of cash ever since the first year of the Restoration of Charles II., and there had been many riots before this present one. As the lads arrived they shouted, "Well done, sailors! get change for your tickets! Make the rogues in the big house swallow them and give you gold for them! On, on, shipmen! the London 'prentices be coming." Although he loved not their frolicksome humour, and had often moaned in the spirit over the lightness of conversation and behaviour of these young denizens of the city, who, like other and higher parts of the nation, seemed determined to make up for lost time, and to take a full swing of frolic and pleasure, which had been so long interdicted by the Presbyterians and Puritans, Joel Wyke nevertheless was not sorry to see their arrival, and, like all mob-orators and club-men, he became the bolder as the number of his auditors increased.

"I say," said the sea-lawyer, "that the clerk to the navy, in there, is a godless rogue that ought to be hanged! I say that they are all rogues together, selling and trafficking in places, filling the navy-office, the victualling-office, the dockyards, and all other offices connected with the service, with cheats and thieves, who defraud and plunder, or with fools, who know not how to perform their duty. They have all been feathering their nests, while the navy has been getting deeper and deeper into debt. They have all been wallowing in luxury and sin, while we have been starving. They and their fellows have sold the country to France, and are going to bring in Popery as well as perukes from France. Our stomachs are empty, and our religion

is in danger. The Lord hath already visited the land and this great city with fearful judgments; but there are those who will not be warned even by fire and plague; their wickedness hath become daily more wicked; they have persecuted God's few faithful people for raising their voices against the sins of the time, for interpreting God's word and the prophecies of the saints, and for calling upon the land to repent in sackcloth and ashes; and therefore judgments still more terrible than those we have lately witnessed are close at hand. Tom of the Woods has said it; and ye all know by experience how true a prophet is Tom. After these judgments we shall have the reign of the saints upon earth; but, shipmates, how are we to live until that happy time if the navy-office pay us not? Shipmates, what shall we do—what is to be done?"

"I wish," said one of the many saucy apprentices, "I wish you would leave off preaching and be a-doing of something. We came here for fun, and not to hear a conventicle discourse about judgments and your fifth monarchy! Let me tell you what to do by way of making a profitable or a merry beginning—break open that black gate, catch Clerk Pepys, and make him empty the strong boxes, and give you money for the tickets; and if he will not or cannot do it, why, carry him across the hill, and throw him into the Tower ditch, periwig and all. A good ducking will do the clerk no harm—his business is with the water; and I say *duck*, but not *drown* him!"

Poor Pepys heard this ribald speech of the London 'prentice with his own ears, for, being anxious to get home to his own house, he had come to the

wicket to peep through a corner of the grating and see whether the mob were dispersing or not, and at this moment he and his man Hater had their ears close to the grating. The secretary's feelings were not to be envied: it was a cold, raw, blowing evening of March, such as no man would choose for a bathe in Thames water; the seamen had not collected for a mere frolic like the apprentices, and some of the more desperate or fanatic sailors might think drowning more applicable to his case than ducking; he might be drowned without their intending it, as many a good man had been killed in wild mischievous sport; and if his life should be saved, his fine clothes would be spoiled and lost for ever; and to Mr. Pepys his fine clothes were as a part of himself, as members and portions of his own living sentient body, nay as part and parcel of his own soul. And to make the stroke the keener, Pepys had on him this day the most costly and best of his attire; for he too had intended to go westward to the Mall to see the Royal sport, and, what would have pleased him more, all the fine-dressed lords and ladies, and bewitching king's mistresses, and he had only been prevented from going by the little accident that every soul in or connected with the Navy-office, except Hater his clerk, and Strong the janitor, had taken their departure thitherward before him, leaving the offices all empty and some important work to be done. He had equipped himself in his largest and newest periwig, his best peach-blossomed velvet coat, and his violet-coloured camlet cloak with silver buttons; and Mrs. Pepys had said that morning at his going out, that she had never seen him look grander, or more like himself. To

have all these gallantries spoiled in their first bloom, and in all their freshness, and before he had received the compliments of his friends upon the one half of them—(the Duke of York had paid a studied eulogy to his wig, but that was some years ago, when he appeared for the first time at court in his periwig, and that periwig was nothing in dimension and make to this periwig)—to have wig, coat, cloak, and all the rest of his exquisite toilet hurled into the mud and water of the Tower ditch, was too distracting to think of. This cruel fate might, however, have befallen both the clothes and their wearer, but for the good, kind heart of Will Gaff, and the moderation of Will's immediate followers. Speaker Joel would fain have broken open the gate, as he had no faith in the clerk's word, and firmly believed some strong boxes he had seen in his office must contain money. Joel was also impelled by a strong political and religious hatred against all men now in office, and indeed against every man that preferred the present kingly government to the government of the saints. But Will Gaff, who had no such inveterate feeling, and who looked to no other millennium than that of getting paid for the past, and service and pay for the future, and who both believed that Pepys had told the truth, and that nothing but disgrace could be got by breaking open the gate and the strong boxes, and laying hands of violence upon the clerk, made a short, sound, and sailor-like speech, which was much applauded by his own party and by the 'prentice boys, and even by some of the sour sort who followed Joel Wyke. He made a great deal of the golden jacobus which Pepys had given him out of his own private pocket; and he ended his

speech by proposing that they should give three cheers for the open-handed clerk. Will's own friends gave tongue immediately, and the city apprentices joined them, not one of them shouting more heartily than the frolicsome youth who had proposed ducking Pepys in the Tower ditch. Except a few, who could not resist the force of example, and who remained to finish the three cheers for the clerk, Joel Wyke's people took their departure, some going to their own hungry lodgings, but more repairing to a secret conventicle or meeting-house in the vicinity of Ratcliffe-highway, where, notwithstanding all the severity of the Government, and the terrible proclamations which had frequently been acted upon, a crowd of fanatics assembled night after night to listen to preachers more hot-brained than themselves; to pray for another revolution and civil war, and the establishment of the fifth-monarchy men; and to concert wild and ferocious, but impracticable schemes of insurrection. Will Gaff and his party, resolving to wait with as much patience as they could for another week, went straight to the Anchor tavern in Wapping, to spend the jacobus and perhaps a little more, to drink the clerk's health, and give a toast for the fulfilment of his promise at the week's end. A good many of the apprentices went with them, and clubbed their pence with them, and got quit of their superfluous vivacity by fighting with the night-watch on Tower-hill, and breaking some Jews' windows in Rosemary-lane. The rest of the hopes of the city strolled away to Moorfields to see a match of bear-baiting by torch-light.

About an hour after they had all dispersed from Crutched-friars, and a full half-hour after Mr. Pepys

had got safely from the Navy-office to his own house and loving spouse, a company of King's Guards arrived from the Tower to suppress the riot, and, finding nothing to do, they marched quietly back again. Nearly everything in the kingdom was in a condition of negligence and unreadiness. At the court end of town everything seemed to be a jest, and was treated as such; at the east end, and more particularly among the sailors, there was poverty, discontent, disaffection, fanaticism, and treason. No marvel was it therefore that the flag of England was on the eve of sustaining a never to be forgotten disgrace.

CHAPTER II.

THE CLERK OF THE NAVY AT HOME.

It is but a short step from the Navy-office in Crutched-friars to Seething-lane, in the parish of St. Olave, Hart-street, where there is a good substantial dwelling-house. The door is carefully closed and locked, and the lower windows, opening upon the street, are well secured by iron bars. It is but a turbulent neighbourhood, being so near to Wapping and Ratcliffe-highway, and these are extra-turbulent times, when it behoves every cautious man to look well to his own house. If he does not, he must expect but little protection from the laws and the authorities that be. Without forcing lock or breaking bar, and without calling upon the aid of sprite or witch, we can enter this well-guarded house and descry its occupants and furniture. Walk in with us, gentle reader.

We cross an entrance-hall, paved with flagstones, and ascend a good, broad, open staircase, with balustrades of oak, quaintly carved and nicely polished. On the first landing-place a door faces us. The door is closed and locked like the street-door, and although it is now the warm and genial month of June, there is a heavy curtain, or hanging, made of green serge and wadded, closely drawn on the inner side of the door—for servants (and there are four or five in the offices below) have a wicked

habit of peeping through keyholes, and of listening to what their betters are about; and those within the room have been doing some things which they would not have seen, and are now saying many things which they would not have heard by any one. But to our natural magic the strong oaken door flies open, the heavy-wadded hanging lifts itself to let us pass, and we stand in the middle of the room, unheard and unseen. On great occasions it is the dining-room of the house, and a very comfortable room it is. The walls are covered with green serge, with gilt leather for borders; the ceiling, though not very lofty, is neatly painted, and is crossed by two massy beams of oak curiously carved; the floor is covered partly with a neat mat, and partly with a soft and richly coloured Turkey carpet. We have had our wars and troubles, and some retrograde steps in taste and letters since the days of Queen Elizabeth, but here is evidence that we are advancing in domestic comfort and the commoner arts. The matting is a great improvement upon loose rushes; the carpet is a step indeed! Yet are there still some things in this furnishing which appear in our eyes rather clumsy and uncouth. These great heavy chests, or trunks, at the sides of the room, bound with strong iron bindings, and secured (when they are shut, for they are open now) with clumsy locks and great padlocks, are not such things as we would keep our plate, table-linen, and fine clothes in; nor is this room the place where we would magazine those stores and treasures. That looking-glass over the mantel-piece, into which a busy lady is now and then peeping, is but small and dingy, and seems to be warped; the grate beneath for holding

the sea-coal fire when the weather demands it, is very wide, rough, and slovenly; these heavy chairs demand the strength of a porter to move them; the huge tables seem fixtures, altogether immoveable, and though they are polished there is a good deal of dust upon them. But the capital finish given by neatness and the perfection of cleanliness is almost everywhere wanting. What has that flannel wrapper to do upon that settee by the window? Why are these loose habiliments of man and woman scattered about? At one end of the room there is a door opening into an inner apartment—the door is wide open, allowing the eye to rest upon sundry objects which ought not to be seen. There is also much litter, or a huddling together of accessories, in the larger room where we are standing. Some of these things, however, betoken the business and taste of the occupants. There are mixed together confusedly, musical instruments and mathematical instruments; music-books and maps and charts; books of drawings and books of accounts; play-bills, hand-ballads, and sermons; a large mariner's compass and a 'nativity' cast by Lilly, the great living astrologer; a pair of globes and sundry models of ships and boats; a warming-pan and a big case-clock; a prayer-book and a pair of spurs; two riding-whips, and three vizards or masks for the lady to wear at the playhouse or upon other occasions; a pill-box for the gentleman, who is rather a valetudinarian, often complaining of a disorder in his eyes, and a thin japan box containing black patches for the lady—for since the Castlemaine set the fashion at court (having first borrowed it from the French) every lady of any fashion wears a black patch or two on her face as an indispensable part of

the toilette. Many other objects there are huddled together; but we must turn our attention from the inanimate to the animate.

Opposite to each other, lolling upon high-backed chairs, and looking as if they are heated and fatigued by some recent exertion, are a lady and gentleman. Reader, we introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Pepys. There is another chair turned towards the window, with the redundant curls of a wig flowing down its straight back: it might be taken for a second gentleman, but it is only Pepys' periwig hung there, for his readiness in going out. Except when entertaining company Pepys wears no periwig at home, but only a velvet cap. Taking him as he now is, without his ambrosial locks or flowing mane, he is but a mean or common-looking mortal. His dress too is rather slovenly, for in these days people wear fine clothes and clean linen only when they go abroad, and throw them off for the sake of economy as soon as ever they return home. The Clerk of the Acts of the Navy is about thirty-five years old, but looks older. He has a better face now than he had at a later period when Sir Godfrey Kneller painted his portrait; yet we cannot call it a pleasing face, and it is very far from being a handsome one. The best thing about it is an expression of ease and good temper; but he looks cunning withal, and has an habitual twitching up of the nose, which makes him appear as if he were always smelling something disagreeable. There is no mistaking by his countenance that he is a shrewd, clever, subtle, and adroit man, who has thriven in the world and will yet thrive, who will permit no delicate scruples to retard his advancement. His wife is seven or eight years younger

than himself, and looks still younger. A comely and handsome blonde she is! and if she has rather too much embonpoint, no flesh can be fairer or more transparent than hers. She has a most happy, heart-at-ease, enjoying countenance, only slightly tinged with vanity, and with the spirit of worldly calculation, which her husband and her worldly experience have put upon her. She is almost as negligent in her in-door attire as Mr. Clerk himself, and it grieves us to say that her stockings are dirty, and her slippers down at heel. But this lonely in-door state is their chrysalis or grub state. You should see Mr. and Mrs. Pepys out of doors in the Park, or on the Mall, or in the playhouse!

"Pepys," says the lady, speaking first, as became her sex, after a short silence, "well Pepys, we have done a good morning's work, and have the satisfaction of knowing that all is right according to inventory—that plate money . . . ."

The Clerk of the Acts lays a finger perpendicularly across his lips, and saith—"Bessy, my darling, speak a little lower."

"Tut," says the lady, "the stuffed hanging is to the door, the windows are all shut, these walls have no ears! Mr. Pepys, methinks you are a trifle over-cautious and timid since the fright you got last March at the Navy-office."

"Bessy, love," says Pepys, in what is almost a whisper, "with so much money in the house, and so much plate and costly gear, one cannot be too cautious, in troublesome times like these, when government and people seem alike determined to take whatever they can come at by the strong hand."

"Most true: but we have been, and we are, care-

ful enough. The servants have no inkling of the coined gold and silver that lie here: nor do they know of one-fourth part of the plate which we possess. Pepys, it gladdens my heart to think of it! Fifty silver spoons, besides ladles; two dozen silver dishes, six silver salvers; and then the silver lamps and candlesticks, and all the rest. Three thousand pounds in coined gold, and more than five hundred pounds in silver! Up heart, Samuel Pepys, and be merry, for are we not thriving apace!"

"We *are* thriving, and for that I am merry, and thank God; but the State, Mrs. Pepys, the State is going to ruin, and for that I am sad."

"But, Samuel Pepys, the State is not you and I; if the State will not take care of itself, as we take care of ourselves, why to ruin it must go! We shall soon be rich enough to do without it."

"If we could but keep that which we have gotten. But that would be hard to do, my Bessy."

"Well, then, Pepys, the State shall not be ruined at all. It is not ruined yet, long as they have been talking about it. The fire of London was to finish our overthrow, but a year hath scarcely past, and the city is already rising from its ashes, richer and more stately than before. Let croakers croak, and fanatics give out prophecies—I believe it will all come to nothing, and that the country and state, and you and I, dear Pepys, will continue to go on much as we have been doing."

"I could hope so too, were not all things in court and government so completely out of joint. The King minds nothing but his pleasures, and though the Duke attends to business, he has no

head for it, and fancies he has. That fifth-monarchy rascal, Joel Wyke, said a good deal that was true, and, in his ignorance, left unsaid many things that are more dreadful, and quite as true. We are at war both with France and Holland, and the Dutch fleets are beating ours in almost every encounter."

"But," says Mrs. Pepys, interrupting him, "the Dutch fleets can't come to London; and this our good house in Seething-lane will not go to sea, or fall in their way—so we need not care a Dutch herring about them."

Pepys, without heeding his wife, continues—"Our navy is in the saddest state, having never been properly paid since the downfall of old Noll's government. The want of money puts all things out of order, but above all the navy, in which our greatest strength and glory once consisted; and the King keeps on spending, and his ministers keep on cheating and robbing."

"The more honour to you, Samuel Pepys, for saving so much, and robbing so very, very little."

"Nay," quoth the Clerk of the Acts, "I rob not at all."

"Nay," says the lady with a laugh, "do not frown, Samuel; but I sometimes cannot quite make out the difference between robbing and the taking of fees and perquisites."

"I will explain it some other time," saith Pepys, who then continues his discourse—"Our office is in an abyss of debt; our ship-yards are empty; there is no discipline left in the fleet; every day brings news of fresh mutinies among the seamen, who can get no wages, who know how they are defrauded, and who will not fight with any heart.

The men, also, have been brought to despise their officers upon other grounds. Promotions have been hurriedly made by my Lady Castlemaine and the King's favourites and courtiers: the veteran officers, the hardy and experienced men trained to the sea-service from their childhood,—the officers who beat French, Dutch, and Spaniards wherever they met them, and who made Europe tremble at the name of old Noll, or of the Commonwealth,—have been driven out of the service in disgust, or have been put upon the shelf in order to make room for young lordlings and land-bred cavalieros, who have never seen blue water in their lives, and who are as ignorant of the sea and its navigation, and of all that concerns the sea, as I am innocent of witchcraft. You shall find more than half of the officers of a first-rate ship laid in their berths all at one time through sea-sickness, and incapable of standing on the quarter-deck from the day the ship leaves port until she returns to it."

Here the lively Mrs. Pepys, who never could listen patiently to a long discourse, exclaims,—"Poor dear Lords, how much they must suffer! I think that the sea-nausea is the worst of all sicknesses, and that the man who invented the first ship ought to have been sunk with it to the bottom of the sea. What says that charming, naughty, winning, wicked fellow Lord Buckhurst in the new song that is just out?—

"To all you ladies now on land,
We men at sea indite;
But first would have you understand
How hard it is to write;
The Muses, now, and Neptune too,
We must implore to write to you.
With a fa, la, la, la, la."

"Mrs. Pepys," says the Clerk, "you are a little out of tune in that song. I wish you would take a lesson from Knipp."

"Samuel Pepys, I wish you would not always be a-nipping me with your slut Knipp." And having said these words, the lady allows her husband to proceed.

"'T is all very well to write verses, Bessy dear, and to tell you ladies how their paper, pen, and ink roll up and down their ships at sea; but officers who take charge of ships ought to be able to be up and doing, which these young fops are not: and then their respect and subordination to their superiors in command! these young sparks will challenge their captains, nay, the very admirals of the fleet. A rake-helly set are they, and for ever quarrelling and duel-fighting, or swearing, tearing, and blaspheming, or gambling, or—or doing worse. When such are the officers, what must be the men? Mrs. Pepys, I tell you there is no discipline left, no respect in the sailors for their officers; and, instead of respect and loyalty, scorn and hatred for the King and Government they serve. And then the perils and fearful losses that we are sustaining through the rashness and ignorance of our sea-captains. Our ships founder in smooth water, are capsized by a cap of wind, and are run ashore in clear weather. The captains and lieutenants, who know nothing, will not be advised by the pilots, and are always swearing that they will run them through the body if they will not carry them where they choose to order—though to do so would be ruin to the ship. The blasphemy is terrible, and drives out of the ships all the more serious part of the mariners. Com-

missioner Middleton says that one might believe that the devil is chief commander of our fleets, so much wickedness is there of all sorts. The scared old Roundheads, who fought so bravely for Noll, cannot stand it, but desert, and come home, and declare that the end of the world must be approaching. Captain Guy, who knows his business, says that the whole navy is governed by a company of fools who will ruin it entirely; that the Dutch do fight in very good order, and we in none at all; that even the true English valour seems almost spent and worn out; and that many of our sailors are declaring that they would rather fight for the Dutch than against them; and that they will not fight at all, nor so much as weigh anchor until they be paid. The crews of four ships mutiny in one day at the Nore. These are sad considerations, while so many of the enemy's ships are triumphing in the sea. Oh! how many ships be lost already! And well may we lose them, since flag-officers themselves be so ignorant of seamanship as not to know which tack loses the wind or keeps it. There is a young land sea-lord that I know that knoweth not the difference between larboard and starboard, and port-helm and helm-a-lee."

"Mr. Pepys," says the lady, "I think you are singing out of tune, and time, and place. What can I understand of your larboards and starboards, and rigmarole?"

The clerk perceiving that his wife had been ruffled by his criticism upon her singing, pays a great flattering compliment to her judgment in other matters, and telling her that she has a head to understand anything that she chooses to listen to,

he continues:—"The King can get no money anywhere unless he call the parliament forthwith, and parliaments he hates and fears. There is no victualling the ships for any long cruise—no paying the men (many of the King's officers have not been paid these four years), no trusting them even if they were properly commanded; and so for these and other weighty reasons, and on account of our many disasters at sea, it is now resolved to keep our fleets at home, to fortify our harbours, and to trust for our defence to a few land-troops, our untrained militia, and our land-forts. But our harbours will not be fortified in time; our land-forts are as badly furnished as our ships; and though every moment is precious, everything is put off till to-morrow. The officers of the ordnance now in employment be as foolish and perverse as those of the navy, and not a whit more honest. In short, Mrs. Pepys, all things are turned topsy-turvy, and the country is in a disorganized helpless condition. While our great fleet is lying at the Hope, and up the Medway by Chatham, the French and Dutch are giving the law in the Channel, and insulting our coasts with ships of war and fire-ships. The King and the Duke are going some day to go to Sheerness to look after the fortifications meant to defend the entrance into the Medway; but a match at tennis, a dance at the court, a new play, a new pretty face, anything is allowed to prevent their going; and when they go they will do nothing; for there is no money! no money! The King can no longer get clothes for his own back: the grooms of the chamber sweep his wardrobe at the end of their monthly services, and the mercers and tailors have such long heavy

bills owing to them that they will give no more trust until they be paid."

"Sad! sad, indeed!" says the lady. "My heart aches for the merry King . . . But, la! Pepys, only to think that you and I should have plenty of fine clothes when the King of England can get none!"

"And, Bessy, he is as ill-furnished with other commodities. The other day, at the council-table, there was not a scrap of writing-paper for his Majesty's use. The King was vexed at this. Sir Richard Browne told his Majesty he would call the person whose work it was to provide the paper: the man being come, told his Majesty that he was but a poor man, that he was out of pocket four hundred or five hundred pounds for paper, which was as much as he is worth; and that he cannot provide it any longer without money, not having received a penny since the King's coming in. And Mr. Evelyn tells me of several of the menial servants of the court lacking bread, from not having received a farthing of wages, since his Majesty's happy restoration seven years ago."

"The more thankful ought we to be to Providence for our own good fortune and present riches. Samuel Pepys, you take these matters too much to heart. All may end well yet. They say the King *must* call a parliament, and then he will get money and pay his poor people—whom Heaven protect in the meanwhile!—and satisfy the mutinous sailors, and put the State in order. You thought you would never get it, and yet you got money enough to keep your promise with the sailors that besieged you last March in the Navy-office. You were born under a lucky star, Pepys, or you and I should not be as we now are."

"I only got money enough to redeem half the tickets held by those two companies of men. I expect every day to see that incarnate devil Joel Wyke and his crew back again; and other many hundreds who have had no money at all."

"But, Pepys, I tell you they will get it when the parliament assembles."

"Before that happens the Dutch and the French and the fanatics, among them, may spoil all."

"But the King has sent to ask for a peace, and the French King is tired of this war; and the Dutch say they are ready to listen to terms."

"When a country sues for peace from being unable to carry on war, it can expect no terms but such as are ruinous or dishonourable."

"But we will get the peace and be quiet, and recover our losses, and wipe out our disgraces at some more favourable juncture. England cannot be long depressed; things cannot remain in the state they are now in."

"I fear that it is only a revolution that can mend them."

"Well, Pepys, and what then? You have thrived under one revolution, and may prosper under another. When we were first married, and you were beginning to stir in the world, you saw nothing but ruin to yourself and patron in the death of Oliver and the overthrow of the Commonwealth; but Oliver died, the Commonwealth *was* overthrown, and from that moment you began to rise in the world; and now you are a rich man, and your patron, from a simple knight, has become Earl of Sandwich."

Pepys smiles as he says that this is most true; and from this moment his spirits brighten, and his

thoughts run into another channel.' He forgets the misfortunes of his country, and thinks only of his own prosperity and aggrandizement. This is a very common habit with him—not that Pepys does not love his country, but that he loves Samuel Pepys more. After whistling part of an air, and singing part of the song—

> "Great, good, and just, could I but rate
> My grief, and thy too rigid fate!"

the words of which were written by Montrose, and the music by Pepys himself (since the Restoration), for Pepys is an accomplished English musician, he smiles again, and more radiantly than before, and then saith, in a voice pitched in altogether a different key from the despondent tone in which he had been talking, "Well, Bessy, darling, when I think of all the past, I do really believe that I was born under a happy star. Doctor Lilly, you know, hath often told me so; and though Lilly doth predict so as to please his friends, and those who pay him best, and so as to keep in with the times, he assuredly hath made some marvellously true hits."

"A fig for Lilly and his astrology! I can tell you as well as he that you have *la belle étoile*, and '*pour être heureux bel astre suffit*'—which means (for you know not French quite so well as you ought to do), to be lucky, nothing is wanting but a good star . . . .'"

"And prudence, Bessy, darling, a little prudence and circumspection. Well! as we began life twelve years ago with nothing, we must have been lucky. You were little more than fifteen, and just out of a foreign convent, I twenty-three, the son of a tailor

in Cheapside, with a small business and a large family. I had nothing but my Saint Paul's school and Cambridge education, and the patronage of the Earl of Sandwich, then Admiral to old Noll, and plain Sir Edward Montague."

"It was a bold venture, truly," says Mrs. Pepys; "but love does wonders—*l'amour fait des miracles.*"

"Do you remember, love, how joyous we were when my Lord gave us a room in one of his outhouses, and found me some work in copying papers and writing letters for him? Do you remember how you used to make coal fires, and wash my foul clothes for me with your own fair young hands? Poor, pretty wretch! 't was up early with thee then, and none to help thee in thy toils—no, not so much as a wench of the smallest! I had but three shirts then and two homely ruffs. It was hard living with us then, Mrs. Pepys!"

"Very hard, and too hard to be borne, Mr. Pepys; had it not been for my youth and the affection that was between us."

"Ah, Bessy! youth is all gold, and first love the first of jewels. There be times when I fancy I was happier then than I now am.

> 'The world was then so light,
> I hardly felt the weight;—
> Joy ruled the day, and love the night.'

There is more pleasure, Mrs. Pepys, in the struggle—that is, when we are young—than there is enjoyment in what the struggle gives us!"

"Yes, Samuel, but as we cannot be young again, I am glad that the toil and doubt are over."

"Still," continues the Clerk of the Acts, "I like to think of the past. And you have not forgot-

ten how, only seven years ago, when fortune had begun to treat us a little more kindly, we lived in the garret in Axe Yard, with our servant wench Jane, and no other in family; and how you dressed the remains of a turkey for dinner on New Year's day, and in the doing of it burned your hands. By my soul, Bessy, I love you the better for these memories of the distressed and pinching times. No concerts then, Bessy, no dances, no plays for us—except once or twice, mayhap, in the course of the year! No fine clothes as yet. I had but two cloth coats in the world, and that grey jackanapes coat with the black bindings I was fain to make last for Sundays and holidays for three whole years."

"Ay, and when my brother, after half-starving at home, went to seek his fortune in the Low Countries, we cut up that jackanapes coat and your old camlet cloak to fit him out, and gave him ten shillings in money that he might start in the world like a gentleman."

"Pardon, Bessy, 't was not the jackanapes coat with the black bindings that I gave your brother, but my old close-bodied light-coloured cloth coat, with a gold edging to each seam, that said gold lace being somewhat thin and tarnished, for 't was the very lace of the best petticoat you had when we were married."

"Well, Samuel," says the corrected spouse, "your memory is better than mine, and I do suppose you have got it down in your diary. But to my story; when you gave the coat and the ten shillings to my brother to go seek his fortune among the Dutch, it was about that time you found we had gotten together, all debts being paid,

nearly one hundred pounds, for which we thanked God, never having hoped at one time to have so much money."

"That, Bessy, was about the time that you first began to wear black patches, and that Mr. Pin, the tailor, brought home my velvet coat and velvet cap, the first that ever I had. Well! we certainly have continued to thrive, and to thank God, therefore. I got a black silk suit shortly after my velvet coat; and, at the end of that year, though the debts of the Navy were swollen to three hundred and seventy-four thousand pounds, I found myself about five hundred pounds clear in the world, and thanked God for it."

"And pray, Samuel, my beloved, what was it you said was shown by your book accounts this year?"

"We have been buying and spending, Bessy; we have been buying and spending our money very freely these last twelve months; we have been almost exorbitant in our pleasure and pastimes and in our purchases of fine clothes: but still have we not done amiss on the getting and saving side of the book. As we are only at the beginning of the month of June, I cannot square for this year; but hand me my diary, love, and I will decipher and read for you the entry I made on the thirty-first of December last."

"Do, Samuel; it is as musical to my ear as one of Purcell's, or one of thine own sweetest songs;" and, so saying, the lady rises and brings from some corner in the inner room a manuscript book.

Pepys opens the book, and reads from ciphers, unintelligible to all that have not the key, as follows:—

"31st Dec. 1666.—To my accounts, wherein, at last, I find them clear and right; but to my great discontent do find that my gettings this year have been 573*l.* less than my last: it being this year in all but 2986*l.*; whereas, the last year I got 3560*l.* And then again my spendings this year have exceeded my spendings the last, by 644*l.*; my whole spendings last year being but 509*l.*; whereas this year it appears I have spent 1154*l.*, which is a sum not fit to be said that ever I should spend in one year . . . ."

"Tut, Samuel Pepys!" says the lady; "I think it a very fitting and grand thing to be said of you. It shows our spirit, Pepys, and our taste—But, la! who would have thought when we were in the garret in Axe Yard that we should ever have been able to do it! Spell me some more of your crooked ciphers—there is a good balance to follow."

The husband reads on—"Yet, blessed be God! and I pray God make me thankful for it, I do find myself worth in money, all good, above 6200*l.*; which is above 1800*l.* more than I was worth the last year. Thus ends this year of public wonder and mischief to this nation."

"You need not read the reflections that follow about the sad condition of the Navy and the discontents of Parliament and the country and the wickedness of the Court: they would only put you in your melancholic humour again, Pepys, and I know them all by heart. It was only the figures I wanted to learn. Six thousand two hundred pounds in good coined money, and more gotten since, and put in safe keeping! Why, Samuel Pepys, this gives me courage to speak again about

our setting up a coach. Sweetheart, you were born to ride in a coach! to be your full self you must have a coach. All people of honour now-a-days have their coaches. There is no perfect gentility without a coach. These hackneys are already become too common; they are dirty and dear, and are always breaking down, and are otherwise dangerous. To say nothing of the smallpox and other terrible diseases, people have ridden in hackney coaches with the plague upon them, and other people who have ridden in them afterwards have caught the infection, and so died. In your goings and comings between this and Whitehall you oft-times ride in those hackneys. Pepys, an you love me, set up a coach of your own, and let our liveries be green lined with red. O! Pepys, how grand we shall appear when we drive to a play in our own coach!"

"It is some time since, my love, that I have had a mind to buy enough ground to build me a coach-house and stable; for I have had it much in my thoughts that it is not too much for me now, in degree or cost, to keep a coach, but, contrarily, that I am almost ashamed to be seen in a hackney. I am almost—nay, I am quite decided. Yes, Bessy, so soon as things get a little quieter I will assuredly set up my coach. It may be next year, but it also may be next month. And, in the meanwhile, let us be merry and go to the play to-night. It is a long while, methinks it is two whole weeks, since we were at the play."

"And what house shall we go to? to the King's or to the Duke's?"

"Oh! to the King's house, my dear one; for Knipp is to do a part in a new play, which she is said

to do ravishingly fine. We will go see, and hear that merry wench, Knipp, by all means. She was once one of our family, you know, your own handmaiden. It was I first taught her to sing and act a little, and (God forgive me!) first put the notion of stage-playing into her head."

"Mr. Pepys," says the lady, and a cloud, the slightest of all clouds of pique or jealousy passes across her broad fair brow, "Mr. Pepys, I hope you did not put still worse mischief into that wench's head? You think rather too much of Knipp—you are always for running to see Knipp, Mr. Pepys."

The husband sees the cloud, and applies himself to dissipate it. "Knipp is a merry baggage, and clever and pretty withal; but, my Bessy fair, what is she, or what is Nelly Gwynn, or what are all the actresses at the theatres, or the ladies at court, compared with you? Has not my Lord Sandwich said many a time that in beauty you beat them all? And does not your own Samuel doat upon you as much as when he first knew you, and used to look upon you until his head grew giddy with love? Knipp might go to the devil for me, but for the love and respect she bears to you as her former mistress. Let us go to the duke's house to-night, if it pleases you better."

Mrs. Pepys, who well knows that her husband is the most uxorious of men, laughs away the remnant of what could hardly be called a frown, and says, No! no! they will go see Knipp to-night, and that handsome youth Kynaston, that all the court ladies are mad after, the very next time he acts at the other house. Pepys is visibly delighted, and goes the length of proposing that to-morrow

(provided all is quiet) they shall make a pleasure excursion *into the country*. There is, however, a little difference about the course they shall take. Pepys would fain go down the river, to talk over some new inventions and contrivances with his friend Mr. Evelyn, at Say's Court near Deptford, and to Erith, to pay a visit to old Sir John Roundtree, for the said Sir John has a pretty and rich young ward, whose person and fortune he thinks will very well suit the son of one of his friends and patrons at court—Pepys being a great match-maker. But Mrs. Pepys, who has a coach and pair running in her head, together with certain other whims and fancies she cannot for her life get rid of, is all for borrowing a friend's coach and driving to the famous wells at Barnet, the waters of which are said to have made mothers for the first time of many ladies who had been wives considerably more than twelve years.

Mrs. Pepys had not yet made her husband a father. If she had brought him six sons and five daughters, as Pepys's mother brought her husband the tailor in the city, it is possible that the money-boxes would not have been quite so full as they now were.

Everybody, according to Mrs. Pepys, goes to the wells at Barnet. It is the best frequented and most gallant of places. Her husband, who had hoped to unite profit with pleasure—for the making of a good match is a common means of securing patronage—and who perhaps had another project which might be forwarded by his going down the river, holds out a little for the water-trip to Erith; but this only makes his wife the more eager for the land-trip to Barnet, and Mrs. Pepys always

has her own way in the end. For his ready compliance in the present instance she vouchsafes him a kiss, which the loving Clerk of the Navy returns right heartily. The tender smack has scarcely ceased to echo in the room ere a mighty rapping is heard at the street-door. Pepys opens a window, and sees that it is only a messenger from the Navy-office. He puts on a face of dignity and severity, and is going to reprehend the man for making so rude a noise; but the poor fellow cries out—"The devil is broken loose! Joel Wyke is on his way to the office with thousands of sailors and sailors' wives; the fanatics are fighting in Tower-street with the King's Majesty's guards, and there is one of them going about stark naked with a pan of burning coals upon his head, crying out Woe! woe! and that the world is to end to-morrow or the day after; and a war-ship full of mutinous sailors has come past the Isle of Dogs with her guns all double-shotted, and now *all* the people do say that Tom of the Woods, who foretold the great fire last year, hath just foretold a much greater calamity for this."

Before this time a serving-boy had cautiously opened the door to the well-known messenger; but Pepys had been too much excited by the man's speech to find words to tell him to enter the house and not alarm the neighbours. Now, however, he bids him enter and close the door, and tells him to wait below in the hall until he is called for. Mrs. Pepys is pale with fright, and her husband has a tremulous motion about the knees. But with inconceivable speed they close, lock, and padlock their strong chests, draw the panel which conceals a dark recess where some money is deposited, and

put all things straight. Pepys then withdraws the heavy curtain, and unlocks the room door, and calls up the messenger, who has little more to say except that everybody has run away from the Navy-office but Master Hater and Strong the porter, who want to know what they are to do. Pepys cannot tell them, nor will the terrified messenger go back to the office, lest he should fall into the hands of the sailors. The man, however, consents to go by another road, to warn the lord mayor, and to make all the haste he can to Whitehall, where there are some mounted guards which may be sent. Pepys then goes and makes his toilette, and his lady does the same with the assistance of mistress Knipp's successor. They have not made up their minds what to do, but think it best to be prepared for a sortie; for Joel Wyke and many of the sailors know the way to their house as well as they know the way to the Navy-office. Pepys is putting on his peruke in a negligent manner, when a firing of muskets is heard in the streets not far off, together with tremendous shouts, and fearful shrieks of women and children. Pepys approaches the window, but his wife drops down on a chair, and turns very very pale. The firing ceases, but other sounds come nearer and nearer—a rushing and running, and the tread as of many thousands of feet are heard all round about: then there is a halting and fresh shouting. The words more distinctly heard are "Money! Money!" "Souls! Souls!" "Bread! bread!" "Hell! Hell!" "Cash our tickets!" "Take heed of the day of judgment!" But these sounds and words are blended together in the strangest fashion; and they are soon interrupted by drums and trumpets

that seem sounding a charge. The rush is renewed, and after a while, a man naked as he was born—save that he hath a clout round his middle —turns into Seething-lane. His pan of burning coal is gone, but he still keeps shouting or shrieking "Woe! Woe! Look to your souls! The day of judgment is at hand!" And a great mob of fanatics that follow him repeat his words in a mighty chorus, while some of them cry "Have a care of hell! the sins of the world are too many! the day of judgment is close at hand! Tom of the Woods hath said it, and Tom is never mistaken!" In the wake of these fanaticals there come running a great multitude of sailors and sailors' wives, who are still shouting, "Money! money! Bread! bread! We will fire the city but we will have these tickets changed! We come for our own, and the King sends his guard to fire upon us!"

Pepys sees clearly enough that the sailors and the fanatic mob are in full retreat, and that no great harm is likely to be done to-day in his part of the town. The crowd in fact whirls by; but the housekeepers in the lane keep up part of the cry when all have disappeared, screaming from their windows and house-tops that Tom of the Woods is the truest of prophets, and that if he says a judgment is at hand, a judgment will assuredly happen; for last year Tom of the Woods said that London would be burned, and London was burned.

As soon as the mob is fairly gone, and troops of the trained bands of the city are seen in motion at the end of Seething-lane, Pepys says he will go to Whitehall to make fresh representations of the urgent necessity of providing some money to pay

the seamen; for so long as the sailors are discontented there must be danger to the whole State, and a frequent occasion given to all the levellers and fifth-monarchy men and fanatics of all sorts, to raise their heads. Mrs. Pepys determines to accompany him, and after waiting an hour, and giving many careful orders to their servants, they sally forth on foot to take the shortest way to the court end of town.

Hard by Charing-Cross Mrs. Pepys calls upon and stays with a friend, for, although Whitehall is as open to all as any place of public entertainment, the Clerk of the Acts of the Navy does not consider it as the fittest place to take his pretty wife to. Pepys himself proceeds, and soon goes up to the matted gallery in the palace, wherein the courtiers and statesmen of the day do usually congregate. But he finds that, as far as business is concerned, he might as well have stayed at home in Seething-lane.

The Lord High Admiral the Duke of York is gone a-pleasuring to Cooper's Hill, with Lady Denham and Sir Charles Sedley, and various other gay dames and gallants; the King is away at the Castlemaine's, very busy in making up a quarrel between her ladyship's nursery-maid and her ladyship's cook. Some of the ministers and privy-counsellors are gone one way, some another. Pepys, however, finds in the Duke's ante-chamber his friend Sir William Coventry, who agrees with him that the aspect of the times is very awful.—Although it is he that hath advised the King to equip no fleet this spring, and that has been most active at the council-board in carrying this deci-

sion.—Coventry is a wise man—a very wise man —a Solomon, quite a Solomon at court; but, as he knows that the court has no money to pay the sailors, he says he will advise the King to take measures of severity against the fanatics in the city, and to get hold of Tom of the Woods, whose prophecies he takes to be the main cause of the scandalous behaviour of the seamen. Pepys thinks this is beginning at the wrong end, but is far too prudent to say so; and, giving the right honourable member of the Privy Council some information respecting the evil seer, and the woods in Kent which Tom hath been wont to frequent, he bows and takes his leave. At his wife's friend's by Charing-Cross he finds a good dinner, and then certain intelligence that the city is perfectly quiet, and that the train-bands have done wondrous things. Therefore, he and Mrs. Pepys go to the King's house after all. Knipp excels, and does her part very extraordinarily well. Pepys is in ecstasies, more especially when Knipp sings his own song 'Beauty Retire.' He and Mrs. Pepys are marvellously curious to know who a certain lady is that never takes off her black mask, and that hath a beautiful white hand. They stay till the end of the play, then seek a hackney, and so home at about twelve o'clock at night. Their servants tell them that a good number of the fanatics and riotous sailors have been seized, and made fast in prison. They thank God therefore, and eat a little supper, and so to bed. Mrs. Pepys dreams of her coach and pair of Flanders mares, and of the Wells at Barnet. Her husband has his pleasant visions too, but they are mixed with ugly

sights and sounds, such as sailors' tickets and Joel Wyke's harangues, naked fanatics with burning coals on their pates, and sailors crying "Pay, pay! Money, money!" Oh! Clerk of the Acts of the Navy, you will have uglier dreams yet before this wonderful and, to England, disgraceful year, sixteen hundred and sixty-seven, be past and gone.

CHAPTER III.

A VOYAGE TO ERITH.

THE merry King and his court eagerly embraced the opinion that, as the French King had testified a willingness to negotiate, and to separate his interests from those of the Republican De Witt and the Seven United Provinces, there was nothing to fear from the Dutch; and that as for the mutinies and riots of the sailors, they were entirely owing, not to want and hunger, but to the fanatics that lurked in the city, and to the disaffected prophecyings of Tom of the Woods, a strange old man, who had been leading an eremitical life in the woods between Woolwich and Erith. It was therefore resolved in a hurried council, which was held between night and morning, in the matted gallery at Whitehall, that the Lord Mayor and the train-bands should be thanked for what they had done in putting down the rioters; that a new proclamation should be hurled, some day soon, at the heads of the fanatics; and that some confidential servant of the court should be sent to procure the arrest of Tom of the Woods with as little noise as possible.

The morning after the visit of the Clerk of the Acts of the Navy, a finely dressed gallant, followed by a serving-man almost as fine as himself, issued from Whitehall, and swaggered towards Charing-Cross Stairs, a usual place of embarkation for the

court end of town. It was rather an early hour for a courtly spark to be up and abroad; but his flushed cheek and reddened eyes, and a certain unsteadiness in his gait, seemed to indicate that this cavaliero had not been in bed. He was a tall, well-proportioned man, and otherwise well-favoured by nature; but dissipation and other evil habits had spoiled his countenance, and there was no looking in his face without seeing rake and bully written upon it in most legible characters. He was not young; but his grey hairs were concealed by a Louis Quatorze periwig, and his clothes, gay in colour, and of the newest fashion, helped to give an air of juvenility. He turned into the first tavern he found open, just to settle his head and nerves, or to take a hair of the tail of the dog which had bitten him overnight. The Lambeth ale was so cool and good, that he took a second cup of it; and as the hostess had a passable face, and a very roguish laughing eye, he stayed gossiping for nearly an hour. He and his man then resumed their walk to the stairs, where a score or two of watermen saluted them with cries of "Eastward, ho! Boat, your honours." "Monsieur Faittout," said the almost hiccuping cavalier to his attendant, "we must have a boat of the largest, and two pair of oars, for I have no fancy to spoil my best cloak in shooting the bridge, and it is sometimes rough water below Greenwich. See to it, Faittout; and tell these rascaille people not to make such a noise. It is time they should learn better manners when they see a gentleman of the court."

Now Faittout, who came from the banks of the Seine, could scarcely speak intelligible English,

and many mistakes were committed, and there was a great deal of laughter among our jolly Thames watermen before a bargain could be concluded, or even before it could be understood by the boatmen that his honour wanted a good boat to carry him as far as Erith. At length the necessary arrangements were made, and the cavalier and his Frenchman stepped into a trim launch, well manned with four stout rowers, and the master-waterman to steer. As they shot away from the stairs a shrewd-looking old boatman said,—"I wonder whether that fine spark hath money enough about him to pay the fare. If I had been Jerry I would have made him pay beforehand, for 't is a serious pull from here to Erith. As for casts across to the playhouse at Bankside, they are, singly, but small matters—and yet for those casts I wot not how much is owing to me by these court-gallants, who never have any money about them, and are always promising to pay next time."

"Ah! Ben," said another of the boatmen, "these Charing-Cross Stairs be about the most pestilent beggarly stairs, for sculls or oars, that be anywhere upon the river! They be so swarmed by your penniless court-gallants. Merry waterman as I am, I could almost find it in my heart to wish that the by-gone times were not by-gone; for, if the Roundheads did set their sour faces against sports, and shut up the playhouses and the bear-gardens at Bankside, as everywhere else, they always paid their fares, and never thought of drawing swords upon a man as these cavalieros do at the slightest offence taken."

By this time the boat was well out in the bed of the river, and going at good speed. It was just at

the turn of tide, and the four men pulled vigorously and gaily, hoping to reach their destination before low-water. But when they came abreast of the Temple Stairs, the cavalier sings—

"Nous ne pouvons rien trouver sur la terre
Qui soit si bon, ni si beau que la verre,"

and must needs land and take a morning-draught with a friend, who is known to have some strange and incomparably good claret. This occupied good part of an hour. When our gentleman embarked again, he was fresh and boisterously merry—so much so that he had some smart thing to say to every boat they met or crossed, and when no boat was near he either sang bits of songs or talked and laughed with his attendant. Some of his songs were English, but more were French: his talk with Monsieur Faittout was wholly in French, which considerably annoyed the boatmen. Notwithstanding the paralysed state of trade there were a good many boats upon the river, and several eminent merchants were seen taking this pleasant highway from their houses in the country to the city. Our cavalier made some envious remark about the wealth of these city traders; but he consoled himself with the thought that all trade was but a trick, and quoted his friend Sir John Denham, pointing at the citizens' boats as he said,—

"There, with like haste, through several ways, they run,
Some to undo, and some to be undone."

When they came near to the stairs at the city side of London Bridge, the cavalier must needs stop again; for a gaily dressed lady had just landed from a boat, and was displaying a pair of unusually

fine legs as she ascended the rough wooden steps. The old master of the boat, who was steering, hoped and begged that his honour would not tarry long, as the tide was running so finely down now, and as it would be hard toil to make Erith if they did not make it before the return-tide. The cavaliero said he would be back to the boat in no time. As master and man ran up the steps, the master singing—

> "When ladies call, I 'll have at all;
> My father did so before me,"

old Jerry scratched his head, and wished he had never entered into competition for such a fare. One quarter of an hour passed, and then another—and there was no mistaking the progress of time in that latitude, so abounding in church clocks and chimes; but when the third quarter struck, old Jerry lost the little patience that was left to him, and the men wished the courtier to all manner of unmentionable places. The master of the boat was near upon deciding that the best thing to do would be to put up with the loss of his fare so far, and think no more of the courtier, when his Honour hove in sight with a green parrot in a cage in his hand, and with his valet close behind him, carrying a monkey. A crowd of dirty little boys followed the waiting-man, being attracted and amused by the monkey, who did not like his present mode of conveyance, but grinned and bit at poor Faittout, who made almost as many grimaces as Jacko himself. As old Jerry handed the cavalier over the gunwale he said, in no very pleasant tone—"Your honour has made us lose the best of the tide: we shall have it right against us before we get to Erith."

"Never mind, base Bezonian," said the cavalier; "your men will row all the harder, and we will hoist a sail when below Deptford."

The boat again was put in motion, the bridge—then London's only bridge—was cleared without disaster, and the cavalier again began to talk volubly with his attendant.

"Faittout," said he in his French, "though the baggage was froward, and not worth the running after, it was well she met my eye, for otherwise I should never have thought of these presents, which will be very acceptable in the house to which we are going. I think I once promised the young mistress a talking-bird, as she talks so little herself, and the old dame has a great penchant and partiality for apes."

"Parbleu!" said Faittout; "then I wish she had got this mischievous beast in charge, for he has bitten my hands in three places already."

"Hold him not so tight, Faittout. Give him his chain; he is too prudent a beast to quit the boat by leaping overboard."

The waiting-man, happy to be released, let the monkey go.

The cavalier continued his discourse upon the singular good fortune of being attracted to shore, and led to a place where there was so good a choice of monkeys and outlandish birds. As he was talking in this strain, the parrot in the cage began to talk also, and to swear and scream, in the fashion of parrots who have had a long education on board ship, at the monkey, who, after biting the calf of old Jerry's leg, and getting a good kick in return, had set himself down in front of the cage, to torment poor Poll. Before they got from the rapids

of London Bridge to the shallows of the Isle of Dogs, old Jerry and his men were about equally sick of all their four passengers, and heartily wished they had them all on shore. For the monkey and the parrot we cannot speak, but as they were off Greenwich the courtier and the waiting-man assuredly wished themselves on shore. For a boatful of mutinous or discontented sailors came up with them, and, after much violent language, threatened to throw them overboard as a pair of the court thieves, that robbed the King, and caused the poor seamen of his Majesty's navy to be left to starve. Inattentive as he was, and more than half besotted, the cavalier could not but observe that these forward boisterous men were cheered and encouraged by other sailors and boatmen, and that there was a great deal of confusion on every part of the river below bridge, and not the least sign of any guard or police to preserve order. The insolent boat, however, made land at one of the Greenwich stairs, without attempting any actual mischief. When he was a good half mile from them, the cavalier talked big of what he would have done if they had assaulted him, and called them candidates for Tyburn. Old Jerry ventured to say that many poor sailors were driven desperate by want, and that mischief must come of it: that he was sure the King's Majesty knew not how much these men and their wives and children were suffering, or surely he would find money to relieve them. And, generally, at this time, and even at a later period, the people of England were disposed to give Charles credit for having a kind heart and good intentions, and to throw the entire blame of the national distress, and the gross and palpable mis-

management of the State, upon his ministers and courtiers. Faittout said that if such an insult as had been offered to his master had been offered in France to a French courtier, King Louis would have hanged up every one of the sailors. He also said that the English people knew not what starvation meant, and that if they wanted to learn what starving really was, they ought to go see the poor in his country. The gentle knight said that the English people had become over-free and insolent since the beginning of the great Rebellion, but that he hoped the King would soon be enabled to restore the Marshalsea Court and the Star-Chamber, and so bring them back to reason, and a proper reverence to their superiors. The gallows and the pillory were the best instructors of the rabble, not but that scourging at the cart's-tail, and cutting off men's ears, made very salutary impressions on the popular mind; and he thought that a score or two of gibbets erected along the river would purge the land of its present evil humours and discontents. He said this in French, and having said it, he ceased to think at all about it, and began to sing a French love-song: and when he had finished his French love-song he sang a verse of an English drinking-song, written by Alexander Brome, one of the Anacreons of the cavalier party:

"Come, come, let us drink,
'T is in vain to think,
Like fools, on grief and sadness;
Let our money fly,
And our sorrows die,
All worldly care is madness:
But sack and good cheer
Will, in spite of our fear
Inspire our souls with gladness."

They were now getting below Deptford, but there was little or no wind, and the very little that blew was not favourable. No sail could be hoisted, but the boatmen worked all the harder, in order to save the tide, only hoping that his honour would remember their toils in the drink-penny. Although it was a beautiful day, both man and master grew very fidgety and sick of the boat. Neither of them could find recreation in watching the floating summer clouds, or the flow of the majestic river, or in catching the notes of the birds which played among the rushes close by the water-side, or which sang merrily out from the woods and thickets on the slopes of the Kentish hills. No ships, and scarcely any boats, were in motion in this part of the Thames —for trade was stopped, and had been for weeks. The cavalier pathetically lamented the toils and discomforts that must be undergone by those who faithfully serve princes. He then played a little with the monkey, and discoursed a little with the parrot; and, as the next and very best thing he could do, he stretched himself at his full length, and went fast asleep, in the hope of not waking until they came to Erith. But Faittout fell asleep also, and the monkey, to the great diversion of the watermen, began to play with the cavalier's periwig; and this waked him, and brought down a volley of French oaths upon the head of the French valet for not having prevented it. Jacko was made fast to one of the boat-seats, and master and man returned to their slumber. But it was now the parrot's turn to murder sleep, and she set up such a screaming and screeching, that the cavalier sprung to his feet, and nearly fell overboard. "Faittout," said he, "I took that for the voice of

the vintner's wife at the Heaven tavern. It was just so she screamed the other night, when Tom Talbot and I drew upon the varlet her husband for not bringing us more canary."

The valet, only half awake, muttered—"*Oui, Monseigneur, la voix de Madame est terrible.*" Meaning to say, that the voice of the vintner's wife at the Heaven tavern was very dreadful.

Old Jerry hung a tarpaulin over the bird-cage, which simple operation put a stopper upon the bird's tongue, and allowed the passengers to get a good long nap. If the courtier, or hanger-on of the court, awoke somewhat soberer than he was before he fell asleep, he also awoke in a more irritable humour. The men also were irritable and very weary, and said that they must stop and rest and refresh themselves for a few minutes at a little house of entertainment close by the water-side, under the village and church of Charlton. Upon mention of this not unreasonable intention, the cavalier flew out in a passion, calling the poor boatmen rascal-people, buffle-heads, sluggards, and beer-swillers, and telling them that he must not be stayed, as he was going upon the King's business—upon state business of the utmost importance.

"I wish," said one of the watermen, "that your worship's honour had thought of this when you stayed so long at the Temple, and when you ran after that pair of clean linen stockings at the bridge stairs!"

Upon this the cavalier flew into a still higher passion, and called the man many hard names. Now the London watermen, being at all times a bold and free set of fellows, would not stomach this language, or be induced by it to forego the

little rest and the cup of drink they had proposed to themselves; and so they pulled in to shore, made the boat fast, and went up to the alehouse, leaving the courtier, the valet, the parrot, and the monkey to themselves. The poor fellows, however, scarcely stopped one quarter of an hour. By the time they got halfway down Halfway Reach the tide was out; and very soon it began to make against them. This increase of toil did not add to their good humour, and the slowness of the boat's progress increased the irritation of the very impatient and now very hungry cavalier. At last, however, they pulled round the point into Erith Reach, caught sight of the taper spire and ivy-covered walls of the village church, and made Erith; but they were all in a very ill-humour, which was soon made worse by sundry little circumstances. As the tide had only just begun to rise, there was a long strip of mud between the water's edge and the little wooden pier or wharf of the village, and this must be crossed, and can hardly be crossed without mischief to fine garments. Old Jerry the master, having an eye to his fare, proposed that two of the men should doff the nethermost parts of their attire and carry the passengers on their shoulders. The men, despairing of the drink-penny, and smarting with the ill-treatment they had received, at first refused to do anything of the kind, one of them saying, with particular emphasis, that it should never be said an Englishman had made himself a beast to be ridden upon by a French varlet. There was nobody on the wharf save two or three little boys and a couple of old women, who were very busy in packing shrimps, or in eating them. Old Jerry, knowing the dogged obstinacy of his lads,

hailed the two old women; but both master and man flew out against such a mode of conveyance, the cavalier swearing that it would be a stain upon his knighthood, and Faittout protesting that his respect and tendresse for the fair sex would not allow him to use ladies in that way.

But the thought uppermost in both their minds was that the old women might stumble with them, and so spoil their finery; this thought being perhaps mingled with an unpleasant idea of the laughable figures they would cut being so mounted.

At last the cavalier had recourse to smooth words and promises: over and above the fare agreed upon he would give the boat's crew a good silver crown. Being thus mollified, though not yet restored to their habitual good-humour, two sturdy fellows partially stripped themselves and got into the water. The knight, taking the cage with the parrot in it in his hand, mounts first by throwing his two legs over the boatman's shoulders, and holding on by the fellow's rough poll. Poll being restored to daylight by the removing of the tarpaulin, renews her hooting and screaming. Faittout vows he cannot manage the monkey, but his bearer says it will be a queer thing if a London waterman can't carry a Frenchman and a monkey both together; and catching at the chain and coiling it round his wrist, he brings Jacko tight under his left arm, telling him to be well behaved. Then Faittout mounts, and away they go.

The cavalier and the parrot got safely to the little wharf and to terra firma, but it fared otherwise with the valet and monkey. Just as they were in the deepest part of the mud, Jacko, though firmly and skilfully held, contrived to give the

boatman a fearful bite in the fleshiest part of his arm. The fellow swore a loud oath, importing that the filthy ape had made his teeth meet in his flesh; and then he gave a lurch to leeward, and as Faittout did not sit steady, the centre of gravity was lost, and boatman, Frenchman, and monkey lay sprawling in the mud and slush. How the boatmen laughed, and how the old women and little boys laughed and screamed, need not be told. Old Jerry, whom age had made prudent and circumspect, told his two fellows in the boat that they were putting their silver crown in jeopardy; but if possession of the king's crown in the Tower had depended upon it, the lads could not have stopped their laughter. It took them some time to disentangle themselves from one another and clear the sludge from their eyes; but eventually the three who had been sprawling in the mud, got singly and severally to the wharf, the monkey dragging his chain after him and looking very disconsolate, and the valet raving and swearing in French, and being on the utmost verge of rage and mortification, and so soiled that there was no telling of what stuff or what colours his dress was made—that dress which but a few minutes before had been so bright and gay—that dress which had not yet been paid for, and which was not likely to be soon replaced by a new suit, as there was hardly left in the wide range of London a single tailor so credulous or desperate as to trust a man like the cavalier any longer. The boatman, who was still smarting with the monkey's bite, was at first disposed to be very wroth; but when he looked at Faittout he could not help joining in the laugh which still continued, and which in fact never stopped until the water-

man who had carried the cavalier held out his hand with the palm open, and with a bow and a scrape asked his honour for the fare. The cavalier swore with a terrible oath that his comrade had purposely thrown his valet and monkey into the mud, that they were all of them a traitorous set, and that he would give them no crown and no drinking-money whatever. He put his hands into his deep pocket to draw out the stipulated fare and not a doit more; but after fumbling for a good minute, all the money he could find did not amount to half the fare. He asked his valet whether he had not a few pieces of silver about him. Faittout said that his pockets were empty—that he had emptied them at the bird and beast shop to make up the price of the monkey. For a moment the cavalier seemed rather disconcerted; but putting on his most courteous face—which was not done without a great effort—he put all the money he had into the boatman's hand, and told him he would pay the remainder the day next after to-morrow, when he would be returned to London. The fellow set up a whoop and holla, and called to old Jerry in the boat, that the spark was for being off without paying his fare. At these sounds the last laugh in the boat was cut short; and without caring for their clothes and comfort, old Jerry and the two lads leaped into the water, ran across the mud, and joined their two comrades on the wharf. As they carried oars and a sharp boathook with them, they were not to be scared by the cavalier, who had drawn his long rapier, but who found himself obliged to come to a parley.

"By a slight inadvertence," said the knightly personage, "I came from the court without my

purse, and having made some purchases on the way....."

"That screech-owl of a bird and that biting monkey," said the man that had been bitten.

"I have not wherewith to satisfy your immoderate demands; but come to me the day next after to-morrow to Whitehall, and you shall be paid in full; but drink-money ye will have none, for ye have all behaved scandalously."

"I will to none of your Whitehalls," said old Jerry; "I know well what that land is, and what an honest man gets by going to it. I should get cuffed and maltreated, and then clapped up in the gatehouse like silver-oar Sam, who is still in prison for going into the purlieus of the court to ask his own."

"Then," quoth the knight, "will I send down to you at Charing-Cross Stairs this my gentleman, whom ye will all know."

"We shall never forget him," said one of the boatmen, eyeing Faittout, and putting his tongue out at one corner of his mouth; "but the chances are we shall never see him come to our stairs again, or never with the money in his hand."

The cavalier was going to storm at this distrust of a gentleman's word; but his bullying propensities were checked by seeing that several aquatic or amphibious-looking men had gathered in his rear. They were sailors and fishermen, who had come down from the village, and who showed a marked bias in favour of the boatmen. "'T is shameful and monstrous," said one of them, "that poor sailors should be cheated and starved, and that these high-flying sparks should have no bowels for our honest watermen."

"We are robbed and cheated by some of them every day," said one of old Jerry's men; "there is no honesty left above bridge! But we did not come all this way in our best launch to be maltreated, and robbed besides of our dues."

"Take off his gold-laced cloak, and keep it for your fare," said one of the Erith fishermen.

"And let us drag him through the mud," said a very strange-looking Erith waterman, who wore a red coat, and had a very strange voice—a voice which was sometimes a squeak, and sometimes a growl—"I say," added this red-coated man, beginning with his squeak and ending with his growl, "Let us give his honour a mud-bath, like his ape and that other outlandish monkey."

"Do," said Knapp the baker, another of the droll-visaged worthies of Erith, who had just arrived.

These two last propositions quite unmanned the cavalier. He offered to leave both parrot and monkey in pledge for payment, but Jerry and his men would none of them, having had too much of them already; and they vowed they would have their money ere they left the courtier. In these straits the cavalier, who had made some awkward appearances before-time, and who wished to avoid making his first salutation to his kinsman this time by borrowing money from him, found himself under the absolute necessity of naming Sir John Roundtree, and requesting that old Jerry or one of his lads would follow him up the hill to Sir John's house, where the money would surely be paid. The name of Sir John stilled the tempest in a moment: the Erith folk all saying that Sir John was a man of worship, and justice of the

peace, a most worthy man, and honest in all his dealings, and an especial good friend and employer of the poor; and Knapp the baker vowing that there was not so good a knight anywhere between Erith and Gravesend on the one side, or between London and Erith on the other. Upon these satisfactory explanations touching the character of Sir John Roundtree, old Jerry agreed to go up to the house for the money. As, however, the distance from the river to the house was more than half a mile, and as Jerry knew not but that the cavalier and his man might play him a trick by the road, he called upon two of his smart lads to follow him. Two or three of the Erith sailors said they would go too; for they had nothing to do just now, and had very good hopes of getting a glass of good ale if they went up to Sir John's—it being a very ancient maxim in that honourable family that it was very unlucky to send any man away from the gate without giving him to drink. *Neminem tristem demisit*—the Roundtrees never allowed any man to depart with an empty belly. When these preliminaries had been settled, and when Monsieur Faittout had somewhat freed himself from the mud which covered him from head to foot, the march up the hill began—and a curious march it was. Old Jerry, with a boathook in his hand, marched first; then went Faittout, who was still very slimy, leading that pestilent monkey by the chain; next went the cavalier with the cage and parrot, and then Jerry's two smart lads (each with an oar in his hand), and the Erith fishermen and sailors. The two old women stayed where they were with the shrimps; but the dirty little boys followed the procession, and as they

went from the wharf through the straggling village half a score other ragged little urchins ran out to see the monkey, and to follow it up the hill, clapping their hands, and shouting at its caprices and gambols, which continued to be the cause of great distress to the serving-man, for the sad ape would not go straight forward, but kept jumping from one side of the road to the other, or running round and round, and entangling Faittout's legs with his chain. In this manner the company, though still further increased by some bumpkins who came across fields and hedges to look on open-mouthed, arrived in front of Sir John Roundtree's mansion. That worthy knight, who was sitting at an open window with my Lady his wife, cried out, as he caught sight of the cavalier, "Why, as I live, here 's my mad cousin Sir Ralph Spicer! But what a strange attendance he hath! What, in the devil's name, hath he been about now? S 'life, he hath got a foreign talking-bird in his hand, and that outlandish varlet of his, that seemeth in a queer pickle, is dancing with a baboon."

Although Sir John laughed, and marvelled much, he was not altogether pleased with this visit, his cousin Sir Ralph's visits having cost him rather dear before now. But Sir John was a thorough-bred cavalier (of the good sort); he believed that any man who stood in the near relation of a full cousin had a claim upon his purse, and he looked upon hospitality as the most sacred of duties. He was soon in the hall, and at the door, welcoming his kinsman. After hugging and embracing him in the Whitehall or French fashion, Sir Ralph took his cousin aside, explained his case, and borrowed the little money he immediately

wanted, intending to get rather a larger sum out of that purse before he again quitted Kent. Old Roundtree reprehended Jerry for failing in respect and reverence to a man of quality, but he then gave the crown for drinking-money which Sir Ralph refused to do, and, telling the company all to go round to the butler at the back of the house, and get a cup of ale a-piece, he dismissed them, and conducted his cousin into the mansion.

Faittout was sent to wash and clean the monkey, and make him fit to be presented to Lady Roundtree, and to dry himself, and clean himself, and smarten himself as best he could; and his master, having borrowed a clean ruff and laced bands from his cousin (for Sir Ralph had encumbered himself with no luggage, and had brought nothing with him except the clothes on his back, and the ape and parrot), withdrew to an airy and most clean and comfortable bed-chamber to trim himself. While thus engaged Sir Ralph forgot all his vexations. "Well," said he to himself, "here I am, after all, safe in Kent, and well lodged, and with the prospect of good diet. Yes, last night I was at the Devil tavern, drinking with Tom Killigrew—this morning I was at Whitehall—and now here am I at Erith. So wags the world. But your true cavaliers are at home wherever they go. What says old Jack Denham?—

> 'At Paris, at Rome,
> At the Hague, they 're at home;
> The good fellow is nowhere a stranger.'

So now for that credulous old dame my Lady Roundtree, and that shy damsel mistress Marion: of one or the other, or of both, something may be made."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD CAVALIER.

IMMENSE were the changes or transfers of property occasioned by the great civil war, and mournful was the fate of many of the honestest partisans of Charles I. Of late years the manor of Erith had repeatedly changed hands. Sir William Compton, the last noble owner, "being a most loyal and valiant gentleman," according to the King's party, and "an incurable malignant," according to the Commonwealth party, had engaged on the royal side when only in the eighteenth year of his age, and he had been governor of Banbury Castle, and had fought in many battles and sieges for King Charles; but he had found himself under the necessity of selling the manor of Erith, since the Restoration, to a Mr. Ludwig, a trader of London, who had quickly resold it to one Nicholas Vannacker, a city merchant of Dutch extraction, who had shut up the old manor-house, which stood at the entrance of the village, coming from Crayford, and which had been the seat of hospitality in the time of the ancient Comptons. Except his house and grounds, Sir John Roundtree —descended from a family which had held considerable estates here as far back as the days of the Plantagenets—had not much land within the parish, his chief estate lying at a short distance.

A pleasant and spacious old house, and right pleasantly situated, was that of our worthy old Kentish knight. It had been built, in the early part of the reign of Elizabeth, by his great-grandfather. It had fine bay-windows, and some massive and most picturesque stacks of chimneys, which towered above the gable-ends of the roof. It stood on a green, swelling knoll. In front flowed the broad, majestic Thames: behind were finely wooded hills and parks. There was a garden near the house, laid out according to the plan of the great Lord Bacon. Everything in and about the place was upon some old plan, and strictly in accordance with the building: there was nothing modish, or new-fashioned,—nothing betokening transition or change,—but all things were solid, sober, and antiquated, and proper to carry the mind back to a former age. The character of Sir John Roundtree harmonized with the place, and may have been influenced by it. He was a hale man, and born considerably within the seventeenth century; but his manners and thoughts were all of the preceding century, and he might have been taken for an honest country knight of the time of the Maiden Queen. Like Dryden's Kentish squire, he was stout, and plain in speech and in behaviour; loved none of the fine town tricks of breeding, but stood up for the old Elizabeth-way in all things. He was a royalist and a high-churchman, as his father and grandfather had been before him; and he never could conceive how a Roundtree, or any true-bred, honest English gentleman, could be anything else. What had contributed not a little to the steadiness of his principles was the fact that he had all through life shut his ears and eyes to any-

thing that made against them. It was long, very long ere he could believe that the Cavaliers could ever be in the wrong, or the Roundheads ever in the right. Yet in the hour of success and prosperity his zeal was tempered by a kindly heart and a rough magnanimity; and whether in good or evil fortune, whether triumphant with his party or cast down with it, no man could well be more disinterested and single-minded. It is true the kingly office was in his eye a holy thing, but his passionate love for the King and the Church was coupled with the inward and never-doubting belief that there was no happiness for the people of England without them; and he never looked to the obtaining of any personal advantage from them, or by them. In fact, contented and happy at home, he had rarely been to the great city, though living so near to it, and he had never once shown himself at court until Charles I. was a fugitive from London, and a part of his subjects were in arms against him. Then Sir John put on the iron jacket which his grandfather had worn in 1588, when Queen Elizabeth was menaced by the Spanish Armada, and hastened away to join the King at Oxford, to offer him his money and his services, and the services of his only son, a handsome youth, and the joy and pride of his heart, who very soon perished in battle. The death of her son, and her anxieties for her absent husband, brought his first wife to the grave; his estate was seized by the Parliament, and he was reduced oftentimes to feel the want of that crust of bread and cup of ale which he had never had the heart to refuse to any man. But not for this did he murmur or turn his back on a losing and desperate cause: he fought gallantly all

through the long, unhappy war, and never came in or submitted until the cause was utterly lost, and the King brought to the block. Until Cromwell secured possession of a more than kingly power, Sir John was left in a very reduced and precarious state, being repeatedly thrown into prison as a malcontent and rebel to Parliament. But when the great-minded usurper put a drag to the wheels of revolution, and began to re-organize the state, Sir John was allowed to compound for his estate, and the terms of his composition were made comparatively light, through the mediation of an old neighbour, who had taken the opposite side in politics, and who stood high in the favour of the Protector. But for Captain Hemingford the paternal acres at Erith and Bexley might have been sadly clipped by the commissioners. Yet, at the time he rendered this essential service to his old playmate and once dear friend, Sir John Roundtree had not seen him for a long while, and would scarcely have spoken to him if they had chanced to meet. Before the disputes between King and Parliament came to a head they had had many disputes—if we can give the name of disputation to the warm conversation of two men, both equally determined to adhere to their own previously formed opinions, and each determined not to listen to the other. But after recovering possession of his estate upon such easy terms of composition, and after knowing—not from Hemingford, who did all he could to conceal the service he had rendered to his proud old neighbour, but from Cromwell's commissioners and from other sources—that he was indebted to the captain, he again sought him out, and gave him, if not his entire friendship, a

great deal of gratitude and some of his old kindliness. "Dick Hemingford," Sir John would say, "has been corrupted by the times and evil associates, and has been turned into a Roundhead; but he was born a gentleman, and he cannot help it." Of his own ancient lineage Sir John was very proud. Few sights were more grateful in his eyes than that of the dark old grave-stone at the entrance into the south aisle of Erith church, with the brass plate upon it, bearing this inscription in Gothic and scarcely legible characters—

"Ellin atte Coke gist icy
Dieu de sa alme mercy."

Some of the lands he held came to him through this Ellin atte Coke, wife to Peter atte Coke, otherwise called Peter de Wellinsburg, who was enfeoffed of lands at Erith in the time of King Edward III. "I should like to know," Sir John had often been heard to say, "whether this Vannacker—this Dutch lord of a Kentish manor—had a grandmother that wanted God's mercy in the fourteenth century." During the Protectorate—when Hemingford's party was everything, and Roundtree's nothing—they at times renewed their disputations, the captain endeavouring to convert the knight, and the knight endeavouring, just as earnestly, and quite as fearlessly, to convert the Commonwealth captain. Hemingford would at times express his astonishment at Sir John's obstinacy in not allowing a single political virtue to Mr. Hampden; and Sir John, being the hotter tempered man of the two, would occasionally lose all patience with Hemingford for his denying the high qualities of Lord Falkland. They lived near

to each other, the house of Hemingford being barely a mile from Roundtree's mansion. They interchanged visits, but perhaps (albeit they agreed after a time to exclude politics and polemics from their conversation) it was fortunate for their restored or reviving friendship that the captain was a good deal at sea.

When Oliver died, when Richard Cromwell quietly withdrew, and when Charles II. was recalled by General Monk, and hailed on his return, by the great majority of the English people, with transports of joy, Hemingford—who had bravely fought for the Commonwealth, or for his country, under the great Blake—retired from the service, and was thought by some men (though assuredly not by himself) to stand in need of a friend at court. Sir John Roundtree waited twice upon the King: the first time was to welcome him on his return, when he rode with a great company of loyal Kentish gentlemen to meet his Majesty at Canterbury, and when he saw the royal face, and kissed the royal hand, and found a most flattering reception; the second time was when he went up to Whitehall, to repay the debt of gratitude he owed by saying a good word for Hemingford. This second time he had some difficulty in getting access to the King, and when he did get it his Majesty seemed not to know him, and to be very eager to cut the audience short. The worthy Kentish knight, though not the quickest of men, and not at all given to inquiry or research of any kind, soon found out the reason. The King was constantly beset by the Cavalier party, who looked to his return as the pledge and assurance of wealth and honour to each and all of them; they tired

his never very patient ear with their tales of past sufferings, and of the sacrifices they had made for his father or for himself; and those who had done the least, and suffered the least, appeared to expect the highest rewards from royal gratitude. Sir John Roundtree immediately took boat, returned to Erith, and never went near the court again. But, through a friend of a more courtly character, he had a letter presented to Charles, in which he expressed his mixed anger and shame, and pleaded for his neighbour Hemingford better than he could have done by word of mouth, or in a less excited state of feeling. In this letter he never once made allusion to his numerous sufferings and sacrifices for the royal cause; he did not remind the King that his only son, and his only child, had perished in his prime of youth; nor did he tell Charles how often since his father's execution he had complied with the request of his circular letters for loans of money—thereby not merely pinching himself, but also exposing himself to confiscation and imprisonment. He could have sent the spendthrift Sovereign more than a dozen of his autograph letters, written during his exile, and running in the ordinary style—"I have had so good testimony of your affection to the King, my dear father of blessed memory, that I desire you on this present occasion to lend me two hundred pounds, whereof I promise you, on my royal word, very faithful repayment."

But while others, who had kept larger estates, and who had not contributed half so much to the wants of the royal wanderer, and who had not given it with a tithe of his good-will, preserved all these things as vouchers, and frequently exhibited them

to the restored king, to his ministers and others,—and when they found, after a long and pertinacious trial, that repayment was not to be procured, exhibited them more publicly as proofs of the royal ingratitude and dishonesty,—Sir John Roundtree tied all his letters together and threw them into the fire, not willing to keep any record of the debasement and wretchedness of royalty, and not wishing for any repayment from a prince who had so many claims to satisfy. In his own epistle to the king he merely said that in the troublous times which were past he had done his bounden duty and no more; that every English gentleman, in proportion to his means, ought to have done as much; that his conscience would not have let him know peace by day or rest by night if he had done less; and that he had never looked for repayment or reward of any kind, either in money, lands, or honours. It grieved him, he said, and made him blush to think that the motive of his visit to Whitehall should be so cruelly misrepresented to his Majesty, or so sadly mistaken by him. The only favour he had had to ask was in behalf of an old friend, Captain Richard Hemingford, who had saved him from beggary in the usurper's time; and he had been emboldened to ask this from his conviction that it would benefit his Majesty's government to reconcile an officer of so much distinction, and who had so great an influence over the old officers and sailors of the navy. Thoughtless, and absorbed by the pursuit of pleasure as he was, Charles was much struck with the letter of the honest Kentish knight, which was so very different from those he was constantly receiving. The king even sat down to answer the epistle with his own

hand; but one of his courtiers came in to tell him that Lady Castlemaine, in a bewitching new dress, was waiting for him in the park, and he threw aside the letter, and never thought of finishing it. Captain Hemingford, however, so far from being disturbed by the Restoration government, was invited to continue in his Majesty's service; but, seeing too well how shamefully the whole navy was now managed, the veteran declined the invitation. Hemingford did not survive quite two years. He left behind him the snug estate which he had inherited from his father, and an only child, a daughter, then between twelve and thirteen years of age. Hemingford was no truckler or time-server, and never feared for himself; but when the hand of death was upon him he greatly feared for the future fate of his young daughter, whose property and beauty must, in those grasping and dissolute days, greatly increase her peril. In the belief that his old friend Sir John would be both willing and able to perform the trust better than any friend of his own fallen and now obnoxious party, and that, notwithstanding their differences of opinion, there lived not a more honourable, high-minded, and kind-hearted man than his neighbour, who, moreover, had known his child from her birth, he entreated Roundtree to be her guardian, and his executor; and when Sir John accepted the trust, and said, in his plain downright way, that Marion should be as his daughter, the veteran sailor said he should die easy; and so he did.

After sixteen years of widowhood, Sir John Roundtree married a second wife; but this marriage was only contracted in order that Marion Hemingford might be the better attended to.

The new Lady Roundtree came of a good old Kentish stock, of the right hue in politics. She had been a widow. She was younger than Sir John, though not quite so young as she pretended to be. The world, which is ever critical about second marriages, laughed a little at our knight on the first blush of the business, and afterwards bestowed some commiseration upon him; for the second Lady Roundtree was not so amiable a person or so popular in the neighbourhood as the first, and the notion got abroad that the doughty old soldier was not only vexed and put out of his way by her ladyship's whims and vanities, but was even henpecked by her. Her ladyship, however, was far from being so bad as people chose to think; and although he was often vexed by her, Sir John was the last man in Kent to bear henpecking, or to forego the exercise of his supremacy in any important concern. It is true that her ladyship had a large share of vanity, frivolity, and conceit; that she was always fancying herself a beauty, and fifteen years younger than she really was; and that since the king's return, she was constantly pestering her lord to have a lodging in London, which he detested, and to make a figure at court, which he had resolved never to visit again.

> For courts are full of flattery,
> As hath too oft been tried;
> The city full of wantonness,
> And both are full of pride.

But then she kept his house in very good order, was, on the whole, kind and affectionate to his young ward (but for whom she might have remained a widow still, for all that Sir John would ever have said to the contrary), and was the means

of bringing such female society to the house as Marion Hemingford needed, and of taking her out on visits to the few neighbouring gentry.

Although Lady Roundtree would often affect to treat her as a mere child, Marion was at this time between seventeen and eighteen years of age. The pleasant county of Kent, which had given birth to that fairest of maids, who was afterwards wife to that conqueror of France, Edward the Black Prince, was famed in all times for its fair maids, but it did not at this time or in any other contain a fairer girl than Marion, or one more gentle and right-hearted. In the little world in which she moved—and a little world indeed it was, and she had never been beyond it or had known any other—she was universally beloved, and almost always called "the Fair Maid of Kent."

For some two years past the most copious source of uneasiness to good Sir John was the question which my lady was continually urging, of how they should dispose of the young heiress in marriage. Her ladyship's notions ran very high. With such an estate as Marion possessed, and with the expectations she had (the knight had made no secret of his intention to leave her all his property that he could bequeath), she might mate with a great lord, and wear a coronet, and shine at court. [Here the knight invariably said, "The Lord forbid!"] The child was rather pretty—her complexion was certainly clear and good—and she would lose her rusticity in London. It was unluckily true that her father had been a Roundhead; but, still, there was no denying that he came of an ancient and honourable family—of as old a family as any in Kent or the three adjoining counties. Rich, pretty,

well born, why shouldn't the chit marry the son of a marquis—nay, the son and heir apparent of a duke? Thus reasoned the second Lady Roundtree. But there was one strong reason why Marion Hemingford should not make any marriage of the kind; she was in love with a plain commoner, she had plighted her troth, and was the least likely person in the world to change.

Walter Wynton was the son of another of the Commonwealth sea captains, long a shipmate at sea, and a near neighbour on shore, of Marion's father. Captain Wynton, whose politics were of a sterner kind than those of his friend, and who had not submitted quite so tranquilly to the inevitable revolution which terminated the Commonwealth, was in trouble and under sharp persecution at the time when Hemingford was dying. But for these circumstances Hemingford might possibly have balanced between Wynton and Roundtree in his choice of a guardian for his infant child, notwithstanding his convictions that the laws were weak, and that the guardianship and protection of a gentleman belonging to the triumphant party in the state would be more efficacious and powerful than those of a republican officer who had resolutely adhered to the fallen party. Captain Wynton, after much suffering, was allowed to return to his home, and to live quietly with Walter, his only son; but persecution could not make a convert of him, nor could the shameless exhibitions made by the court turn his republicanism into loyalty; he remained a moody, discontented man, and of late the humiliation of his country and the disgraces put upon his cherished profession had well nigh driven him to the brink of madness. Oh! how he

sighed for the past rule of the Protector, and for the glorious days of Blake! Living, as he did, near the river, and not far from Deptford Yard (nor very far from Sheerness and Chatham), he could not remain ignorant of the shameful events that were happening; his house was frequented by many old Commonwealth officers, and was not unfrequently beset by some of the starving sailors, who had served under his honour in the good days, and who knew that his honour would feel for their woes, and, as far as he could, relieve them. Wynton was thus kept in a state of constant excitement and irritation, the effects of which could not but be felt by his son.

Walter Wynton was a serious, meditative, but very handsome young man, and one that could be lively and gay enough upon occasion. He was now in his twenty-fifth year. From his twelfth year till his eighteenth, when the Restoration deprived his father of his commission, he had been in the navy, and the companion of his father in every voyage he made. It was predicted of him by all the tars that knew him—and he was known at one time to most of the men in the fleet—that master Walter, who had taken to the service betimes, would make a first-rate officer, and be an admiral before he was thirty. The overcasting of this bright vision was not an easy thing to bear. Walter, like his father, dearly loved his profession; and his country, and the glory of his country's flag at sea, he loved with all his heart and with all his soul.

So long as Captain Hemingford lived there was the closest intimacy between the two families, and master Walter was the first friend of little Marion's

childhood. Sir John Roundtree would hardly share in this intimacy, for he looked upon Wynton as a sour and incurable Roundhead, and even as a fanatic in republicanism; but, spite of himself, he admired and liked the lad Walter, whom he frequently met; and after Hemingford's death, when he took his daughter home to his own house, he could not do less than invite her neighbour and friend master Walter to come and see her from time to time. The young man came very frequently, and as he became more and more known to his host he was liked the better by him; and after a year or so had passed it would have been difficult to say whether Sir John or Marion was the more anxious for his coming. Walter was a keen sportsman, and an adept in all varieties of rural sports—as was Sir John, and as all Sir John's forefathers, of whom there was any record or tradition, had been. He went hunting and fowling with Sir John in the autumn and winter seasons; and in the spring and summer they fished together in the Thames, or in those pretty tributary streams the Cray and the Darent. Walter never refused his company at a race or at a match of coursing; and when people were merry at a village fair or wake, at a sheep-shearing or harvest-home, if he did not dance much himself, he loved to look upon their dancing. He was also quietly facetious at times. The knight would often say, "This young fellow may be a Roundhead and a shade or two more serious than befits one of his age and condition; but devil a bit of the Puritan has he in him." Nay, as the times grew worse, or as the vices of the restored government became more brazen and were more talked of, Sir John could even listen patiently to Walter's murmurings

against the profligacy of the court, and enter fully into his indignant feelings when he spoke of the navy and of the dishonoured flag of England; invariably contriving, however, to end the conversation with saying a good word for the King, throwing the blame on his evil advisers and dishonest ministers, and hoping that matters would mend.

With my lady Walter was never a favourite; for her ladyship loved flattery in large doses, and he could never flatter at all. She thought him a very unlikely and unapt person to win the heart of any woman; not that she could deny that he had a fine manly figure and handsome countenance, but she said he always looked starch and severe, and had none of the little talk which ladies love to listen to. As, for the sake of her own juvenility, she had taught herself really to believe that Marion had scarcely grown a year older since her marriage with Sir John, but still continued a child, she was astonished, even to the stopping of her breath, when the knight one day not long ago, being wearied with her ambitious schemes for his ward and her talk about coronets and court, told her rather pettishly that she might put all such nonsense out of her head, as he believed that Marion had already made up her mind on that particular, and that Walter Wynton would be Marion's husband as surely as he, Sir John, had the honour of calling her ladyship his wife. As soon as the dame recovered her breath and speech, she said that this was wonderful news indeed, and rather too wonderful to be true; that it was impossible the child could so much as have given such matters a thought; but then she said that if she had, it was forward and shameful in her, and that such notions ought to be

driven out of her head, as in all worshipful families loves and matches and matrimony were managed by the parents or guardians of the young ladies. "Doubtless," replied Sir John, "this hath been the general rule, but there are exceptions—there will be exceptions—there have been exceptions—my first wife was an exception, seeing that she would marry me, though only the son of a plain Kentish knight, when her mother, and her maiden aunt, and the whole family conclave had settled that she was to marry a much greater personage."

"But, dear Sir John," said her ladyship, "you do not approve of this independence and indiscipline in young girls?"

"I approved of it very much *once*," replied the knight, "and she who exercised her own free will never gave me cause to repent that she had exercised it in my favour."

"But consider, dear Sir John, this Walter Wynton is a Roundhead, and the son of a man notoriously disaffected to our most gracious sovereign—a man who, apart from that rank in the service which he has forfeited, would only take rank with a second or third rate Kentish squire. Surely you can never seriously think of giving the child, with her competent estate and good expectations, to a Roundhead! It is against your known principles, Sir John."

The knight fidgeted and looked rather confused; the lady followed up her attack by representing that Captain Wynton was one of the most sullen and desperate of the surviving republican faction—that he was a near relation to one of the regicides, and had been the bosom friend of several of those king-killers—that he was a man of that temper that

was sure to involve himself in some new trouble, and that his son, who took so little care to conceal his sentiments, would be involved in his father's ruin. Her ladyship scarcely stopped until she brought both father and son to the scaffold, and put poor Marion in widow's weeds.

"Hark ye, madam," said Sir John, "my principles are unchanged and unchangeable. I love not Roundheads, albeit but for one of that classis of men I should not be where I now am. But I like this manly, right-English youth; and think, nay feel sure, his principles may be changed by time and experience. If I could have chosen, perhaps I would have ordered things otherwise, and have had the girl married to some man of undoubted loyalty, some honest and virtuous cavalier, if any such be left in the world in these corrupted times. But there again I have my scruples, for I promised to my old friend and benefactor, on his death-bed, that I would act by Marion as a father; and I am certain that if Hemingford were living, Walter Wynton is on every account the very man to whom he would give his daughter and estate. But then again, it behoves me to look well to the safety and happiness of my ward, and the security of her estate. There is an ugly chance, indeed, that the mutinies of our sailors, the general discontent of the people, the wickedness of those who mislead his Majesty, may encourage the Roundheads to undertake some high-flying enterprise—and in that case methinks Captain Wynton would be very likely—very likely indeed, to be in the head of the insurrection. And will Walter keep aloof when his father is engaged? Not he; not he! . . . Then will Walter Wynton be by the fact in the position

of my personal enemy, for come what may the King must be supported; and then will follow troubles and woes, ruin to Walter, and .... No! by the duty I owe to Hemingford, by the love I bear his child, who has become as dear to me as if she were my daughter, I will not give my consent to this union until the country be more settled, or until I see some notable change in the politics of Wynton Lodge!"

Lady Roundtree expressed herself well pleased with this determination.

"But," continued Sir John, "your ladyship will please bear in mind that I will have no coercion, and much less any trick or manœuvre practised upon my ward. Were I to cause her to shed a tear, by my soul I should expect to see her father's ghost appear to upbraid me! Your ladyship knows the extent of my obligations to Hemingford. Vex not the dear child by showing discourtesy to Walter, or by talking about coronets and baubles which Marion will never wear, nor wish to wear."

The good knight was much excited. His lady declared that she had never vexed the child's ear with any such talk (which was not quite true), and that she ever had and ever would set her face against coercion, and tricks, and manœuvres (which was still less true).

The last time that Sir Ralph Spicer had been down at Erith to visit his cousin Sir John, whom he had not seen for many a year, that needy courtier, chiefly through the gossip and confidential communications of my Lady Roundtree, had made himself well acquainted with Marion's history, and with the rent-roll of her estate; and he was not without his hopes of dazzling the young rustic,

converting Marion Hemingford into my Lady Spicer, and revelling on the produce of her good, broad, Kentish acres. The egregious folly and vanity of Lady Roundtree had given him encouragement and some opportunity. Her ladyship had been charmed almost out of her senses by his gallantry and court impudence, by the delicious Whitehall news he gave her, and by the pleasant stories he told about Lady Castlemaine, the fair Mistress Stuart, and other mistresses or favourites of the King; about this lord's intrigue and that lord's duel, and other edifying things of the same courtly description. What Walter Wynton could not do at all, Sir Ralph Spicer could do in the greatest perfection: he had given her ladyship doses of flattery large enough to choke ten ordinary ladies, and seeing that she took them all and gloated upon them, he had absolutely proceeded to the length of making love to her ladyship.

What! make love to his cousin's wife? Ay—and Sir Ralph was a spark that would have had no scruple to make love to the wife of his own brother! And there were many Sir Ralphs in the court of Charles the Second. Such were the promising vices which our exiled king and cavaliers had imported from France, with French dresses and fashions, French plays, French poetry, French everything!

But in this case Sir Ralph's love-making was but sham love, adopted partly as a capriccio, and partly, as he thought, to serve a purpose profitable to himself. Her ladyship, in the warmth of her confidence, had lamented the obstinacy of Sir John in leading a recluse life in Kent, and had opened to him her grand plan of marrying in due course of time the child Marion to some illustrious noble-

man. Living out of the world as she was constrained to do, she had small opportunity for forwarding her project; a live lord scarcely passed through Erith once in half a dozen years, except it was my Lord Say and Sele, and he had got a wife already, and was little better than a Roundhead and Puritan; but Sir Ralph Spicer, the gay and gallant Sir Ralph (her ladyship could give compliments as well as take them), a courtier who knew every great lord and lady at court, a friend of the King, a friend of his Grace of Buckingham, of George Etherege and Sir Charles Sedley, a man who played at Orestes and Pylades with the gay Lord Buckhurst, and who was familiar with every other lord and courtier, must have abundance of opportunities of promoting the plan upon which her ladyship had set her heart. And Sir Ralph had given her ladyship his word that he would move in this behalf, and find a lord for the little girl. After this satisfactory pledge to the old lady, he had seized the very first opportunity of declaring an outrageous passion of love to the young one. Poor Marion, who had never seen such a specimen of humanity, thought he was crazed:—and crazed no doubt he was, crazed then and always with vanity and drink, by presumption and debauchery. At first she met his hyperbolical expressions with laughter, but when he grew more stormy and impudent, she turned away from him with silent scorn. A man so confident was not to be checked or humbled so easily. He had found another meet opportunity of playing the part of the amorous swain; and then Marion had reminded him of a fact which he had altogether forgotten or disregarded—that is, that he was old enough to be her

father; and she had then told him, with very unpleasant frankness, that it assorted ill with his years to play such fantastic tricks before a Kentish maiden in her teens. After that last scene she had taken good care to avoid him, and to secure herself from his impertinent intrusion; and she had scarcely spoken a word to him during the rest of that visit. Sir Ralph nevertheless had gone back to London with the confident assurance that by and through the very credulous and awkwardly manœuvring Lady Roundtree, he might turn Marion Hemingford to good account, either by marrying her himself, or by acting as matrimonial broker for somebody else. Her ladyship, at this time, had never once thought of the possibility of an attachment existing between Walter and her husband's ward. Sir John's explanatory conversation had taken place some weeks after the departure of his cousin from Erith, a welcome departure to Sir John, although it cost him a good many gold pieces. Sir Ralph had promised very faithfully to repay the money, but Sir John had not been much disappointed at never having got it. In London, and in the courtly air of Saint James's, our cavalier had soon forgotten the fair maid of Kent, his coquetry with Lady Roundtree, and his promises to her; for other game had started, of which the pursuit seemed less difficult; and it was not in the nature of these gallants to be steady or persevering in anything,—no, not even in mischief! When, however, the court had come to discuss the question of the seizure of Tom of the Woods, Sir Ralph's thoughts had been carried back to Erith, and to the pretty little projects he had conceived while there. He had volunteered

his services to the King, who wished the arrest to be made without noise, telling his Majesty about his worshipful cousin Sir John, who was a cavalier to the backbone, and in the commission of the peace for that part of Kent where the dangerous prophet had so long been hiding. Years before this his Majesty had forgotten everything about Sir John Roundtree; but Sir Ralph's relationship with that worthy magistrate might facilitate the great enterprise in hand; and his Majesty had therefore intrusted the mission to our precious rake, who had served him before in a capacity far more dishonourable even than that of a runner or common thief-taker. Sir Ralph had thought that this present state business, if well managed by him, might lead to some fixed office or salary; and some of the King's merry counsellors had told him, as an encouragement, that if he gagged and caged the prophet, he should have some immediate reward.

Marion, keeping a secret from him for the first time in her life, had not told Walter Wynton anything about the extravagant behaviour and impertinence of her good old guardian's reprobate cousin; for she knew that Walter might attach more importance to it than it merited, that Walter would be sure to be vexed and irritated, and that Walter, though so quiet and composed, had a fiery spirit within him. Since that unpleasant visitation the poor girl had been somewhat distressed by seeing, or fancying, that Sir John Roundtree was not quite so cordial with Walter Wynton as he had used to be. She, however, knew that the mind of the good old knight was disturbed by the aspect of public affairs, and by the exceedingly great diffi-

culty he found in answering the angry arguments of some of his neighbours, and in excusing royalty; for politics, which had been in a great measure excluded from this quiet corner of Kent, now forced themselves upon the attention of all men. For some time past there had been no looking down from the green hills upon the flowing river, without seeing some evidence of disaster and disgrace, of interrupted commerce, of starvation and mutiny. Erith was an exposed position; the storm was at its very doors.

Things were in this state when Sir Ralph Spicer arrived at his cousin's mansion in the manner which has been described. Her ladyship gently reproached him for his so long absence and neglect in writing; but he pleaded his busy avocations at court, and made a triumphant peace by whistling Faittout to bring in the ape and the parrot. Lady Roundtree was enchanted with the monkey, and Marion was not at all transported by the present of the talking-bird. The parrot, however, was left in the saloon, while the monkey was sent down to the kitchen with Faittout. As the cavalier made no secret of his hunger, as it wanted some hours of supper-time, and as it was the rule of the house to lay meat and drink before the stranger immediately after his arrival, a good meal was served up for Sir Ralph. When he had eaten his fill, and had, with the occasional assistance of Sir John, finished two good bottles of claret, and not until then, he put on his business face, and told his host and cousin, in the hearing of the ladies, that he had come hurriedly down into Kent upon a state matter, a very important state matter which nearly concerned the King's majesty, who had himself sent him, and in

which he, Sir John, might render good service to his Majesty.

"I am ever ready to do that last," said Sir John: "Tell me, cousin, what it is I can do for the King!"

Sir Ralph, looking still more important and solemn, said, "Cousin, it is a matter of high concernment, and must be handled in secret. When state matters are to be treated—when the salvation of the king's crown is at issue, gallantry must give way to duty—Lady Roundtree, and you, Mistress Marion, will pardon me if I crave Sir John's ear in the library for one half-hour."

The ladies smiled and bowed an assent; the elder lady, who was burning to know what the state matter could be, greatly praising Sir Ralph's discretion. Sir John forthwith led his cousin to the library, a fine old wainscoted room, with a few family pictures in it, and shelves, and books, not a volume among them being of less size than a folio, nor of later date than the reign of James I. Marion, happy to be released, walked out into the garden; Lady Roundtree would have run to the library door to listen; but Sir John, who really expected some most important communication, cautiously turned the key of the door of an outer room, and so her ladyship found that she could hear nothing. Sir John being seated on one oak chair, and Sir Ralph being seated upon another directly opposite to him, the solemn conference opened. The courtier made a great many flourishes, ran into a vast deal of extraneous matter, and kept from the main point considerably more than half an hour; but the secret came out at last, and great was the astonishment and mortification of Sir John

upon finding that the great state business in which he was to take a part was nothing more than the seizure of a mad fanatic who told fortunes, and uttered what were called prophecies. He thought that the King might have put some better service upon a man of condition like himself, who had fought for his royal father in half a score of battles. He was irritated.

"Cousin," said he, "if half be true that men do say, it is not the seizing of this moon-struck hermit that will save the State. But since it seems to be thought otherwise at Whitehall, let Tom of the Woods be seized in God's name. You have, of course, the secretary's warrant for his arrest?"

"The devil a warrant have I," responded Sir Ralph. "My commission was given me all of a hurry, and between night and morning in the matted gallery. Besides, Government wishes the thing to be done quietly, and mayhap would not like to appear in it."

"Hem! Such appearance would not add to its dignity," quoth Roundtree; "but by what authority is the lunatic to be seized?"

"By the authority of your own and special warrant, cousin Sir John. I told the King that you were in the commission of the peace in these parts, and it was upon my so saying that his Majesty was pleased most graciously to say that you were the truest and best cavalier in all Kent, and that he could be sure of your doing the business discreetly and quietly."

"His Majesty," quoth Sir John, bowing reverentially as if the king were present, "too much honours me by his remembrance of me; but I should have thought that I had long since been

forgotten in those quarters. But to the matter, cousin Ralph: I must needs tell you that I relish it not. This Tom of Bedlam, or Tom of the Woods, whom I have various times seen, and with whom I have had some talk, may be a *mad* man, but he cannot be called a *bad* man. I would not willingly be the means of throwing him into prison. I confess that neither in the old time, in the days of the King's father, nor now, in the days of his Majesty, did I ever see any good done to the common weal by imprisoning and persecuting these poor deluded enthusiasts, or by scourging them, or by cutting off their noses or ears. Cousin, you know, or ought to know, my high-church principles, but there are times when I cannot help thinking that if Archbishop Laud had left Prynne's and Bastwick's ears upon their heads, he would not have been brought to lay his own head upon the block!"

"But, Sir John, the King's majesty doth say that it is all through the foresayings of this Tom of the Woods that the fanatics in London be so riotous and the sailors so mutinous."

"I opine," quoth Roundtree, "that those unpaid tickets, and want and hunger, have a good deal more to do with the mutinies of the seamen than have the predictions of Tom of the Woods. If the King's majesty could but spend a little less among his courtiers and his . . . . . ."

"Od's blood! cousin John, his religious Majesty hath not given me a doit, as I have a soul to be saved! and, what with this whole niggardly and half-puritanical parliament, which he prorogues and prorogues but is afear'd to dissolve, lest he should be forced to call another and get a worse

one, and what with this thing and that thing, and the miscalculations attending this beggarly war, there's no money in the treasury to pay anybody. The sailors may eat their tickets, and feed their wives and children upon them as they can. . . . . But this is not to the point: it is thought by the King's majesty and by his government that the sailors would be quiet, or quieter than they are, if this fanatical prophet were laid by the heels, and deprived of his gift of prophesying. The tickets cannot be paid, but Tom can be imprisoned; therefore let that be done which can be done, and do you, Sir John, issue your warrant forthwith, as you love the King."

"I must both issue it and execute it," said Sir John; "for Tom of the Woods stands well with all the people hereabout, and there is hardly a man, not excepting even mine own constable, that would willingly take him into custody. If Tom had lived two or three centuries ago, he would have been conceited into a saint. In truth, his life is very simple, harmless, and holy-looking! He does evil to no man, he offends the laws in no particular. The law hath no hold on him; Cousin Ralph, I foresee mischief if we attempt to trouble him. Yes, I tell you I foresee mischief and even insurrection among these commons of Kent, for he hath singularly endeared himself unto them."

"It is not for a Roundtree to *fear*," said Sir Ralph, making up his heroical face; "it is not for you, my right worshipful cousin, to hesitate when the *King commands*."

"Cousin Ralph," said Sir John, "I fear not for myself, and I will not disobey his Majesty, albeit I should have liked some warrant from him, and

cannot like the duty put upon me. You are sure, perfectly sure, that the King said the thing ought to be done by me?"

Sir Ralph very solemnly vowed that it was so.

"Then," quoth Roundtree, "since it must be, the sooner it is done the better. I will draw out a warrant, and go myself with Roger Hinde, mine own confidential serving-man, and see it executed; for otherwise methinks it may chance not to be executed at all. You will come with me, Sir Ralph, into the woods?—it is but a short and pleasant walk hence to the place which Tom makes his haunt."

"Sir John, the sun is sinking—it will soon be night—to-morrow morning will be time enough—I have had a wearying day in the service of the State, and would fain rest where I am, and divert the ladies. Consider, too, the presence of a stranger of quality like myself might make a stir through the country side! In every way I am better where I am. But to-morrow morning will be time enough."

As Sir John looked into Sir Ralph's face he could not avoid the thought, that whatever the Roundtrees might be, there was a Spicer in the world that looked at this moment very like a shuffler and coward; but he said nothing, except that he would go and get through the business himself, without any loss of time. And having drawn out a warrant, and summoned Roger Hinde, the stout old knight sallied forth from the mansion, leaving Sir Ralph to divert the ladies, and to tell them (if he should so choose) the real nature of the mission he had come upon.

CHAPTER V.

TOM OF THE WOODS.

Sir John Roundtree had not got many yards from his own door ere he met the Erith constable, Mike Woodenspoon, who was going round the hill upon some weighty concernments, for Mike, besides being constable, was chief shaver and hair-trimmer to the whole of the little district, and held the ancient and important office of "Ale-conner," or "kenner" or "taster" of ale; and not a drop of that liquor could be vended in any part of the parish, either in the village or in the upland, until he had tasted it and declared it to be good and fit to be drunk by his majesty's lieges. In the performance of these last-mentioned official duties, which he was never known to neglect, he had grown very corpulent and rather short-winded, and was not altogether without symptoms of gout in the toes; but it was thought that the size of his belly and the slowness of his walk added very materially to his constabulary dignity. As Mike was quite alone, and as our good knight and justice of the peace thought it would be better to proceed with the legal regularity, he said to the shaver, "Mike, follow me; I want you to serve a warrant." Mike touched his cap, and said he would follow his honour to the world's end; but warrants being very rare things at Erith, and Mike

having a great deal of natural and professional curiosity, could not but ask Sir John who it was that was to be taken up. When our knight named Tom of the Woods, the barber stood aghast, and for some time could not speak at all. When Mike found his tongue, he said that he would sooner dig up his old father out of his grave than put Tom in prison; that he would sooner serve a warrant upon the Archbishop of Canterbury in the midst of his clergy in Canterbury Cathedral, or even upon the Lord Mayor of London himself between his men in armour, and in the midst of his aldermen in their wigs and formalities, than serve one upon Tom of the Woods in his wilderness, for Tom was an awful man and he feared him, and Tom had a tail of followers which reached all the way from Holly-hill Wood to Greenwich Park, and a great deal farther. The knight reminded the barber of his oaths of office, and told him that the warrant must be served forthwith, and that he himself would stand by. Mike, who had been at one period of his life a candle-snuffer at the Globe theatre, took off his cap with his left hand, laid his right hand upon his heart, and said that he must needs keep his constable oath, and that if the King's majesty and his worshipful master Sir John called for his services in this particular, he would go serve the warrant even though he died for it. But the barber's knees almost knocked together as he said the words.

"A fiddlestick for your dying," quoth Sir John; "there will be no dying or killing in this matter! Tom of the Woods will demean himself gently in my presence, and where is the Kentish man in these parts that will offer wrong to Sir John

Roundtree, or to any man acting with him or under his warrant? Follow me, Mike Woodenspoon, and if you meet with any of your gossips, say not a word of the business we have in hand."

The knight strode on, and Mike falling in the rear marched after him with Roger Hinde, the serving-man, who liked the business no better than Mike did, having the same awe of Tom's supernatural character, and the same dread that a tumult would follow Tom's arrest. Sir John walked so fast that the constable and ale-conner had much ado to keep up with him; yet Mike not only spoke about Tom, but also spoke professionally to the old butler about the knight's ale-casks. As they went along they were seen by divers country-people who were going into Erith, and who as soon as they got there reported that Sir John Roundtree and his man Roger, and Constable Woodenspoon, were walking towards the woods, and walking very fast indeed, as if they had something to do of great weight and urgency. This note was quite enough to rouse curiosity, and several of the villagers forthwith set out to follow on the footsteps of our knight and party.

It was, as Sir John had told his cousin, only a short and pleasant walk to Tom's Dodona. It was a very pleasant walk through winding lanes, hedged in with briar and honeysuckle, through two or three thickets, and over two or three gentle hills, which afforded from their tops glimpses of the broad river, and which had at their feet clear and prattling little brooks, that were running and skipping to the Thames. These little hill-tops and openings in the thickets afforded also views of

the woods, marshes, and meadows of Essex, and of the little old village of Dagenham, with the low red roofs of its houses shining in the setting sun. The trio, bound on justice business, were soon at the edge of the wood. Sir John, though not insensible to the stillness and solemnity of the place, entered without hesitation by a narrow winding path; but Mike and Roger hesitated and stopped at the edge of the wood, each putting his open palm above his eyebrows, and looking under it into the brown and misty atmosphere. When they had gazed thus for awhile without seeing anything but the trees, and the fern that grew under the trees, and some squirrels that were nimbly running up the stems of the trees, the barber and waiting-man entered the wood and walked at a smart pace to come up with the knight, who had never missed them. The almost horizontal rays of the sun found their way into the wood but only for a short distance, when the trees were found to grow so closely together and the foliage was so thick, that scarcely a ray could penetrate, and hardly a glimpse could be gotten of the sky. Here that brown and misty hue which reigns in such places was browner and more vapoury. It was a most solemn spot; it was the centre of a world of gnarled trunks, wide-spreading branches, and thick leaves. There was no sound. A forest roaring with the tempest is sublime, trees moaning in the evening wind give a melancholy, soul-touching note; but there is something more touching, more melancholy, more awful than these—and that is the inmost heart of a forest on a calm summer's eve.

Stopping under a strange blighted tree, Sir John

said, "This should be near the place. Shout, my good fellows, and then, good Mike, do your duty and fear not."

Never was there a more lamentable attempt at a shout than that which the two men uttered; awe and fear choked their voices, and made them look so pale and ghostly that a stout-hearted man might have been startled at the sight of them, had he come suddenly upon them in that solemn place.

"Tom must be near indeed, if he can hear those piping voices of yours," said Sir John. "What ails you? Shout, Mike, shout! Roger, give tongue!"

The barber and the serving-man tried again, but it was again but a poor and weak Holla! that they could give. The knight grew impatient, and raising his own firm and manful voice, he made the thick wood re-echo with his "Holla! holla! holla! Tom of the Woods come forth!"

Presently a rustling was heard among the trees, and footsteps among the fern, and a deep voice which said "I come! I come! I come! and the judgment is a-coming!" and in the next instant Tom of the Woods stood close by the side of our knight. The barber and the serving-man shook in their shoes. In truth, the woodland seer, in such a place, was an awful sight to look upon. He was a tall, gaunt, thin man, clad in a long black riding-cloak, much stained and tattered; his head was without any covering, and almost bald, but he had cultivated a beard with singular success, for it was thick and shaggy, and reached nearly to his girdle; his legs beyond the mantle or cloak were naked, and instead of shoes he wore rough sandals. He carried neither staff nor sword—he had nothing

in his right hand but a small black book—but no one could look at him without seeing that a sword or any implement of war in such a right hand as his would be a fearful weapon. It was also easy to see that Tom had dealt in pikes and trenchant blades at some period of his life: on his bald forehead just above the left temple there was a long, broad, and deep scar; and on the same side of the head, between the cheek-bone and the beard, there were the signs of another portentous gash. Our hermit, indeed, had a hybrid look, being very like a cross between a monk and a man-at-arms, or a hermit and a dragoon. The long riding-cloak and Tom's manner of wearing it assisted no doubt in giving him this mixed character; but Tom had really been one of Oliver Cromwell's Ironsides, and as doughty and fearless a one as ever rode with the Protector. He stood erect and looked calmly in the face of Sir John, as if he expected the knight to speak first; but as Sir John did not open his lips, Tom of the Woods, not roughly or rudely, but with a gentle voice said, "Here am I; you called me from my evening meditation: what would ye have of me—in what can I serve you, Sir John Roundtree?"

The knight, who more than ever hated the task which had been forced upon him, looked round to Constable Woodenspoon, and intimated by several hems and nods that he ought to speak and stand forward with the warrant he held in his hand. But Mike could neither speak nor move; and thus Sir John found himself under the necessity of telling the hermit that his alarming prophecies had excited the suspicions of certain persons well affected to the State, and had induced him to issue

a warrant for his apprehension, in order that he might be examined. Tom listened calmly; and replied without any anger, or any visible emotion, that he had expected such a summons, that he had had a vision, and that he was ready to go again into prison for righteousness' sake, being well assured, and by heavenly relations, that the iron bars were not forged, nor the fetters made, that could restrain him long. By this time Mike had grown bold enough to step within ten yards of the hermit, and to show him the warrant by holding it out at arm's length.

"'Tis well," said Tom; "put up the paper, I need it not, I am ready to go whithersoever Sir John chooses. The law cannot hurt me, nor can the law-makers or law-breakers." And then turning to the knight, he said in a milder tone, "This is not your doing, Sir John Roundtree; you have been put upon this thing by men who live not at Erith or anywhere in Kent, but at Whitehall;" and then speaking in a whisper in the knight's ear, he added, "Your ungodly kinsman, Sir Ralph Spicer, has been sent down by the court to compass my arrest."

"Was that also in your vision?" said Sir John, somewhat startled.

"Ay," replied Tom of the Woods, "and a great deal more than that: but let them repent, let them all repent, for I say again the judgment of the Lord is at hand, more terrible than the judgment of fire and plague!"

The instant that Tom began to prophesy, his countenance, which before had been perfectly calm, became flushed and excited, his eyes flashed, and his tall figure seemed to grow still taller and more

erect. Mike and Roger trembled and shrunk within themselves, and went behind a tree to avoid the fearful sight. Sir John, who had seen him thus before, said nothing but "God forefend! God forefend! But judgment or no judgment, follow me to Erith."

Our knight then began to walk back by the way he had come. The seer followed him in silence, and thereupon, encouraged by the meekness of his deportment, the constable and his serving-man, though still trembling, followed the seer. Sir John had a good sword by his side, and old as he was growing, he was still a match for most men (as for any assistance from constable or servant, he might as well have expected it from the timid little squirrels); but Tom of the Woods had no mischief in his head of that sort. All went as quietly as a funeral procession until they came near to the edge of the wood; but there they were met by some score of peasants, who, having finished their daily labours, were going to Tom's temple and confessional for some ghostly comfort or discomfort, as many of the people of the neighbouring country had been in the habit of doing for a long time past. These rustics bowed to Sir John, and gave him the good evening with all due reverence; but when they saw the constable, they suspected what was in the wind, and some of them began to cry, "Whither away, Tom; whither away, Tom of the Woods? We were coming unto you to make some more repentance."

"Brethren," said Tom, "depart in peace, for I am now in the grip of the world's law."

"What 's that to the law of the saints," said one of the fellows who had been most seriously

infected by Tom's fanaticism. "Heed it not, Tom of the Woods! We will stand by you even though it be against this worshipful knight, who hath not joined in the revelry and wickedness of the times, and who ever yet hath been the poor Kentish man's friend."

At this very moment the people who had come out from Erith reached the spot. Except a few of the rougher sort who dwelt down by the river side, and who lived more upon water than upon land, they all doffed their caps to our knight; but at the same time they seemed to be grieved and even angry at what he was doing, and they joined the other party in saying that Tom of the Woods should not be sent to prison. Sir John was about to address them, when the prophet held up his right hand and spake.

"Peace, brothers and children," said Tom; "Peace and submission! The time hath long been that those who persecute God's true servants, and seek to kill them, think they do the State good service. But this worthy knight, however mistaken in other particulars, and however hoodwinked he may be, hath never been of that number. Do him, therefore, no wrong in hindering that which he hath in hand, and which by the light that is in me I do know he hath unwillingly undertaken. Let me go whithersoever he will take me. This bondage will be short. I shall be free and back to the woods again. This I tell ye all; and when did ye know me to be a false prophet?"

This tranquillized most of the multitude, and they were clearing the path, when a sour old fisherman who had been present at the arrival and landing of Sir Ralph Spicer, said doggedly, "Tom

of the Woods, you know not all the danger you are in. There 's a hell-rake of a courtier that hath come down from London, and . . . . . ."

"I knew of that coming before you did," said the prophet, "and I tell ye that neither that jack-anapes nor those that sent him can for this present do me any harm."

"You know best," said the surly man, "but may I be cursed, or pressed into the navy to starve, an there were but a few here of my mind, if I would allow thee to run so much as the risk of being mistreated by that courtier's tongue. Comrades, I say that Tom of the Woods ought to stay where he is, or go farther into the Weald; and that we ought to see to it."

Several of the rougher sort showed an inclination to be violent. As all violent passions are infectious, this might have spread; but the hermit, letting the Ironside part of his character get the ascendant, caught the sour old fisherman by his jacket, and shook him till his bones rattled, calling him all the while a doubter and unbeliever, a godless man that was setting himself in opposition to destiny and prophecy. After this there was no more opposition to Tom's removal, and the whole and now rather numerous party quitted the wood and walked across the hills to Sir John's mansion. By the time they got there it was night; but the moon had risen. Sir Ralph, being much disquieted by that great concourse of people, did not come out to meet his cousin. Sir John found him diverting her ladyship with court anecdotes, which, in his old-fashioned way, he considered as very improper entertainment for the ears of a modest woman. A cloud was on Sir John's brow as he

said, "Sir Ralph, I have done what the King hath put upon me. Tom of the Woods is here in custody; but now we have got him, what shall we do with him?"

"Oh!" quoth Sir Ralph, "send the fanatic to prison."

"But the law, cousin Ralph, requireth some previous examination. I see we shall get no good by it, nor by any part of these proceedings; but the forms must be gone through with. Sir Ralph, I expect that you will attend me during this examination."

"Is the fanatic well bound and ironed? They are dangerous neighbours when the fit is upon them."

"I have put neither cords nor chains upon the man. There might have been danger in trying to do it."

"Then, Sir John, my good cousin, as the King's majesty wishes this matter to be done off-hand and as quietly as possible, and without appearing in it, I think I had better not show myself in the justice-room."

"As for that, Sir Ralph, Tom knew of your coming before you got here; and now the people all know that you are here, and that the court hath sent you to procure his arrest. Come, then, and help me in this examination."

Sir Ralph very reluctantly followed Sir John to the library. The prisoner was brought in by poor Mike, the terrified constable; and a few of the people were admitted, the rest being recommended to the care of Roger Hinde, and to the knight's ale-casks. The lamp on the justice-table scarcely gave so much light as the broad full moon that shone through the bay-window: Tom thus

appeared a few shades more awful than he had done in the thick wood. Sir Ralph got behind the high table, and seated himself close by the side of Sir John, who opened an enormous folio volume, containing abstracts of statutes, with directions to justices of the peace: he kept turning the pages over and over, but was excessively puzzled how to begin. Although he had been in the commission of the peace good seven years, he had never had such a case to deal with. And of law, to say the truth, he knew but little. He knew of some statutes against witchcraft—and he had a proper respect for them—but he knew of none against prophesying, except an old one of the time of Henry the Eighth, against prophesying the king's death—which the prisoner was never known to have done. At last he made a desperate leap in the middle, and said, "Tom of the Woods, dost know why thou art here?"

"Because it is the will of the Lord, and because the spirit of prophecy hath been put in me," replied Tom.

"But why dost utter prophecies, which do too much excite men's minds, as is alleged?"

"Because I cannot choose," said Tom; and he drew himself up and pointed through the bay-window to the broad river, which was brightened by the full moon, and added, "I can no more help giving utterance to the foreknowledge which comes into my mind in my solitude, and after long fasting and prayer, than the waters of that river can avoid the influence of the planet which causes the ebb and flow of the tide."

"But," said Sir John, "there have been false prophets as well as true ones. Our divines tell us

that the voice of prophecy ceased at the coming of the Redeemer, which was the fulfilment of all prophecy. How, then, canst prove thyself a true prophet?"

"By the verifications of my predictions," replied the hermit. "In the year sixteen hundred and sixty-five, I foretold a national judgment, and that year came the plague. In sixteen hundred and sixty-six, I told men that the vials of the heavenly wrath were filled, and that year came the great fire; for this year I have predicted another judgment, more fearful than fire and plague. And it is coming, and is at hand! Therefore let me call ye all to repentance!"

Sir John, being more and more puzzled, uttered some hems and hahs, and then said with some simplicity — "If it be as thou sayest — if what thou foresayest doth so surely come to pass, then man why dost not foretell good things? Better be a prophet of good, than a prophet of evil. Tom, I have known thee do kind deeds among our poor Kentish folk; and, it hath been told me, that thou hast in thy heart a love of thy country. Then, prithee, why not foretell some good thing, instead of all this woe?"

"Worthy knight," said the hermit, "I cannot shape my predictions to suit the wish and pleasure of the world, as that ungodly impostor Lilly, the star-gazer, is said to do. I cannot do as our roystering Kentish youths are wont to do at the season when the apple-trees are putting on their blossoms; and when, with an un-Christianlike noise and a very heathenish ceremony, they run into the orchards and encircle every tree, and promise the farmer,

'To every twig, apple big!
To every bough, apples enow!'

and then, if the owner should not give them to drink and hand them money besides, they do unsay what they have said, and tell the good man, in another rhyme, that his crop of apples will be nought. I cannot do this, Sir John. I predict not for gold, like the London astrologer; nor for ale and shillings, like our young Kentish bumpkins! I only utter the words which are put into my mouth or into my heart. I would foretell good things if I could. But, sunk in sin as she is, how can England expect good? Again, I say, let us all humble ourselves, and repent! I would die this instant, and be happy in my death, if I could but see the beginning of repentance. This land is overshadowed by sin and the devil! The awful judgment cannot be delayed! Let every man look to the wickedness of his own heart, and repent—repent—repent!"

The people present trembled. Sir John, turning to his cousin, said, "Sir Ralph, tell me what to say next. Sir Ralph, you must e'en speak up yourself as a deponent, for there is no man here that will speak against him."

"Call up my man Faittout," said Sir Ralph; "he will depone whatsoever you will."

"But, cousin Ralph, these country folk will not understand the varlet's English. They may take it into their heads to cry out against him as a Frenchman and a Papist—and what, in Heaven's name, can Faittout know about Tom in the Woods?"

"He can say he knows just this much—that it is a common rumour, both in court and city, that Tom's outcryings against the wickedness of the times are directed against the King's sacred ma-

jesty, and that Tom's prophesyings excite to riot and insurrection, and are the main cause of the mutiny of our sailors."

Poor Sir John rubbed his chin, said that was the point where he ought to have begun, and sent to call up Faittout.

When the Frenchman came into the room, and caught, for the first time in his life, a sight of Tom of the Woods, as Tom was standing near the bay-window, he started back as if he had seen a ghost. He had been familiar in his own country with the sight of bearded men, and with men gashed and scarred in the wars; but such a beard, such scars as Tom's, he had never seen. When his master told him, in French, the service that was expected from him, although he was no coward, he almost shook, and he tried to excuse himself. He could not, however, deny that he had heard the rumour, as well in the city as in the precincts of the court, and at last he undertook to give a deposition to that effect, provided his master would speak first in the same sense.

Upon this, Sir Ralph, finding that he could not do otherwise, made a deposition, and then Faittout followed him and repeated his very words, as nearly as he could remember and pronounce them. Sir John did not take the oaths of the deponents, for he would have thought his justice Bible profaned by being put to the lips of a Papist like Faittout; but he wrote down what was said, and then asked Tom of the Woods whether he had any reply to make. Tom answered that he had none, except that in his prophesyings he had never named the King, or any other person; that he had never meant to excite men to insurrection, and that he knew the

mutiny in the fleet was not caused by him. With a faltering and most unwilling hand Sir John drew up an order to the constable to keep the prophet a prisoner in his house (for the only prison in Erith was a strong room by the side of Mike's shaving-shop), until he could be removed to the county gaol. He clearly foresaw what would happen, and he could scarcely grieve at it. Come what might, he had done all that the King could reasonably expect from him. To have done what the wise court wished would have required an armed force.

The prophet, taking great pains to keep the people quiet, walked down to Mike's lock-up, and entered therein, for this was in his vision; but when, in less than an hour, the men, women, and children of Erith were joined by a mob which had collected from all the neighbouring villages and hamlets, and came and broke open the prison door, Tom girded his cloak about him and walked out a free man, for this, too, was in his vision, and by so speedily regaining his liberty he was only completing his own prophecy.

Among the crowd which escorted Tom up the hills were several persons of superior condition. Of these some had taken part in this breach of the law out of superstition and fanaticism, and with the undoubting belief that poor Tom was really an inspired personage; but others had interfered simply from motives of humanity, having been led to suspect that the government would wreak a cruel vengeance upon poor Tom if they could get him and keep him in their power. Among the latter class was Walter Wynton, who had mounted his horse and ridden over to Erith from his father's house at the first news of the hermit's arrest, which had

been spread far and wide with amazing rapidity; for Tom had his friends and devotees in all directions (and the number and activity of these people, and the daily and almost hourly visits paid by some or other of them to their prophet, were the real causes of a good part of his seemingly mysterious information). Though he had left his horse outside the village and had muffled himself in his cloak, Walter was too well known to escape being recognised; and it was soon gossiped about that master Walter had been the first to break into the lock-up room. This was said in commendation, and for honour; but it was afterwards heard by some who employed it to discredit and ruin young Wynton.

Sir John was sitting at supper with his guest and the ladies, when the mob halted opposite to his house and gave him notice, with three cheers, that Tom of the Woods was free, and was going to put himself beyond the reach of warrants. "Let there be no more of this," shouted one of the mob; "let the courtiers of London leave the prophet in Kent to himself, or perchance we may do that in the great city which will make them think that Wat the Tyler and John Ball the priest, with the old commons of Kent, be upon them! We Kentish men have in all times given sharp blows for our friends, and our old rights and privileges!" It required all the respect they entertained for the worthy knight, and all the convincing eloquence of poor Tom, to prevent their hooting and menacing Sir Ralph, who, at this moment, looked amazingly silly and disconcerted. Taking a cup of claret in his hand, as soon as the mob was gone away, he said, "May this good drink be my poison

if ever I volunteer to go a prophet-hunting again! But 'tis no fault of mine! They ought to have sent me with a squadron of his Majesty's guards, and then . . . . ."

"And then," said Sir John, "there would have been bleeding noses and no gain. The people would have fought for Tom; the sailors in the river, and from Deptford, and Woolwich, and Gravesend, would have gathered here, and bad would have been made worse! And you could never have succeeded in unearthing Tom; and even if you had caught him, and overcome all resistance here, you could never have carried him away; for if you had tried to go by water, the sailors would have been upon you, and if you had endeavoured to go by land, every Kentish man between this and Greenwich would have risen against you. 'Tis a pitiful business, and were better not done; but it is better as it is than as it might have been."

"Of a certainty," said Sir Ralph, "I shall come to no honour or preferment by this expedition; but there is good hope that the King and court will by this time have forgotten that they ever sent me."

"Then cousin Ralph let us try and forget it as quickly as we can, and in the meanwhile say no more about it. The times are too unsettled, and there are too many storms gathering around us, to think of calling the good Erith people to account for what they have done this night. Cousin Ralph, fill to the King's majesty's health, and then sing us a good cavalier song. May God send his Majesty better days and better advisers!"

Sir Ralph gladly accepted both invitations, and

although his singing had been somewhat spoiled by his hard drinking, he sang with very good emphasis "When the King enjoys his own again." Before he could begin "Phillida flouts me," Marion withdrew. My lady tarried, and would have tarried still, but Sir John gave her a peremptory warning, seeing that his cousin was getting very mellow, and exceedingly free both in his speech and in his songs. Since Sir Ralph's last visit there had been no such late sitting at Erith. At last the two cousins drank the St. George and separated.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIGHT AND A FLIGHT.

Sir John Roundtree woke the next morning with a headache, and very heartily sick of his guest.

"If this graceless cousin of mine tarries much longer," said Sir John, "he will talk her ladyship, my wife, quite crazy, and frighten poor Marion out of her wits. I wish he were gone—I wish he had never come—but he is my kinsman, I must not be inhospitable—What shall I do?" Our good knight did nothing at all; and as Sir Ralph found it both expedient and pleasant to stay where he was, he determined to stay for a few days. If he should go back to court while the business was fresh, he might get laughed at for catching a wild man of the woods only to let him go again. Nor did the journey back to London tempt him as a pleasant and safe one just at this moment. In the course of the night the sailors of another king's ship, lying in the upper part of the Hope, near Gravesend, had mutinied, and after landing their officers in the pinnace, they had run out their guns, shotted and ready for action: the whole river, from the Tower down to the buoy at the Nore, was reported to be in a most disorderly state, the crews of the merchant-ships which could not put to sea for fear of being captured by the Dutch, having taken up the cause of the sailors of the fleet as

their own. And if there was danger in going back by the river, there was also a chance of it if he went by land; for the country people might lay in wait for him on the road—and who could tell whither that devil Tom of the Woods had betaken himself? In the course of the morning much news and gossip was brought to the mansion. If half of it were true, the Kentish men on shore were almost as mutinous as the sailors. Sir John was considerably distressed, and Lady Roundtree proportionately gladdened, by hearing the very bold and active part which Walter Wynton had taken in battering and breaking open the door of Mike's lock-up house.

"And who is this Walter Wynton?" said Sir Ralph, who had never seen him.

Marion, who was present, turned aside her head in a very fruitless attempt to conceal a blush. Lady Roundtree, by silent telegraph, gave Sir Ralph to understand that she would tell him something as soon as she could speak with him alone; and Sir John, who found it very inconvenient to enter into any explanation, said, "Oh! master Walter is a very brave young gentleman, who at times lacks discretion—but a brave young gentleman always is master Walter. He is the bravest horseman, the best fowler and angler in all these parts—he knoweth Izaak Walton's book by heart—and is ofttimes here, and the sharer of my sports. The last jack we did kill in the Cray weighed eighteen pounds."

"But did you not say Wynton—Walter Wynton?" asked Sir Ralph.

Lady Roundtree, answering for her silent husband, said, "Ay, that is the youth's name."

"The only Wynton I ever heard of at court," said Sir Ralph, "was that pestilent Roundhead, Captain Wynton of the fleet, who gave the King so much trouble. Can it be that this master Walter is that rebel's son?—But, cousin, you speak of the youth as your friend and frequent inmate. It cannot be! Sir John Roundtree would not admit the son of such a Roundhead within his doors."

Gentle as she was, Marion's dark blue eyes flashed fire at these words, and she looked at Sir Ralph as if she could drive him out of those doors. That look and the preceding blush were quite enough to tell a story. Sir Ralph no longer stood in any need of one part of her ladyship's intended explanations. In the meanwhile Sir John was reddening all over, dreading to appear inconsistent and untrue to his principles, though only in the eyes of a man like his cousin, and yet hating to deny the truth, or even to seem shy of confessing it. At last his perplexity gave way to a good hearty fit of passion, directed wholly against his cousin—

"Cousin Ralph," said Sir John, "it is not for you to tell me against whom I am to shut my doors. But for one honest man of the late faction, I should have had no door to shut or open. Walter Wynton is the son of the bosom friend of that Cromwellite, and, as I said before, he is a brave young gentleman. With the father I have never associated. But, s'blood, why should I give such explanations to you! If you like not the company that come to this house, you can get ye back to court and choose your own. You come here unbidden, and you bring a pack of troubles with you!" Our knight must have been wroth indeed

ere he could commit this breach of hospitality. Her ladyship, who had never heard him say so plainly to any man, and much less to a cavalier and cousin-german—"Get out of my house," was all amazement. But, as it did not suit Sir Ralph to quarrel, and as he could in no case get him gone without borrowing again from his cousin, he would not take the affront, but began a long conciliatory speech, which Sir John did not stop to hear the end of. Beckoning Marion to follow him, the old knight went into the garden, and there walked up and down with such long and hasty strides that his ward could scarcely keep pace with him. His anger, however, soon cooled, and then he felt heartily ashamed of the few hasty words he had said. He returned into the house, made a very unnecessary apology, and invited his cousin to join him and his ward in their garden walk. But in the meanwhile Lady Roundtree had fully acquainted Sir Ralph with the whole history of Walter Wynton; and Sir Ralph had vowed that he would get the said master Walter into such trouble as would make it impossible for him ever to be Marion's husband. The courtier had also amused her ladyship's imagination with various little fictions, some having relation to herself, and others to a great lord at court, who was entirely guided by his advice, and would soon make mistress Marion forget that there ever had been such a person in the world as master Walter.

For poor Marion this was a wearisome day, and so was the day which followed it. Walter Wynton neither came nor sent; and the odious Sir Ralph, whenever he found an opportunity, would be talking rhapsodies to her. But it was not until

the morning of the third day that her cup of disgust was filled to overflowing.

By means of the ingenious Faittout, Sir Ralph discovered that the young lady was a very early riser, and accustomed to be in her flower-garden an hour or twain before Sir John and my lady were stirring. As he sate so late at night, to the no small derangement of that quiet family, and as he had hitherto come down so very late in the morning, Marion hardly expected to be disturbed in her early occupation. This morning, however, as if she had had her visions as well as Tom of the Woods, she roused her hand-maiden, and made her accompany her to the garden. Marion was busy among her flowers, and looking as lovely as Perdita, and Lucy, her maid, who had but small skill in floriculture, was sitting in an alcove knitting, when approaching steps were heard along the winding gravel path. Marion thought it could only be the old gardener, and did not look up. Lucy remained in the alcove, concealed by a screen of flowering honeysuckle. The sound of the steps came nearer, but still Marion did not turn her attention from the flowers she was tying. But, hark! somebody sings! that is not Hodge the gardener! Marion then looked up for the first time, and saw, at the distance of only a few paces, our dissolute cavalier, who had not slept long enough to be quite sober, and who approached her, singing—

"I often heard her say,
That she loved posies;
In the last month of May
I gave her roses;
Cowslips and gilly-flowers,
And the sweet lily,
I got to deck the bowers
Of my dear Philly."

"Sir Ralph!" said Marion, "there is no place here for you at this hour. What brings you hither?"

"Love," said Sir Ralph. "Nothing but love!" And, having a singing in his head, he went on—

"'T was drink made me fall into love,
And love made me run into debt,
And though I have struggled and struggled and strove,
I cannot get out of them yet.
There's nothing but money can cure me,
And rid me of all my pain."

"Sir Ralph," said Marion, "I wish you would rid me of your company. I have told you before now how displeasing this behaviour is to me, and how much unbecoming your years."

"Years, forsooth! Who talks of years? I am no older than the King's religious majesty, and that is the fashionable age at court, whatever it may be in Kent! Ventre saint gris! Why, what age dost thou take me for, thou pouting mistress Marion?"

"The King's years be thirty-seven—a staid age with most men—but I have heard my good guardian say that his cousin Sir Ralph Spicer is forty-five years old."

"My cousin Roundtree has a wooden head and no memory! I tell thee, mistress Marion, that we are all gay young men at court—that I am young, and will be young and thoughtless for twenty good years to come, and that thou oughtest to quit these Kentish clodpoles, and with me to Whitehall, to see how we gallants live, and to learn what life is."

Here Marion gave him a look which ought to have checked his confidence and humbled his

vanity; but the fumes of the overnight's claret swam in his head, and as the young lady said "Since you will not leave me, Sir Ralph, I must leave you," he caught her by the wrist and vowed that she should not go quite so soon. Some of that spirit which had often animated Captain Hemingford on his quarter-deck now flashed from his daughter. "This is insult, Sir Ralph," said she; "this is base surprise, and unmanly violence! Unhand me, Sir! I say unhand me, and leave me, or let me leave this place!"

It is doubtful whether the half-inebriated profligate would have let go his hold of that beautiful young arm so soon, if Lucy had not come forth from the arbour with a scream, and with something which was better than a scream, a good heavy garden-rake, with which she threatened the visage of the court rake. Sir Ralph, who had no notion that Marion had brought her attendant with her, did certainly look rather discomposed at this juncture; but he soon found his impudence and his tongue. "Mistress Marion," said he, "these are but rustical manners, only to be excused by thy ignorance and exceeding simplicity. Child, I did thee too much honour in paying thee a few courtly compliments. But dost think that Sir Ralph Spicer, who is run after by half the ladies at St. James's—to say nothing of rich wives, widows, and maidens in the city—will ever really trouble his head about a Kentish lass that meets him with pshaws and shall nots?" And having thus said, to set himself still better at his ease, the cavalier sang—

"J'aime bien quand je suis aimé,
Mais je ne puis être enflammé

Des belles qui sont inhumaines.
. . . . . .
Et si l'on veut me posséder
Il faut de charmes pour me prendre,
Et des faveurs pour me garder."

Sir Ralph was obliged to walk while he was singing, for Marion, with her maid Lucy (who had not quitted her garden-rake), was taking the shortest way to the house.

"One word," said Sir Ralph, "one word mistress Marion, before we part."

"Sir," said the daughter of Hemingford, "there have been words enough, and too many—there has been misusage and unmannerliness, and too much of that. I would not make discord between kinsmen . . . . I would not stir up strife between any men . . . . but, were I to tell Sir John Roundtree of your behaviour in this garden, my father's friend and my own best friend would make you feel his displeasure."

"And were I," rejoined the cavalier, growing spiteful, "were I to tell my dull cousin that this shy bird, his ward, gets out of her cage at unseemly hours to meet her Roundhead spark in this garden . . . . why, then, my cousin Sir John would see to it. Mistress Marion, thine anger is in good part matter of disappointment! Thou wast here to meet that puritanical stripling they call master Walter—the son of that malignant Captain Wynton. The crop-eared father narrowly escaped hanging at Tyburn for the traitor that he is. Mayhap the son will not be quite so fortunate. It is no light matter to break open the doors of a prison—it is no light matter to do what Walter Wynton did the other night—and then his name

alone is enough to hang him; and men have been drawn, hanged, and quartered for less offences . . . So, so, Mistress Marion, thou turnest pale, dost thou? Thou tremblest? Thy knees may tremble more when thou comest to the matted gallery in Whitehall, to kneel, to pray for . . . ."

"If master Walter were here," said the maiden Lucy, who was excited to that degree that she could put no control upon her tongue, "if master Walter were but here, he would cut your big ugly periwig in twain for making my sweet mistress be so pale. The most that men do say of master Walter is that he kicked open the door of the barber's shop, and most do say that he did not so much as that, and that he was at home at Charlton nursing his sick father when Tom of the Woods was released by Providence according to his prophecy."

But before the warm-hearted Kentish hand-maiden had quite finished her short speech, Sir Ralph had kissed his hand in a mocking, insolent manner, to her fair and now certainly very pale mistress; had taken his departure, and was on his way to his bed to get that additional sleep which his head certainly needed: and he soon disappeared within the house, singing from his friend Sir John Denham,

> "I pretend not to the wise ones,
> To the grave,
> Or the precise ones."

On the morning following these garden-scenes, a certain dapper young man riding a promising nag arrived at Sir John Roundtree's from the village of Charlton. It was only Joe Whitehead,

the groom or horse-boy of master Walter; yet his coming was as welcome to two inmates of the house at Erith as it could have been if he had been King Joseph, or Joseph an Emperor. He brought a letter to Sir John Roundtree, in which his young master frankly stated that he had indeed been present at, and taken part in, the breaking open of Mike Woodenspoon's lock-up; but in which he also reminded Sir John that Tom of the Woods had not been committed in a very legal or regular manner, and that the detention of the poor prophet with the chances of his being subjected to barbarous treatment, was neither what he the knight could wish, nor what the people of the country would allow without a great tumult. Walter further told the knight that he would have been to Erith to give fuller explanation by word of mouth, but for a sudden indisposition of his father.

Of this last circumstance, as we have seen, the maiden Lucy had shown some knowledge. She had an interest in knowing what passed at Charlton; and as that village is little more than five miles from Erith, and as gossips daily went and came between the two places, she might have obtained the information without the aid of a fairy or the relations of a seer.

As Sir John read master Wynton's letter, he muttered to himself—"Break open a prison, that is very bad! but to confess it under his own hand, whatever the future danger may be, that is very good—or very unlike a Puritan! I should not have liked to hear of the poor lunatic's ears being cut off, or of his being sent to the plantations. But I do verily believe the Kentish blood would have been up and mischief done before Tom of the

Woods could have been gotten from Erith. master Walter hath done a better service in helping to let Tom go, than my mad cousin did me in making me commit poor Tom. I say again, I am glad Tom of the Woods is gone free. And I wish Sir Ralph would get him back to Whitehall."

Joe Whitehead was the bearer of another letter which he delivered to Lucy—though it was not intended for Lucy's reading. Marion, who had heard, even in her quiet solitude, of the mad and bloody duels that were continually taking place in London about the court, and who had a fearful conception of the ferocity of many of the cavalier party, or of the reckless desperate men who claimed to be the choice spirits of the age (and she had quite recently heard of friend killing friend, and even brother brother in savage duels, and upon slight provocations), had not only determined to keep Sir Ralph's insolence to herself, but had also charged her handmaiden not to mention it to anybody, lest it should come to the ears of master Walter. Poor Lucy had given a promise, with the full intention of keeping it: but Joe loved Lucy and Lucy him, and for a long time past there had been no secrets between them. And then, that outlandish man Faittout and the pestilent monkey had so flustered and tormented Lucy, the one by making love to her, and the other by making faces at her, and by playing all manner of antics and foul tricks in the servants' hall, that her heart was too full to allow her to be silent about the visitors in the house; and when she began talking and revealing with Joe in the pantry, while he was refreshing himself with the never-failing cup of ale, she revealed much more than she meant

to do, and never found out her mistake until Joe jumped up in a round passion and swore he would cut the monkey's throat first, and beat the Frenchman within an inch of his life afterwards, and go and bring down master Walter to deal with the cavaliero. Then Lucy wept and implored Joe to be quiet if he really loved her, and told him how strictly her young mistress had enjoined her to be silent and secret—at least about all that scene in the garden. Now, as Joe Whitehead was really and truly head over ears in love, his wrath was soon subdued, and he was easily made to promise that he would say nothing to his young master for fear of combustion and trouble. We think that before Joe left the house at Erith there was a neat little letter put into his hand with the name of master Walter Wynton upon it; but we know for historical truths, that after giving a kick to the monkey who was chained up in the servants' hall, and a very unfriendly look to Monsieur Faittout, who was brushing his master's cloak in the yard, Joe Whitehead mounted his nag and trotted away over hill, heath, and common for Charlton, his heart being lighter than it otherwise would have been, by the assurance he had received from Lucy that both master and man, Sir Ralph and Faittout —were going to leave for London that same forenoon.

Now, it so fell out that the visitors at Erith did not take their departure until the noon of the following day, although Sir Ralph had settled all the necessary preliminaries, and had intended to take his departure at the time mentioned by Marion's maiden. He had borrowed from his cousin some gold pieces, which the knight cared little enough

about, and he had even succeeded in borrowing the knight's favourite bright bay mare, which Sir John cared a great deal about, and the lending of which showed how eager he was to get rid of his kinsman, who would not venture by water on account of the mutinous sailors. But when all these arrangements were made, our cavalier thought it would be better to tarry another day where he was, to allow more time for the people to cool upon the subject of the arrest of Tom of the Woods, and for the courtiers at Whitehall to forget the business he had been sent upon. In spite of the side-looks and frowns of her husband, Lady Roundtree earnestly pressed him to stay and enliven their dullness with a little more lively talk; and Sir Ralph had the art of making it appear—at least to her ladyship—that he stayed the one day more only to please her, and at the cost of much pleasure at court and some detriment to state business.

On the morrow, however, a little before the hour of noon, Sir Ralph Spicer took his departure from the house at Erith, well mounted on Sir John's bay mare, and being followed by Faittout, who bestrode a little rough pony hired for that occasion. The beautiful weather still continued: the bright warm sun of June shone out from a blue sky which had scarcely a cloud; the air was balmy, and perfumed with the sweetbriar and eglantine, with the unseen violet which grew in shade near the edges of the woods and coppices, or on the moist banks by the roadside; and myriads of birds were singing in those Kentish woodlands. Although scarcely conscious of these purer influences, they nevertheless acted upon his dulled and vitiated spirit, and contributed greatly to Sir Ralph's buoyancy of

heart. As he rode along he felt gayer than he had done for many a long day. Perhaps he thought that this was all owing to the gold he had gotten into his purse, for before he got out of sight of Erith church he began to sing—

"Money 's a lady; nay, she is a princess;
Nay more, a goddess adored on earth.
Without this money who can be merry,
Though he be never so noble by birth?

. . . . . .

When thou hast Money, then friends thou hast many;
When it is wasted, their friendship is cold;
Go by Geronimo, no man then will thee know,
Knowing thou hast neither silver nor gold.

. . . . . .

Money doth all things, both great things and small things;
Money doth all things, as plainly we see:
Money doth each thing, want can do nothing,
Poverty parteth still good companie:
When thou hast spent all, or else hast lent all,
Who then is loving or kind unto thee?"

Thus carolling and ambling the cavalier and his man came to Lessness Heath, where the road was scarcely perceptible, or where there was then no high road, every traveller choosing his own path over the green sward, and among the furze and thickly-growing brushwood. Our travellers were somewhat embarrassed in their choice, for they knew not the country, and in that solitude they could see no cottage, and met with no one of whom to ask the way. Sir Ralph, however, without taking the shortest path, chose pretty well, and, crossing Lessness Heath, and leaving the old grey tower of East Wickham church on the left, he soon got upon Plumstead Common. Here the scenery became still wilder, the ground rougher

and more broken, the furze thicker and higher; and there was more wood and coppice. But there was beauty and sweetness in this increasing wildness. The furze was covered with its rich golden bloom, and the wild thyme, that grew all about, mixed its perfume with that of the blooming heather, and gave out its full fragrance when crushed beneath the hoofs of the two steeds. As they came to the very wildest part of Plumstead Common, our travellers—who had seen no human being since they left Erith, except an old woman in a red cloak, attending some very white geese on the common, and some little boys hunting for linnets' nests among the furze—discovered a gentleman riding alone across a lower part of the common.

"I wonder," said Sir Ralph, "who is that solitary spark?"

He was soon to know, and to his cost. As he was looking at the distant stranger, that gentleman, seeming for the first time to have caught sight of him, turned his horse's head, and, quitting the path he had been following, rode up the common towards our cavaliero. At first he came up gently and hesitatingly, as if he doubted whether he were not mistaken; but, as he got within nearer view, he spurred his horse, and came on at speed, in spite of the rough and broken nature of the ground. The bold rider was Walter Wynton, who had been pursuing the shortest road from Charlton to Erith, with various unpleasant thoughts working in his head. Poor Marion's well-intended secret—for it was intended to prevent strife and bloodshed—had been a second time betrayed. Joe Whitehead—concluding that Sir Ralph must have been before this back in the great city, whither

his young master most rarely went, and whither he could not consider him mad enough to go in search of a courtier—thought that there would be no great harm in telling what Lucy had told him yesterday; and, as Walter was preparing for his ride, his groom had told him all about the scene in the garden, and the exceeding vexation which the roystering cavalier had caused mistress Marion. Although he had some notion of going to London with a friend, Walter had not the least expectation of meeting our courtly knight on Plumstead Common; but, as such personages were not often seen in that lone place, it struck him, as soon as he saw the cavalier's gay dress, that this could be no other than Sir Ralph; and, when he got near enough to see the well-known bay mare he was riding, he could have sworn to his man, although he had never seen him before.

Walter did not draw rein until he drew up across a rugged narrow path which our knight was following; and then, rising in his stirrups, he said, in a tone very unlike that used in friendly greetings, "Sir Ralph Spicer, if I mistake not?"

"Who is it that asks?" said the cavalier.

"Walter Wynton," replied the young man; "and that name is enough to tell you that you must dismount and fight me here."

The cavalier eyed his man, and the length of the sword he wore at his side. The sight was not such as to give the assurance of an easy victory; and Sir Ralph, whose courage and nerve had been injured by drink and debauchery, would rather not have fought at all in that lonely place. But he bethought him that Walter had only been a tarpaulin, that sailors were seldom skilled in fence,

and that he in his exile had learned the trick from some of the best French masters. Moreover, he saw that he must either fight or run away, and that there was but slight chance of escaping on that rough country from one that was so well mounted, and rode so fearlessly. During the few seconds that these calculations were made in the mind of the cavalier, the young sailor loosened his sword from its sheath, and half drew it; and Faittout expressed by sundry French ejaculations that he expected his master would dismount, and drill a hole through the young man's jerkin. Having made up his mind, Sir Ralph said, "Roundhead and malignant, I use not to fight in duello with such as thou art, but to leave them to the pillory and gibbet. Thou hast done that at Erith which may lay thee by the heels before long, if I spare thee now. But, since thou wilt have it so, I will even dismount, and change the colour of some of these heath-flowers with thy blood."

He dismounted and drew, but not before Walter Wynton was out of the saddle and on the ground, with his good rapier unsheathed. Faittout got off the pony to hold the two steeds, and to look upon the fight with a critical eye, but with the very confident assurance that his well-taught master, who had lived so long in France, must, after a very few passes, run his adversary through the body. But, when swords were crossed, the fencing French valet began to waver in his opinion, for Walter handled his weapon like one who had been tolerably well taught; and in vigour of limb, in breath, and in quickness of eye he clearly had the superiority. The roughness of the ground was more unfavourable to Sir Ralph, who skipped

about in the manner of the French school, than to Walter, who stood firm, with one foot fixed on the heath, in the manner of the Spanish, or rather Neapolitan school of fence. After a few lounges the cavalier missed his footing, and fell among the furze. His life was at the mercy of his adversary, but Walter would not take advantage of an accident. When Sir Ralph rose he fought much more cautiously, and Faittout had soon the satisfaction to call out in French "Blood! blood! Cavalier you have drawn the first blood, and had you not better let this decide, and end the combat, as our rule is in France?"

Sir Ralph instantly acted upon the suggestion—"Young man thou art wounded, shall we stop here?"

"Fight on," replied Walter; "I am no duel-seeker, and fight not for trifles; but when I do draw the sword it is not a scratch, that shall make me put it into the scabbard. You have insulted my honourable father—you have done other wrongs which can hardly be expiated with your blood; but you or I shall fall here."

The fight continued; and Walter—fresh in strength as when he began, and altogether insensible to the slight wound which he had received—plied his rapier so vigorously, that Sir Ralph lost breath and gave ground, and in so doing received the point of his adversary's sword on one of his ribs, and nearly measured his length backwards. At this sight, which seemed to threaten him with the loss of his place, Faittout threw up the reins of the steeds he was holding, and, drawing his own sword, threw himself between his master and Walter, and, as he beat aside Walter's sword, Sir

Ralph made a very ungenerous and unmanly thrust at his brave foe. But, before any more mischief could be done, a tall, gaunt man, with a beard flowing down to his girdle, came out of some underwood close at hand, shouting "What is this ungodly brawl? Know ye not that the judgment of the Lord is at hand? Put up your swords, I say. But what! have we two upon one?"

It was Tom of the Woods, with a tremendous oaken staff in his hand; and that staff was presently applied to the pate of Faittout with so much vigour that the varlet bit the heath. Then, standing by the side of the cavalier and Walter Wynton, who renewed their fight, Tom said,—"Master Walter, I thought not to find you engaged in such work as this; but I know you enough to know that you must have strong and good cause for it—and as you have now a fair field, go on in God's name, and smite that Philistine. But coolly, master Walter, forget not your fence, my young master! So, so, ply him so!—that's a good thrust—that lounge was well parried! . . Straight home! . . . Ah, Ha!—you hit him there, you hit him!"

The old-soldier fighting part of Tom's character had completely gotten the better of the prophet and caller to repentance. He was following the combatants with his staff held up in the air like a truncheon, when Faittout, having recovered from the stunning effects of his blow, and in part from the awe his so sudden appearance created in him, put himself upon his track with his drawn sword. Tom, however, was too old a soldier to be taken by surprise: absorbed as he was by watching master Walter's prowess and good fence, he yet kept the corner of an eye for the French-

man, and as soon as Faittout came within reach he lowered his oaken staff, knocked the sword out of the varlet's hand, by hitting him a fearful rap across the knuckles, and then knocked the senses fairly out of his head by another and a harder stroke across the pate. Meanwhile Sir Ralph had kept receding and retreating until he found himself at the edge of a precipice overhanging a sand and gravel pit. As he could retreat no farther, the cavalier, whose breath and strength were all but gone, made one desperate effort to recover ground in front; but in the act he fell bodily upon the point of Walter's sword, and then, reeling backward from the weapon, fell over the precipice into the deep pit, with one short groan.

"He is gone to his account!" said Tom of the Woods. "But now, master Walter, ye must get ye to some place of safety, for the fairness of this duello on your part will not save you from trouble if you should be caught, and that French varlet, who will soon come to his senses again, may make false report, and the word of Tom of the Woods will not be taken in these unfair times."

Walter now, for the first time, thought of his horse, and looked across Plumstead Common for him. Upon Faittout giving up the reins, in order to cover his master, Sir John Roundtree's bay mare, after a shake or two of the head, had cantered off for her stable at Erith, and Walter's good black horse had scampered after her, and even the sluggish little pony had shown its heels in the air and had gone off in the same direction.

"I must walk back to Charlton and see my poor old father," said Walter.

"Not so," said Tom; "I will find the means of

breaking this business to Captain Wynton, and . . . . . also to the gentle mistress Marion at Erith, lest she should think worse hath happened than the death of that foul scoffer. But you must away, Master Walter—away instantly to some safe hiding-place!"

"But whither shall I go?" said Walter.

"If you could live in the woods like a hermit," said Tom, "I would say come with me into the Weald; if you could dwell in caves and holes in the earth, as I have done when the unrighteous were seeking to ensnare me, I would say follow me to the chalk caverns by Crayford, where there be chambers, and passages, and labyrinths that defy search; but as you have not been so rudely nurtured as I, and as these lone places would be all too drear without the visitations of prophecy, I say, master Walter, get ye gone to the great city, and seek shelter for a season in the most peopled part of it, where you are most likely to escape detection."

"I have no friends in those parts," said Walter, musing. "Samuel Pepys, who abides by the Navy-office, and whom I have now and then seen of late years at Deptford and at Erith, was once the friend or most devoted servant of my father; but times are changed, and Pepys is changed with them."

"Aye," said Tom, "in the old Protector's time Samuel Pepys was the roundest of Roundheads. I would not trust Samuel Pepys; but I can put you in possession of a secret which is the dread of his life, and with which you can make him fear you. That morning the man Charles Stuart went to the block in front of Whitehall, Pepys proposed as

a fitting text for his funeral sermon—'Let the memory of the wicked perish.' He was little more than a boy when he said the words; but he knows that men have been severely handled for less things said or done in their boyhood, and next to getting money and fine clothes, the great aim of his life is to conceal that his father was a tailor of very republican principles, and that he, Samuel, was ever other than a hot cavalier and high churchman. Samuel Pepys, though a backslider and turncoat, is not so bad as most of them. There is kindness and even a sense of justice in his heart —all the seamen do say that he knows his present trade, and would put excellent order in the Navy if his superiors in office allowed him so to do—Pepys might be a very good man yet, if it were not for his self-seeking. But then Pepys is a downright coward, and, master Walter, you know a coward is never to be trusted."

Walter, still musing, said,—"I have heard all this of Samuel Pepys, yet have I never been able to help liking the man the few times that I have been in his company; and, if I cannot trust him, I know nobody to whom I can apply for a hiding-place."

"But I do know," said Tom of the Woods. "Not many stone-casts from Samuel Pepys's abode there dwells my fast friend Hiram Bingley, my comrade in the arms of the flesh and my brother in the Lord. Hiram has a snug house in Gravel Lane, by Ratcliffe Highway: many are the children of sorrow and persecution he has sheltered ere now, and assuredly he will do his best for the son of so true a man as Captain Wynton, and for the friend and liberator of poor Tom of the Woods. His

vicinage too is full of bold sailors who would all fight for a Wynton. But it will not need, for Hiram can protect you of himself."

"But how shall I find this Hiram Bingley, or how make him put trust in me? for I know him not, nor does he know me."

"You will proceed in this wise, master Walter. At the lower end of Gravel Lane, near the water, there is a house of public entertainment for the godlier sort of seamen; 't is called the 'Anchor of Salvation,' and is kept by Hezekiah Hope, a godly woman, and stedfast in the faith if there ever was one. To her you will say—'Tom of the Woods salutes thee, in the name of thy father and his old friend Ephraim Dwight, and by the number and token *Thirty-five*, and bids thee let me have speech of the true man Hiram Bingley:'—and when Hiram comes, which he will presently do (he hath a cut very like my own across his right brow), you will say to him—'I have befriended Tom of the Woods when he hath been in trouble, and now that I am in trouble, Tom hath sent me hither to be sheltered and succoured by thee: the number and token is *eleven*, being that of the apostles, to the exclusion of the traitor Judas Iscariot.' And having once said these words, master Walter, you will be safe. You may reach Wapping Stairs long before the news of what has been done upon Plumstead Common reaches Whitehall. But get down to Woolwich, and take boat immediately. Others may tremble, but the son of Captain Wynton hath nothing to fear from the sailors on the river."

"And whither wilt thou betake thyself, poor Tom?" asked Walter.

"Oh, I am safe in any part of this well-wooded

country of Kent, and I have had visions that I shall be wanted hereabouts, or, mayhap, on the other side of Gad's Hill."

"But how shall I find thee again, or hear of thee?"

To this the Prophet of the Woods replied by giving Walter some more names, pass-words, and numbers, which the young man wrote on his tablets, together with those which he was to make use of in Ratcliffe Highway.

By this time Faittout had come to, at least so far as to be able to sit up among the furze into which he had fallen; but his face was almost as yellow as the flowers of the broom, and he was looking about him with wild, half-dreamy eyes. The prophet's oaken staff had driven out of the poor fellow's head all the little English that had ever been in it, and he could only say in French—"Where is my master—where are the horses—where is my unlucky master?" Walter made him rise, and leading him to the edge of the pit into which Sir Ralph had fallen, he pointed downward with his finger and said—"There!" without looking into the chasm. Tom then took master Walter by the arm, and led him with hasty steps to the wood from which he had emerged at the most critical moment of the fight. The wood at that time reached nearly to the bank of the river. As they went through it, Tom comforted Walter by repeating his assurances that he would communicate both with Captain Wynton and with Marion Hemingford. On the lower skirt of the wood, by the marshes, they parted, the prophet with the staff in his hand plunging back into the wilderness, and the young sailor striding with agitated steps

down to the river-side; for his blood had now cooled, and he could not think without horror of having taken the life of a fellow-being in a private quarrel. As he was getting into a boat, which was not procured without difficulty, a number of mutinous seamen recognised him, and shouted—"Ah, master Walter, things would not have come to this pass with us if Captain Wynton had been left to command our ship, with you for his lieutenant! Master Walter, we be starving! Remember this when you hear blame and shame thrown upon us!"

Walter threw the poor fellows a little money, and then, taking the boat's rudder in his hand, he bade the watermen pull away as hard as they could for Wapping Old Stairs.

Before sunset Walter was securely lodged with Hiram Bingley.

CHAPTER VII.

WAPPING.

Upon the river, and all through Wapping and the populous neighbourhood of Ratcliffe Highway, Walter had seen nothing but distressing sights. The king's ships seemed to be either deserted by their crews or in the hands of mutineers: the flags of several of them were hoisted half-mast high, as if in mourning, and on their black broadsides were chalked the words, "Money! Money! No more tickets! Bread for our wives and children!" The trading vessels lay huddled together in idle and disorderly tiers, with their top-masts struck and with great birch-brooms hoisted as if to intimate that they were all for sale; and at times a roar of angry voices came from these tiers of merchantmen, saying "Here is a pretty sight! The traders of England cannot go to sea because of the Dutch! Go tell this at Whitehall! The flag of England has become a dirty rag! The mariners of England be all starving!" On shore the same cries, or worse, were heard; and the haggard looks and dirty ragged clothes of thousands of men, women, and children in the streets seemed to confirm the truth of the outcries. These were things to drive a true Englishman, and a born sailor like Walter Wynton, to distraction. But what agitated him still more was the evidence, now almost every-

where given, that the seamen had become indifferent to the honour of their country—dead to the national pride, without which there can be no nation. In nearly every open space he saw groups of tattered sailors, listening with sullen, but assenting countenances, to some demagogue and fanatic, who was openly preaching that England was a doomed and ruined country; that the curse of the Almighty was upon it; that the heaviest of judgments was approaching; and that the mariners had better go and join the Dutch, who were a Protestant people, and who paid their men, than go out and fight against them for a court and government that were bringing in Popery, and that paid nobody. Walter also found that his host Hiram Bingley was a fanatic of the most determined kind, one immeasurably more in extremes than Tom of the Woods; and he was not long in discovering that Hiram's house—a puzzle of a place, which seemed all made up of crooked passages, double doors, and cellars with many mysterious outlets—was a downright conventicle and conciliabulum, wherein were discussed the wildest doctrines of the Fifth Monarchy men, and wherein were hatching plots of the most desperate description. He saw that to attempt to reason with these high-priests of anarchy would be worse than useless; but he could not stay among them; he would rather be apprehended and hanged for murder; and on the second morning after his arrival, while Hiram was asleep, and in a dream wrestling with the Lord for a blessing, he left a piece of money on a table, threw an old boat-cloak over his dress, put on a sailor's cap, and stole out of the house in Gravel Lane. He knew not whither to go, but he was scarcely at the

top of the lane when he was carried away by a great crowd that was rushing to the middle of Ratcliffe Highway, shouting and screaming "Hey! hey for Joel Wyke! Joel is afoot at the Cross to tell us what to do. Joel says the hour is come!"

Walter presently found himself within sight and ear-shot of that sea-lawyer, whose sour visage had so often disturbed the dreams of the Clerk of the Acts of the Navy. Joel was mounted on the top of a great tub or butt, with a Bible in one hand and a cutlass in the other; and the doctrine he was expounding, being stripped of its cant and blasphemy and frantic rhetoric, came simply to this—that the starving and God-fearing sailors ought that morning to go and meet the Dutch, and give them welcome and assistance. The Dutch fleet he assured them was cruising between Harwich and the North Foreland, with many righteous Englishmen on board; and as for the means of conveyance down the river, he told his auditors that there was a large armed lugger lying off Limehouse Stairs which had been for many days in the hands of his friends; that there were three fly-boats or tenders which might be seized; and that they could also take such merchant-vessels as they thought best; and that there was not anywhere between Wapping and the Nore a single king's ship that was in a state to oppose their departure.

A tall, thin, very hungry-looking sailor cried—"Then let us sheer off without any more parlaver! If we stay the length of another day's log I shall not have strength enough left in me to get up the Dutchman's side. Let us trip anchor and away at once, without playing 'Loth to depart.'"

"Aye," cried another man's voice in the crowd,

"Let us be gone with this turn of tide. The Dutch have dollars for us, as well as meat and drink, and they are only wearing off and on, waiting for us to show them how to do the trick at Sheerness and Chatham—and then, my boys, up for London again with de Ruyter."

Here some hems, and coughs, and murmurs were heard; but it was clearly an overwhelming majority that shouted "Let us weigh and begone, and sing no 'Loth to depart.' It is hard to be sorry when we are running from starvation."

Walter, who could not imagine that the government or anybody connected with it could be aware of this desperation, or believe that any extremity would drive an English seaman to fight under an enemy's flag, now resolved to seek out Mr. Pepys, and, at whatsoever hazard to himself, to reveal all that he had just heard in the highway—which he might very well do without any breach of confidence to Hiram Bingley and his friends in Gravel Lane, who, madmen as they were, had behaved to him with much kindness, and had pledged their lives for the defence of his. But master Walter had got so wedged in the crowd that he could scarcely move; and in trying to extricate himself the old boat-cloak was torn from his shoulders, his slouching cap was knocked off, and he stood revealed in the garb of a gentleman. That instant a hand as hard as a marlin-spike was at his throat, and the cry was set up of "Spy! a spy among us! Let us hang him before we go!"

"I'll be bilboed if you do," cried Will Gaff. "This young gentleman is master Walter Wynton, the son of my old commander, Captain Wynton, and if you don't know him, Jack, there is

many an honest man here that does, or may I never taste grog again!"

A score or more sailors that were nearest instantly declared that it was master Walter Wynton, and none but he, and that there was nowhere a better friend to the poor sailor. And in the heat and fulness of their heart they all swore that he could only be there for a good purpose, and that no man should touch a hair of his head. Jack let go his grip as soon as the name of Wynton was first pronounced. Joel, on his tub, waved his hand and raised his voice to restore quiet—for the long-winded rascal had not half finished his proposed speech—and, after censuring the men who had used such ungodly oaths, he proposed that master Walter should stand forth and explain why he was there in disguise.

"That will he do presently, like the true gentleman that he is," cried Will Gaff. "Make way, and lend your ear to master Walter, whose father so often belaboured Dutch, French, and Spaniards. So now Joel Wyke just break off your yarn and splice it again anon, and step down from your forecastle, and let the son of our old fighting captain give us a word of discourse."

Walter, who was now close to the foot of Joel's rostrum, was considerably perplexed, for he must begin with confessing his duel, and he had never in his life tried to address a mob or any other assemblage either from a tub-head or from any other spouting-place; but Will Gaff whispered in his ear, "Get up, master Walter, and stand to your quarters for old England! Tell them it is better to starve than to go fight against their own flag, and betray all our weakness to the enemy."

Thus urged by Gaff, and called upon by many others, Walter mounted the rostrum, from which Joel Wyke had very sulkily descended.

"Shipmates!" said Walter, "the reason of my being here slightly disguised is very soon told. I have killed in single combat an insolent cavalier, one of the King's courtiers....."

"If you had killed the King as well, and the Duke after him, it would have been better!" cried several voices at once.

"If you have slain a courtier, and are at feud with the court, and are in danger of its vengeance, then will you be a friend to the seamen's cause, and away with us to the Dutch, and give a helping hand in the overthrowing of this detestable and popishly-inclined government," said Joel Wyke. "Young man, I think you have said enough, and may now step down and let me finish that which I was saying."

"Not yet, not just yet," shouted Will Gaff: "go on, master Walter."

And Walter went on. "You mistake me," said he, "if you think that any extremity would drive me to bear arms against my country. I do not shut my eyes to the lamentable errors and sins of the present government, which hath brought such shame upon England. I have taken into my own hands the right of punishing one who heaped insult upon the hoary head of my father, and did me other wrongs, and for this act—as I can hardly hope for an impartial trial—I may, if seized anywhere in England, be brought to an opprobrious death; yet, rather than join you in going to the Dutch, I would be hanged three times over, if I had three lives to throw away. I learned my sea-

politics in the school of the unselfish and heroical Blake, who struck down the insolent broom from Van Tromp's mast-head, and did battle for various, and quickly varying, English governments. It was Blake's saying, that it was not the business of sailors to mind state affairs, but to keep foreigners from fooling us....."

"Aye," said an old sailor, "and at the command of the statesmen that now are, the bones and scarcely mouldering flesh of the great Blake were dug out of their grave and cast out of Westminster Abbey, as if they had been the remains of a traitor or of some unclean animal. I—I who fought under Blake in twenty victorious fights—saw the mortal part of my great commander thus treated, and the sight filled my mouth with curses, and my heart with bitterness, and with hatred of this restored government."

This short speech of the old sailor excited the mob so much that there was a hooting and yelling which lasted for some minutes. When the noise subsided, Walter said, "I too saw that unseemly sight, and loathed it as much as any man that saw it. But Blake had a soul to despise such paltry malignity. They might cast out the mortal fragments of the man upon the dung-heap, but they can never destroy his fame, or the memory and love of him in the heart of every true English sailor. If Blake could speak from the grave, he would still tell ye to stand by your country's flag, however the country may be misgoverned; he would tell you to look to English hearts and English hands for the redress of grievances and the reformation of the state, but to die rather than help to destroy your own navy and bring a foreign

foe—the Dutch, whom he, with your good aid, so often beat—into the heart of our country."

The young orator was evidently making some impression even upon the worst part of that turbulent audience; but Joel Wyke twanged loudly through his nose, "But there is no longer any country left! This is not our Israel, but a land of prelates and Philistines. We may no longer worship the Lord after our own hearts. It offers to us, the chosen and the godly, nothing but scourges and pillories, the prison and the gallows! It is no longer our country, and we have no birthright in it."

The fanatics said, "Yea! and Amen!" But these men, who had been preached out of their senses, were far fewer in number than those whom sheer hunger had driven out of their patriotism; and the orator who closed the debate was that tall, lank, and very hungry-looking seaman, who now said, "The young gentleman who hath spoken so prettily is not starving, and we are. Therefore let us cast loose and be off to get food while we can, and let us carry this master Walter with us, will he nill he, for we may want a knowing officer a-board; and if he stay here the chances are, upon his own showing, that he will be taken and hanged for killing one of those scoundrels who have turned our bountiful old mother into a cruel step-mother, and have made England no country for us."

Walter sprung to the spot where Will Gaff was standing, laid his hand to the hilt of his sword, and shouted, "Stand by me, all ye that have English hearts, and this great shame shall not fall upon our flag!"

But alas! though Will Gaff had a majority in

the riot at the Navy-office, he was wofully in the minority now; for three months of want and misery to the men, and of broken promises and criminal neglect in the government, had wrought the most pernicious effects. There seemed not one man in twenty to answer Will Gaff's calls of "Rescue master Walter; let us not be traitors to England!"

Joel Wyke and other desperadoes seized both Walter and Will Gaff, and tied their arms behind them; a voice cried, "Speaker Joel, no more speeches; we shall lose the tide:" and the dense mob began to roll along the highway like water through an open floodgate, carrying with it whatever lies in its course. As soon as the rush began, some fellows in the rear, either believing or inventing the case, shouted, "Get on there ahead —the King's cutthroats are coming down upon us from the Tower; we hear horses galloping and swords rattling!" At this cry the torrent rushed on more rapidly and wildly than before; those who were unwilling to go with the mutineers, or unable through weakness to keep pace with them, were thrown down and trampled under foot, and none stopped to help them. They went through narrow intricate lanes down to the water-side and to Limehouse Stairs. But before they got to the appointed place of embarkation their numbers were very materially diminished: some of the men could not keep up their hearts to the horrible intent: some were moved from their purpose by the prayers and tears of their mothers and wives, who clung to them or pulled them in at their open doors as they passed by their habitations; and others

were deterred by their dread of the gallows, and slipped away as they came to the cross-lanes and alleys. But Walter Wynton and Will Gaff being in the head of the torrent, bound and surrounded by the most desperate men, and narrowly watched by Joel Wyke himself, who kept waving his cutlass and crying, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" could nowhere see the slightest chance of escaping; and when they reached the stairs, and Walter would have made a last effort to bring the men back to a sense of their duty to their country, Joel and that other lean sailor who had distinguished himself at the Cross rudely and brutally gagged him with a neckerchief.

The armed lugger, with her guns run out, and with a black flag instead of a blue-peter flying at her top, lay right off the stairs, and seemed mistress of all that part of the river: boats were in readiness to carry off the mutineers, and while they were embarking in large parties, two sloops which had been serving as fly-boats or tenders to the King's fleet, crossed the river and lay to. Walter and Will Gaff were carried off to the lugger in the first boat; and when the rapid embarkation was finished, from two hundred to three hundred sailors were shipped in the lugger or in the two fly-boats. More than a hundred had stolen away from the wharf at the last moment; and one party had put back when they were almost alongside the lugger. But though there were several king's ships at hand, not the slightest opposition was offered; and as the mutineers got under sail, such seamen as were left on board the merchant-ships gave them three cheers. To such a temper had a thoughtless

and base government brought the brave mariners of England! It had taken seven years to do it, but the woful consummation had come at last.

Favoured by wind as well as by tide, the mutinous flotilla ran rapidly down the river, with the black flag at the mizen, and the national standard dragging over their poops as a thing dishonoured and disowned. Still no opposition was offered to their progress. Between Greenwich and Deptford there lay a good many king's ships, and some of the highest rate then known; but for the most part they had neither powder nor shot on board; and some were deserted by their crews, and the captains and officers of others were away, amusing themselves at the courtly end of London. One sturdy old captain got a great gun loaded and pointed at the armed lugger; but his men gathered round the breech of the gun, and swore that it should not be fired at their countrymen and brothers, who were only seeking how to escape from starvation.

As the lugger shot into Erith reach and allowed Walter's eye to rest for a few minutes upon the ivyed church, and the village, and the mansion of Sir John Roundtree standing on the green hill behind, among the old patriarchal trees, he was so overcome by his feelings, that he would have thrown himself over the mutinous ship's side, and, pinioned and gagged as he was, have tried to swim ashore, if he had not been prevented by some of the sailors. In the Upper Hope there were more frigates and ships of the line; and again in the Lower Hope there were king's ships; but their condition was not better than that which has been described already; and onward the mutineers went, without hindrance or challenge. At the Nore and

the mouth of the Medway there were no guard-ships—they had been ordered up the Medway to look for a shameful protection from land-forts and certain other contemptible defences. As the lugger stood into the mouth of that river, to enable Joel Wyke and his friends to reconnoitre, a few shot were fired at her from the fort at Sheerness, but the balls, which had been made for guns of a different calibre, fell wide of their mark, and only made some splashes in the water; and having seen all that they wanted to see, the mutineers stood off with insulting cheers.

From the mouth of the Medway the flotilla made for the Essex coast and the mouth of the Orwell, expecting to find a part of the Dutch fleet off Harwich, or off Landguard fort. In the latter part of their course not a ship of any flag was to be seen; the whole commerce of England was palsied, and even the few fishing-boats that were afloat were hugging the coast, in evident fear of quitting it. As they got into that rough water not inaptly named "the Devil's Bowling-green," they heard at long intervals a gun fired at sea, but the sound came from a distant quarter, and not a sail was to be seen.

"Those heavy-breeched Dutchmen are always behind time," said some of the mutineers.

"Mayhap," said Joel Wyke, "they have misapprehended signals, and a part of them may have gone round the North Foreland to southward, to make sure that we have no ships in the Downs. Put a stopper upon your blasphemy, and we will send a fly-boat for to see, and then have prayers on board and crave the Lord's blessing on what we are about."

Some of the tars said they would rather have a dram of the bottle; others, that they would rather not have God's name mentioned in the business—for, albeit they had done what they had done and were a-doing, they were rather afraid that, next to hunger, it was the devil that had most to do in it; and others said that they had better make at once for the Dogger Bank, as they must starve or go a plundering on shore if the Mynheers delayed coming, there being absolutely nothing on board, except water and a few mouldy biscuits. Joel Wyke, however, succeeded in sending away one of the fly-boats to look round the North Foreland. Walter and Will Gaff were now unbound; but they were forced down into the cabin and there confined, two desperadoes, with cutlasses in their hands, mounting guard at the cabin-door. Joel was still afraid that if the young officer were allowed to speak with the men, he might make them relent, and cause a new mutiny among his mutineers.

The sun was now setting behind the Essex hills, and the breeze began to freshen from the south-east, making a still heavier swell in that unpleasant Bowling-green. The night came on rather dark and hazy, clouds covered the moon, and a bank of sea-fog concealed the coast of Essex and Suffolk. About the midnight watch some more firing was heard. It was like the firing of signal-guns; but, although the sound seemed to proceed from a nearer quarter, it was still far out at sea. There was great anxiety and commotion on board the lugger, which either lay to, or kept standing off and on. In one of their tacks the mutineers saw a red light glimmering through the mist, and at the sight some score of them set up a

wretched cry, that it was a king's ship coming down upon them, and that to save their lives they ought to run their lugger ashore and then abandon her. The light came from a little fishing-boat: but an evil conscience had taken the heart out of these naturally brave fellows. That short summer's night, however, soon wore away, and as the disc of the sun began to appear above the broad waters, a morning-gun was heard booming at no great distance; and, shortly after, tall masts and sails were seen slowly rising to the north-east, behind Orfordness; and by the time the sun was fairly risen, more than twenty sail were seen, stretching in a long loose line from north to south. The sun shone out majestically; the wind had changed; the fresh morning breeze swept away the last remnant of the sea-fog: it was a glorious June day; and land and sea, the one with its towns and villages, and the other with the great ships upon it, were cheerful and beautiful to the eye.

As Walter looked out at the narrow cabin-window he forgot for a moment that he was in the hands of mutineers and traitors, and that those proud and fair ships that were standing on in the most beautiful and seamanlike order for the broad and silvery estuary of the Thames, were carrying dishonour and destruction for his country: but he was soon made acutely sensible to all this woe; for the lugger stood away to meet the nearest of the Dutch ships of war, and as she got under her lee the mutineers gave three cheers, and were answered with three cheers by the Dutchmen. Boats were lowered, and Joel Wyke told Walter and Will Gaff that they must go in the first boat to the Dutch ship. It was vain to remonstrate, for the

lugger was right under the guns of the Dutchman. As Gaff went over the side he shook his fist at Joel Wyke and said—"This is dirty work, Joel! Thou hast brought us to a pretty pass, thou foul sea-lawyer! But look to thyself, for I have a notion that thou wilt get thy brains knocked out before this is over!" Joel grinned a malicious grin to express his triumph over his rival orator Will; and then putting on his demurest and most sanctified face, he twanged through his nose—"It is the Lord's will—all this is the will of the Lord, and the Lord will protect his own."

The Dutch captain and most of his officers behaved with delicacy and kindness to Walter Wynton, as soon as they learned his story, which he told in brief indignant language.

"I cannot put you on shore," said the captain, "and I must not let you prevent these starvelings and desperadoes of your countrymen from assisting us in the enterprise we have in hand, and which we would hardly have undertaken if King Charles had not driven these sailors desperate and so sent them to help us; but as an officer and gentleman I will call upon you for no service whatsoever against your country, nor request more from you than that you will be silent—strictly silent and neutral, for I have so many Englishers on board that . . . ."

Here the Dutch captain stopped short and reddened a little. When he continued, he said that Walter was free to use his cabin and the quarter-deck, and that he should have his sword, which he perceived the mutineers had taken from him; and he concluded the conversation by saying—"Last year your Sir Robert Holmes surprised and burned with

his fire-ships one hundred and seventy of our helpless merchant vessels under Ulie and Schevling, and this year, 'd' ye' see, we mean to pay you back by burning a few of your men-of-war at Chatham and Deptford: so now, young gentleman, take a glass of Schiedam and down with me to breakfast."

As he had tasted nothing for the last four-and-twenty hours, Walter hastily swallowed a few mouthfuls. The Dutch captain, in his eagerness to do his own duty and gain information for the guidance of his admiral, forgot his delicacy so far as to put some questions about the defences on the river Thames, and the state of preparation of the King's ships that were lying up that river; but Walter soon stopped these queries by reminding the Dutchman that he had promised to be strictly silent and neutral so long as he remained a prisoner on board his ship.

In the meanwhile Joel Wyke had transferred nearly all his men from the lugger and the fly-boat to the Dutch ship, and had received a sum of money in hard dollars to distribute among them. The hungry mutineers had, moreover, received abundant rations, and whole kegs of Dutch gin. Although many of them had kept out of sight between-decks, it was easy for Walter, on returning to the quarter-deck, to discover that there were many more Englishmen on board than Joel had brought. Some of these men were sitting between the guns, discussing doctrinal points, interpreting prophecies, and promising to each other the speedy coming of the reign of the Saints. These were Fifth-Monarchy men, whose sheer fanaticism had made them traitors. There were Anabaptists, who regarded John of Munster as a saint and martyr;

there were a few Adamites, who thought that righteousness consisted in going stark naked, without so much as a fig-leaf, as Adam did before the fall; there were Salmonites, or the followers of one Salmon, a mad preacher of Coventry, who had held that swearing and cursing, and all manner of carnal sin and dissoluteness, were not only allowable but commendable, forasmuch as it was natural for men to gratify their natural appetites, and no man could curse and swear unless God allowed it; there were Wykites, or the disciple of one Wyke (a first cousin to our acquaintance Joel), who had reduced all the doctrines and rites of religion into three hugs and three kisses, with which he pretended that the Heavenly spirit might be breathed into any man or any woman. Apart from these were other groups of old sea-men, with faces equally sour and austere, who were talking of kirks, presbyters, and elders, covenants and John Knox. These were Presbyterians, and mostly Scotsmen, who abhorred their brother deserters the Fifth-Monarchy men, and their doctrines, as much as they did the Episcopalian Church, from whose tyranny they all declared themselves to have fled. There were men of other sects of the most fantastic and yet fanatic character, who all pretended that they were fighting for religious liberty, although there was not one of them but would have wielded the sword of persecution if it had been strong enough—not one but would fain have attempted to impose its rule of faith, doctrine, and worship upon all the rest, and upon the whole of the three nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland :—

" Sure I have the truth," says Numph;
" Nay, I have the truth," says Clem;
" Nay, I have the truth," says reverend Ruth;
" Nay, I have the truth," says Nem.

There were also men who had been driven to their present madness by their Republican enthusiasm, or by an enthusiasm for some other untried mode of government; but, after all, the far greater number of these English deserters, or traitors, were simple men, who troubled their heads very little either about rules of faith or forms of government, and whose logic lay all in their stomachs.

As the fleet proceeded under easy sail, the fly-boat, which Joel had sent round the North Foreland, came back with certain intelligence that there were no English men-of-war there, and with the report that, with the exception of a few French men-of-war (the allies of the Dutch), there was no ship in the Channel. Some of the English sailors were now removed from the ship in which Walter Wynton had the misery to be, to other vessels in the Dutch fleet, which had kept concentrating, and so increasing in number that Walter could now count, within a narrow compass, more than forty sail of all rates. Never did sailor returning home from a long voyage wish so passionately for a fair wind as Walter now wished for a foul one. He prayed for a storm—for a tempest to scatter this proud armament, and so save the flag of England from this disgrace; but the summer wind blew softly and favourably for the Dutch, whose mighty fleet still kept increasing. Admiral de Ruyter had brought the whole of his fleet out of the Wierings, and the rest of the ships

from the Texel had joined, or were joining him, under the command of Van Ghent, who had been running all along our eastern coast, from the mouth of the Orwell to the Frith of Forth, and, to distract attention, cannonading Burnt-island, and menacing our shipping in Leith harbour: so that it was with eighty sail of men-of-war, and many fire-ships, that the Dutch bore up for the Nore, to the great consternation of the people of Kent, who were seen flying from all the villages and houses near the sea, and running up into the country with their moveable property.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MEDWAY.

It was on the morning of the tenth of June that de Ruyter and Van Ghent came up to the Nore. While some of their ships were ordered to prepare for the attack of the contemptible fortifications of Sheerness, upon which the government relied for the security of the river Medway and the ships and the dockyards at Chatham, others were sent up the Thames. The latter division, firing off great guns, which were distinctly heard in the city of London, proceeded almost as far as Gravesend; and might have gone up much higher if they had been but a little bolder, there being scarcely anything to offer them a valid resistance. In Tilbury fort there were many guns, but scarcely any powder; and beyond, some bulwarks which had been hastily thrown up on the other side of the river, and which could not have withstood the fire of a single ship for half an hour. There was powder, but scarcely any guns; and the force here stationed consisted wholly of "a great many idle lords and gentlemen with their pistols and fooleries." But these Dutchmen, after making a terrible hubbub, and scaring away the people from Gravesend and Erith, and from all the towns and villages on either bank of the river, fell down from the Lower Hope and Shellhaven, and joined their comrades at

Sheerness. Those contemptible works were attacked in the evening, and were laid even with the ground and carried in about two hours. There were brave men and some excellent English officers who had fought behind those miserable works; but they were few in number and were totally unprovided with the means of defending that important and vital position. As they retreated across the isle of Sheppey, the Dutch lowered their boats and landed a great number of men, land-troops as well as sailors, and took possession of Sheerness, as if with the intention of fortifying it and keeping it.

De Ruyter was a brave and most sturdy officer; he had shown an indomitable courage in a score of great battles, and he had displayed wonderful fortitude in adverse circumstances; but he had some of the slowness and excess of circumspection which it has been the fashion to attribute to his countrymen. His present delays did not save England from disgrace, but they greatly diminished his power of doing mischief. After lying a whole day at the Nore before commencing his attack on Sheerness, he remained another day and two nights at that place, apparently doing nothing at all beyond sending one Doleman, a proscribed English Republican, with a party of English mutineers, across the isle of Sheppey, to make a fruitless attempt to excite the men of Kent to insurrection against King Charles. And although everything remained to the last in a frightful state of disorder (not one man in a hundred in the service of the English government doing his duty, or knowing how to do it), some part of the time which the Dutch allowed them was advantageously employed by the English.

On Tuesday the 11th of June, General Monk—now Duke of Albemarle and commander-in-chief of the land forces, who had been sent by the king to perform duties and to make defences which ought to have been intrusted not to a land but to a sea commander, or rather which ought not to have been needed at all—arrived at Chatham, and found that of twelve hundred men employed in the dock-yard, four hundred had fled, and that those who remained were so distracted with fear or with famine, or so exasperated by want of pay, that no good service could be expected from them. There was scarcely a charge of gunpowder to be found, so that Monk was obliged to send to Gravesend for ammunition, which did not arrive until two o'clock the next day. If the Dutch had gone upwards at once, not a shot could have been fired against them; but they did nothing during the 11th, but take soundings among some sunken ships which had been scuttled near the mouth of the Medway in the absurd intention of blocking up the broad and deep bed of the river. But on the following morning—the memorable morning of the 12th of June—a very fresh wind from the north-east blew over Sheerness and the Dutch fleet, and a strong spring-tide set the same way as the wind, raising and pouring the waters upward from the broad estuary in a mighty current. And now de Ruyter roused himself from his inactivity, and gave orders to his second in command, Admiral Van Ghent, to ascend the river towards Chatham with fire-ships, and fighting ships of various rates. Previously to the appearance of de Ruyter on our coasts, his grace of Albemarle had sunk a few vessels about Muscle Bank, at the narrowest part of

the river, had constructed a boom, and drawn a big iron chain across the river from bank to bank, and within the boom and chain he had stationed three king's ships; and having done these notable things, he had written to court that all was safe on the Medway, and that the Dutch would never be able to break through his formidable defences. But now Van Ghent gave his grace the lie direct; for, favoured by the heady current and strong wind, the prows of his ships broke through the boom and iron chain as though they had been cobwebs, and fell with an overwhelming force upon the ill-manned and ill-managed ships which had been brought down the river to eke out this wretched line of defence. The three ships, the 'Unity,' the 'Matthias,' and the 'Charles the Fifth,' which had been taken from the Dutch in the course of the preceding year — the Annus Mirabilis of Dryden's flattering poem—were presently recaptured and burned under the eyes of the Duke of Albemarle, and of many thousands of Englishmen who had gathered near the banks of the Medway; but who had no batteries, no mounted guns, no barges, no boats, no means whatever of taking part in the action, or of preventing the disgrace they witnessed. Monk was not devoid of courage, and there was bravery enough, and to spare, among those who surrounded him. But what could it boot without nantical skill, and without proper arms and materials wherewith to fight? My lord general knew not what orders to give, and those which he gave were not obeyed. As Van Ghent was first approaching the chain, Monk pointed to his king's ships, and said with a flourish that it was the duty of brave and loyal men to defend those

vessels, and that such as were brave and loyal would follow him and die on board rather than see the ships taken and destroyed. And immediately after this speech he and a good number of volunteers put off in such skiffs as could be procured, and got on board the largest of the three ships with nothing but swords or pikes in their hands. But when they were in the ship they found that they could *do nothing* with her, and that they had better get to shore again as fast as possible. And it was well that they did so, for one of Van Ghent's fire-ships came up, and embraced with a death-hug that royal ship; and she and her two consorts, together with sundry merchant vessels laden and ready for sea, were presently in a blaze. Having done this exploit, and laughed at the iron chain, the Dutchmen addressed themselves to that right noble ship the 'Royal Charles,' which had been left down the river in an exposed situation, and in the most helpless condition, although, many days, nay, weeks, before, strict orders had been given by the Duke of York to take her up to Chatham.

As Van Ghent wore round the point opposite the Stray, with six men-of-war and five fire-ships, he opened a cannonade rather upon the useless people on shore than at the undefended ship; and the English renegadoes and fanatics that were serving with him gave three tremendous cheers, and uttered the most insulting taunts. These men, who were otherwise well informed of the state of affairs on shore, and up the river, could, whenever the smoke cleared away, easily distinguish my lord general, with his baton of command in hand, riding hither and thither with his brilliant but bewildered

and utterly useless staff; and against him, as the chief agent in the unconditional restoration of Charles II., they directed most of their invectives.

Speaker Joel made a long running commentary. As his men let off the Dutch guns and threw the balls on shore, he shouted—"Master Monk! here be beads for thee to tell! Take that, thou traitor to God and man, and the true servants of God! Take that, false Monk! and get thee home to the drab thy wife, whom slaves do call my lady and duchess, and tell her, in her own language, that, after all thy shiftings and turnings, thou hast brought thy hogs to a pretty market! Get thee hence, thou betrayer of thy country! And ye blustering, vapouring, blaspheming cavaliers, get ye all hence with him, for what deed can ye perform here? Ye could bring Sir Harry Vane to the block, but here be blocks and tackle ye cannot handle! Ye could conquer that godly wine-cooper Venner, in London, and Oldroyd, that other servant of the saints, in Yorkshire,—ye could hang up Rathbone and Flint, and scores of godly but defenceless men, as stoutly as Oliver or the Rump could have done it! Ye could make false plots and acts of Parliament to meet them, and so destroy the disarmed; but your acts of Parliament will not quench these fires, or stop these cannon-balls! Since ye will not be gone, and since ye can in no wise defend your country, then stay and weep blood for the shame ye have brought upon her. Aye! foul Monk! stay there on the river bank, shaking thy gold-headed stick, and see the royal navy of England in flames, and hear the Dutch roaring with their guns within hearing of London! Thou hast neither a hand to help nor a heart to feel the misery and infamy thou hast brought upon a

betrayed and ruined people! But England will mourn for this in sackcloth and ashes, and thou and thy master will be rewarded for it. Tophet is hot!"

Others of the deserters, as they eyed their country's undefended and indefensible ships, shouted to one another—"There, a little higher up, lies old Blake's flag-ship,—there lies our own old ship the Naseby!—there's the Speaker;—there the tough old Fairfax,—there the lucky old Victory, that we fought ten good battles in;—but have at 'em all!—let 'em blaze in a heap, since they have changed their names, and turned us adrift to starve! So have at 'em, comrades! We be fighting for dollars now, and will get good change for our old tickets before this brush be over! The man at Whitehall shall know what it is to wrong the English sailors!"

Much of this talk or outcry was distinctly heard by the Englishmen on shore, the best of whom hung down their heads in shame and confusion. But Walter Wynton, who lost not a syllable of it—Walter Wynton, who was in the midst of these desperadoes and fanatics, (the Dutch ship in which he was a prisoner having come up from Sheerness with Van Ghent,) was transported almost into a frenzy. Thinking not of the pledge the Dutch captain had exacted from him, he reprehended Joel Wyke, and even seized that malignant by the throat, as he was leading the anti-national chorus, and exciting his countrymen into a forgetfulness of every feeling for their country. He then rushed below deck to avoid the maddening sight; but he could not stay there, and he rushed back to the quarter-deck as if compelled to gaze upon what his soul abhorred, or as if he could not credit what he

saw and heard, or as if he fancied that the spectacle of the negligence and helplessness of the English ships must presently be succeeded by some terrible and unexpected manœuvre, or some mighty display of forces and means, hitherto concealed, which should drive Van Ghent with loss and shame back to the Nore, or annihilate him where he was. But when Walter saw, on coming close alongside, that the 'Royal Charles,' one of the largest and finest ships in the world, was grounded, immoveable, helpless, and altogether deserted;—when he saw a Dutch boat with only nine men (and half of them English) put off and board and take her, without so much as a musket-shot being fired at the boarders; and when he saw one single man, enveloped in the smoke of the Dutch guns, go up and strike her flag and jack, and heard a trumpeter sound upon her quarter-deck, "Joan's placket is torn," the brave son of the fighting Captain Wynton could stand it no longer. He ran below, and remained there for a good many minutes with his blushing, burning face buried in his hands. Then, fresh shouts made him run back—to see the Dutch flag hoisted on the 'Charles.' At this moment of shame and desperation, as he dashed some big tears from his eyes, he caught sight of the honest, right-down English face of Will Gaff, who seemed to be scarcely less affected than he was himself. Gaff was standing on the bulwarks in the waist of the ship, holding on by the main shrouds. Walter made a rush to him and said, "Will, this is no sight for an Englishman to see! This is not to be borne!"

"That's what I have been thinking this last hour and more," said Will; "and may I perish if

I stand it any longer!" And, as the last word was on his lips, Will threw himself overboard, and was followed in the twinkling of an eye by master Walter. Both went over the ship's side before any of the Dutch seamen had a notion of their desperate intent; but Joel Wyke, who had an eye upon Walter, now came amid-ships crying, "Desertion! Flight of prisoners!" and taking his gun from a Dutch soldier, he fired it, not at Walter, but at the head of the man in the world he most hated—at the head of his rival in oratory or speech-making, poor Will Gaff, who had just come to the surface of the water after his plunge, and was striking away for shore like a good bold swimmer. The malicious bullet whistled close by the wet ear of Will, and made him say to himself, "An inch nearer, and I should have sung Peccavi!" He then cried out to Walter, who was close in his wake, "Dive! master Walter, dive!" And, to get at longer quarters, they both went under, like water-fowl, and so swam good twelve fathoms farther from the ship. The malignant Joel had seized a second gun and was taking a deliberate aim at the nearer reappearing head of Walter, when a Dutch officer struck him with the back of his sword over the elbow, and with sundry "for-damnings," told him that he was a savage, unnatural scoundrel, and that Admiral Van Ghent wanted no such foul services as that. No attempt was made to stop the progress of the two brave swimmers, or to recapture them by sending a boat after them. The stout old Dutch captain, while doing his duty to his own flag and country, could feel for the patriotism of other men, and for the peculiar and most

cruel situation in which Walter Wynton had been placed. He thought that a single young officer, who certainly would do him no good if he stayed, could do no harm if he escaped; and so sad and heart-touching had been his countenance and behaviour, and the few words he had uttered during his imprisonment on board, that he was glad he was gone, looking, with an old sailor superstition, upon his departure as the removal of an evil omen. Being thus unexpectedly left to themselves, such good swimmers as Walter and Will Gaff could have no great difficulty in making shore. But as the tide was running upward with great strength and velocity, they were borne away by it, and could not gain the bank of the river until they came to a small projecting shoal some distance above Stoke, and about midway beween that village and the little hamlet of Hoo. Here they landed, wet and weary enough. The spot, a long narrow strip of marshy land, seemed as solitary as the coast of an uninhabited island; but they had scarcely begun to shake the water from such of their garments as they yet retained (for part of their dress had been cast off in the river that they might swim the better), 'ere they were surrounded and seized by a score of Kentish boors, who, armed with scythes, bill-hooks, and other agricultural or ruder implements, sprang out from some bushes and tall growing reeds, roaring, "Down, Dutch, down! The men of Kent be upon ye! There be no English traitors here to help ye!" Walter and Will, who had scarcely recovered their breath, merely said that they were no Dutchmen, but Englishmen. "Then," said the excited and never very quick-sighted peasants, "ye be English trai-

tors that have come up with the Dutch ships, and that now come hither to look for false men to aid ye, as that devil Doleman is a-doing across the river at Gillingham. But the men of Gillingham be as sound at heart as their own cherries. Doleman and his traitorous crew, perchance, may fire the village and cut down the cherry-trees; but they will find not one traitor there save themselves. And as for you pair of runagates, we will hand ye over to safe prison."

"Or," said one of the rustic company, "as there be not prisons enough to hold so many traitors as have declared against king and country, in these last days, suppose we take them up to Hoo, and hang them ourselves off-hand on the tallest tree in our churchyard?"

"Marry!" quoth Will Gaff, who had now quite recovered his breath; "it were too hard to be hanged so soon after escaping drowning and shooting besides! Hold off! I tell ye we be true Englishmen—I tell ye, above all, that this young gentleman is a true gentleman and a worshipful, albeit he hath neither beaver nor coat, and his hose be but muddy. He and I were forcibly carried away by the rebellious seamen in Ratcliffe-highway, and were put on board one of those broad-sterned Dutchmen, from which we have just escaped by leaping overboard. So avast! I say. Or whatever you may do with me, who am but a poor tarpaulin, and used to rough it, take your hands off this person of honour, who is not accustomed to rough usage."

The bumpkins shook their heads, and said that Will's story was not a very probable one. Master Walter told it with a little more detail, and assured

them that he was not only a true Englishman, and one ready to die for his country, but also a true-born Kentish man like themselves. He named his father, Captain Wynton, and Sir John Roundtree; but to these stay-at-home churls Charlton and Erith were places too remote for them to know anything about those who dwelt at them. While this conversation lasted the Dutch guns kept roaring in the river, a Dutch fire-ship exploded with a terrific noise, and the smoke from the cannon, the fire-ship, and the burning English ships became so dense as to obscure the bright summer sun. This was enough to keep up the ill-humour and suspicion of the poor peasants; and, moreover, just as Walter's explanations and assurances were beginning to make a favourable impression, a Dutch barge, full of armed men, was seen crossing the river from Gillingham, and making what appeared to be signals to some persons on shore on this side of the river. In the next instant a swivel placed in the bow of the barge was fired, and the ball passed over their heads. Upon this the peasants beat a retreat from the water's edge, going off in the direction of Hoo, and carrying their two prisoners with them. They marched for some distance across a low flat swampy country—a part of Hoo marshes; but scarcely had they crossed the first low ridge of clay hills which rise above the bank of the Medway, a little below Hoo Church, when they saw a great force of men marching towards the river.

No uniforms or military dresses of any kind were discernable in this host; yet, distant as it was, Walter could perceive that it was formed, and was marching, in something very like good military order. The peasants halted on the inward slope of

the hills, gazing and marvelling much; but presently when they made out a banner with the large rude figure of a white horse upon it, they set up a joyous shout, and cried, "There's the old banner of Kent! Yon be true Kentish men!" As the host came nearer, Walter perceived that they were dragging some artillery with them—and were dragging it with the strength of their own arms across a rough muddy country where there was scarcely anything deserving the name of a road, the soil being deep and heavy, and it being an old proverb which said—

> He that rides into the Hundred of Hoo,
> Besides tippling sailors will find mud enew.

At the sight he joined the peasants in their loud and joyous shouting. Will Gaff, whose cheering was distinctly heard above all the other voices, said, after the third cheer, "Master Walter, if these honest men bring but ball and powder as well as guns, we may put some bitter salt upon the tails of the Dutch before they get out of this river."

"Perchance we may," said Walter; "but who have we there marching in the head of that host? . . . . . As I live it is none other than Tom of the Woods!"

At the hearing of Tom's name some of the peasants almost shuddered with awe, for although they had never seen him in the body, they had all heard of his prophesyings. Walter himself was for a moment rather uneasy, doubting whether Tom's persecutions and sufferings might not have wholly estranged his heart from his country, and whether his fanaticism and pride of prophecy might not have induced him to collect all the fanatics and

malcontents of Kent to aid in the fulfilment of his own predictions. Meanwhile the force kept advancing in good order and (the nature of the ground being considered) with admirable speed. As they drew near Will Gaff said—"I don't know his rating or his rig, because d'y'see, master Walter, I have never seen him afore; but I take that tall fellow in the black cloak and with that long beard at his figure-head to be the Kentish prophet men call Tom of the Woods; and a very terrible-looking prophet he is, and very like Death in the Revelations—only instead of having the white horse under him, he has got it pictured over his head!"

"That *is* my *friend* Tom," said Walter.

At these words the two peasants, who had been holding Walter by the arms, let go their hold, and hoped his honour would pardon them for what they might have done amiss. Then was heard from the advancing line the word "Halt!" pronounced with that deep and unearthly voice which Tom of the Woods and only he possessed: and when the line halted, the same deep voice cried to the peasants, "Who be ye, and why standing here?"

The poor bumpkins trembled outright, and knew not how to answer; but Will Gaff, who had better knowledge of challenges and practices of war, put his right hand to the side of his mouth and shouted right manfully, "Friends, for old England."

"Then move and fall into our rear," cried the prophet.

Walter Wynton now stepped forward to meet the head of the line, which was again in motion. Hatless, and coatless, and mud-stained, and still

dripping with the Medway water, as he was, Tom of the Woods did not recognise him until he came close up to him; but then Tom gave a cry of mixed wonderment and joy; and after greeting the young gentleman most cordially he turned to his followers and said, "Now have we a good sea-officer with us. This is master Walter Wynton, who knows what ships be made of." The people shouted, and said that they would have master Walter for their leader. As our hero looked at the men, and read the countenance of the prophet, his doubts and misgivings as to their intention were ended. There was not a thin fanatic or sour-faced malignant among them; they seemed to be composed in good part of hearty Kentish farmers and small freeholders, and of their well-conditioned farm-servants; and as for Tom, he seemed wholly changed. The truth was that the soldier part of his character and his latent patriotism had completely subdued the fanatical part of it. The ranter and prophet had entirely disappeared with the news that his country was invaded, and he stood on those Kentish hills a warrior and patriot, with no other thought than how to beat back the insolent foe, and avenge the disgrace his country had sustained. His tongue had forgotten the language of the conventicle—that mad phraseology which had so turned his brain; he had left his book and his hermit's staff behind him in the woods, and now he carried a good sword of the Ironside fashion in his right hand and pistols in his girdle, and, instead of speaking of vials of heavenly wrath and of visitations and judgments, he spoke of cannon and battles, of the primary duty of all Englishmen to stand for their country, and beat the Dutch before

any man among them, of whatsoever party in politics or religion, gave another thought to what might be amiss in church or state.

A few hurried explanations were given to Walter. Tom, suspecting where the great blow would be struck, and knowing the distractions of the government, the shameful corruption and negligence of its officers, and the indefensible state in which that district had been left, had thrown himself among the free and stout-hearted farmers and freeholders dwelling on the broad promontory which divides the Thames from the Medway, and had easily made them take up arms for the defence of their own shores, and place themselves under his leading. Every pike, spear, match-lock, musket, or fowling-piece in the district had been put in requisition; and the supply had been found so abundant, that out of four or five hundred men only a few were armed with scythes, bill-hooks, and such like tools. At Cowling Castle (once the property and abode of the renowned Sir John Oldcastle, the head of the Wycliffites in the days of Henry IV., who was the first martyr, and the first author among the nobility of England, and who was barbarously put to death upon the statutes of treason and *de heretico comburendo*) they had found a few old brass guns; and in some other places nearer the water they had furnished themselves with a few old ship guns, and with a considerable quantity of powder and suitable ball. A few sailors had joined them, and after explaining the confusion which prevailed in the upper part of the river, and especially at Upnor Castle, together with the faults of construction, and the other causes which would render the fire of that castle so very useless

a waste of powder and shot, these mariners had recommended the construction of a battery on the bank below Hoo, where, on account of sand-banks and shallows, the Dutch would be obliged to sail very close to shore.

As Tom of the Woods finished these explanations, Walter said to him, "By my life, your whole plan is a good one, and I will do my best to help in the execution of it. I could not but think, even when those poor clowns held me in their grip as a Dutchman or traitor, that somewhere in this quarter a few well-served guns might do much."

"Aye," said Will Gaff, with a right merry grin, "a few good shot between wind and water! . . . . . I see . . . . . And I have seen a big Dutchman go down that way aforetime. That old Dutch skipper is a gentleman, and behaved as such to master Walter; but d—n me double if I don't have a rap at his sheathings for the sake of Joel Wyke, and the other ranting, psalm-singing English scoundrels that be on board."

Instead of reproving him for swearing, Tom of the Woods swore himself, saying to Will Gaff, "By the Lord, so you shall! and mind you take good aim."

"I 'll take better aim than Joel took at my poor skull while I was in the water," said Will, with another very pleasant grin.

It was not until all these explanations had been given, and the march of the hermit's little army had been resumed, that Walter's patriotism allowed him to speak of more private matters, near as some of those matters were to his heart's core. He then questioned Tom of the Woods, and learned from him that his father at Charlton, and the family at

Erith, had been duly informed of the duel and catastrophe which had made Walter a fugitive, and sent the good knight's bay mare and the young gentleman's black horse scampering into Erith without any riders upon their backs, and with their reins broken and the furniture all torn—a sight which had filled the kind heart of the old knight and the loving heart of maid Marion with dismay and grief. Of Faittout, or the body of Sir Ralph Spicer, or of any proclamation by government or by sheriff, Tom knew nothing; for, since his parting with Walter, and the dispatching of his trusty messenger to Captain Wynton at Charlton, he had kept a good way to the eastward of Lessness Heath and Plumstead Common, and during the last three days he, as well as all the men of Kent, had been too busy to hear or think of any such matters. Tom had, however, heard in the course of the preceding day that the family had quitted Erith: he did not know whither Marion and my lady were gone, but Sir John Roundtree had been met on horseback with his warlike harness on, and with a good company of armed yeomen at his back, crossing Gad's hill, on his way to Chatham.

"And thither, or to some other post or place of danger, will my brave father have betaken himself, if he but alive and able to move from his bed," said Walter. "If he and Sir John should but meet where bullets and balls be flying about, they will be friends for the rest of their lives. Yet would I could know where Marion is! The times are dangerous, and Lady Roundtree, to say the least, lacketh discretion."

But busy occupation drove away for the time

these anxious thoughts. They had now reached the river bank, and after gazing for a short while at the fire and smoke which now seemed to cover the whole of the Medway from Muscle Bank to Upnor Castle, these true-hearted men of Kent, under the guidance of Walter and Tom of the Woods, began to mark out a battery, and to dig a broad deep ditch. As they worked might and main, a number of peasants came and joined them from Stoke, and from other villages. Women and children, and tottering old men, came flocking to Hoo, and to the river bank beneath, bringing spades and mattocks, and meat and drink, and then lending their hands to the digging :—

> "The oldest and youngest
> Are at work with the strongest."

With all this heart put into it, the labour advanced rapidly; and as they toiled, the brave yeomen of fruitful Kent sang in merry chorus the ballad which recited how their ancestors had stood in arms against William the Conqueror until he granted them the laws of good King Edward, and all their ancient customs, liberties, and privileges: and albeit the ballad was but homely (being the composition of "the ballading silk-weaver," Thomas Deloney, who lived in the days of Elizabeth and King James), yet was there poetry and a lyrical grandeur in it, when four hundred manly voices chanted—

> "Let us not live like bondmen poor to foemen in their pride,
> But keep our ancient liberty, what chance soe'er betide:
> And rather die in bloody field, in manlike courage prest,
> Than to endure the servile yoke which we so much detest."

Thus did the Kentish commons cry unto their leaders still,
And so marched forth in warlike sort and stood on Swanscombe hill,
Where in the woods they hid themselves under the shady green,
Thereby to get them vantage good, of all their foes unseen.

And for the conqueror's coming there, they privily laid wait,
And thereby suddenly appalled his lofty high conceit.

"God send we may do as much by the Dutch," said Will Gaff. "We have no green wood here, but we have a snug covering of rushes and brush-wood; and if some spy do not prate, we shall take Mynheer by surprise as we rattle into the bows of the first ship that comes up". . . . "Or that goes down," said Walter; "for our battery cannot be ready until to-morrow, and we must not throw away powder and shot, or let them know where we be until we can make the report with good effect. They may not come further this tide, for it is turning, and they will not try by night."

"Not they!" said Will.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BATTERY UNDER HOO.

After witnessing the easy destruction of his boom and chain, Monk was put to his wits' end. Like all the rest, he blamed everybody but himself. He, however, remained on the Medway instead of repairing to London, to which he was hastily summoned by the court. He sent up hurried and evidently confused orders to the governor of Upnor Castle, who, instead of artillery-men, had no force with him except some cavalry. In the evening my lord general, being followed by nearly all the land troops, rode back to Chatham to see to the means of defending the dockyard and the ships that lay in that part of the river. In order to screen himself, he may, in the well-known letter which he did not give in until some months after the events, have exaggerated the faults of others; yet is there no good ground for doubting that all things at Chatham were in a disgraceful state of disorganization and confusion, and that nearly every servant of government was thinking rather of himself than of his country. Monk wanted carpenters and good oak or ship-timber, wherewith to make bulwarks for batteries intended for the defence of the yard; but in the yard he could find only two carpenters, and they were running away; and instead of oak the commissioners sent him deal planks. But what he wanted most of all was a supply of

boats and barges—and this was not to be procured. Under this disjointed and corrupt government everything connected with the service had become disjointed, and nearly every man in the service corrupt and base to the lowest pitch of baseness. The officers specially charged with these duties, instead of attending to them, had attended and were actually attending to nothing save their own private interests; and while some of them were withholding the materials of war, others were busily engaged in removing their own household furniture and other property in the government boats up the river to Maidstone, or to some nearer yet safe place above Rochester bridge. Nearly every boat and barge was thus employed by the officers and officials. Execrably as all things had been managed, not one of our ships in the upper part of the river would have been taken and burned, if the boats and barges had been where they ought to have been. But they were nearly all above bridge; and there they continued the next day when most wanted. Monk got a few working men together, and stayed all night in Chatham yard; but, having no money wherewith to pay the men, all that he could do or say could not put a proper spirit in them. The shipwrights, like the sailors, were starving. Such little work as was well done appears to have been done entirely by volunteers — by right-hearted Kentish men, who came in from the neighbouring towns and villages, and many of them from places further off than that pretty and safe town of Maidstone, to which our fighting men were sending off their goods.

In the course of the night Monk got some fifty cannon planted in different places, but the sites of

his batteries appear to have been badly chosen, and they were certainly all very badly supplied. Before morning my lord general most idly flattered himself that he had at the least put Upnor Castle "in a pretty condition of defence." Piteous and most deplorable was the plight of England when her fleet was thus put under the control of land-generals and colonels of regiments; when her ships were thus made to skulk behind miserable land-batteries, and to seek protection, not from their own good broadsides of guns, but from booms of wood and chains of iron!

On the following morning (Thursday the 13th of June) at about ten o'clock, as the tide was rising, and the wind blowing right up the river, Van Ghent, who had been lying at anchor near the scene of his yesterday's easy triumph, unfurled his top-sails, called his men to their guns, and began to steer through the shallows for Chatham. As his ships got in motion Will Gaff said, "As ye have stayed so long, I wish ye had stayed a little longer, for we be not quite ready for ye yet." And, notwithstanding the energy of our Kentish yeomen, who had been working all the night long under the direction of Walter Wynton and Tom of the Woods, the battery in Hoo Marsh was indeed not quite ready. Our friends, however, comforted themselves with thinking that something great must have been done by the Duke of Albemarle in the course of the night; that the Dutch who went up must come down again with the returning tide, and that *then* they would have their guns in readiness for them, and their battery in such order as to defy a land attack, which was the only kind of attack that could give them much uneasiness. "Let us lie

quiet," said master Walter, "while the enemy passes upwards, for he must not know that we be here until we be quite ready for him. His decks are crowded with land troops!" And the brave Kentish men, who much required rest and time to take a little food, suspended their labours and concealed themselves.

The Dutch had nothing to do, or had not to fire a gun until they came abreast of the pleasant village and cherry-orchards of Gillingham. Here, close to the water's edge, there was an English battery which might perchance have made Van Ghent repent having ventured so far up; but alas! there were only four or five bad old guns on the spot, and of these only two could be fired, and the parapet was so weak that more than half of it fell with the first Dutch ball that struck it. A little above Gillingham, and on the opposite side of the river, there stood (as there now stands) on a little slope above the river bank, the small old castle of Upnor, which had been built by Queen Elizabeth for the protection of Chatham, but which was scarcely a better place of arms than the block-houses which had been built on various parts of the English coast by her father Henry VIII. Upnor Castle, too, was injudiciously placed; and incapable of being made of much consequence as a fort; yet the Dutch did not expect to pass it without some hard knocks, for they saw a good many great guns pointed across the river, which was here very narrow. But when this battery began to play upon them, its fire excited laughter and derision rather than alarm; for the ball which had been collected did not fit the bore of the guns, some of the guns were honey-combed, some of their carriages were

rotten, and only four cannon could be used at all, and these so badly loaded as to be of no use. Throwing only a few shot to create confusion among some militia-men and country-people who were standing on the green hillocks near the castle, cursing the sight of their country's shame and their own insufficiency, Van Ghent very composedly brought his men-of-war to anchor a little above Upnor Castle. Of fighting ships he had not brought more than five or six, and of these not one was a first-rate—indeed two of them would not have been a match for one of our ships of the line if she had been properly manned and stocked—and we had ten or twelve of the largest ships lying between Upnor Castle and Rochester bridge. From Sheerness, Van Ghent's first starting-point, to Chatham is only some twenty miles. The mid-channel of the Medway is so deep, the bed so soft, and the reaches of the river are so short, that it is the safest harbour in the kingdom. Our great ships were riding as in a wet dock, and being moored to chains fixed to the bottom of the river, they swung up and down with the tide. But all these ships, as well as many others of lower rates, were almost entirely deserted by their crews, or rather by those few men who had been put in them early in the spring, rather as watchmen than as sailors; some were unrigged, some had never been finished, and scarcely one of them had either guns or ammunition on board, although hurried orders had been sent down to equip some of them and to remove others still higher up the river out of the reach of danger.

It was about the hour of noon when Van Ghent let go his anchor just above Upnor Castle. But his fire-ships did not come to anchor. No! still

favoured by wind and tide, they proceeded onward, and presently fell among our great but defenceless ships. The two first of these fire-ships burned without any effect, but the rest that went upward grappled the 'Great James,' the 'Royal Oak,' and the 'Loyal London,' and these three proud ships which, under other names, and even under the names they now bore, had so often been plumed with victory, lay a helpless prey to the enemy, and were presently in a blaze. "Had I but had five or six boats to cut off the boats of these fire-ships," said Monk, "we had prevented the burning of our men-of-war!"

From the dark tower of Rochester Castle to the heights behind Chatham, where Fort Pitt now stands, and from those heights down to the river, and along the river bank as low as Gillingham, the ground was almost covered with troops, militia, and armed burghers and peasants, who could be little more than spectators—indignant spectators, but useless in all that concerned the protection of our ships. And on the opposite side, the green undulating hills between Upnor and Stroud, and the northern end of Rochester Bridge, were sprinkled with irregular armed bands of all but useless landsmen. On either side of the river gaudy cavaliers and officers in fine scarlet coats were seen galloping to and fro with their drawn swords most idly glittering in the summer sun; but we wanted not vapouring gallants, but good sea-captains—we wanted not horses, but boats—not militia, but sailors—not pikes, halberds, pistols, and swords, but good ship-guns, and good powder to put into them, with ball of the proper calibre. General Middleton, who had obtained some reputation as a

land-commander, and who had been sent by the king to draw all the train-bands of Kent and the neighbourhood together, and to take the command of all such forces, was storming and cursing, now on one side of the river and now on the other; and "my Lord General" and present commander of all, Monk, Duke of Albemarle, was here within Chatham lines fully persuaded at last that he might almost as well be in the moon.

Having burned to the water's edge the 'London,' the 'James,' and the 'Royal Oak,' and some few other vessels of less note, Van Ghent thought it best to take his departure. Yet great as was the mischief he had done, it was so easy to have done a vast deal more, that the English officers at Chatham could scarcely believe their own eyes when they saw him prepare to drop down the river with the next receding tide, and without making any further effort. The young lords who had been caracoling with General Middleton or with the Duke of Albemarle, now laughed at the Dutch and called them cowards; but the general and the duke, as well as every man in his sober senses, were glad to see them going, knowing as they did but too well, that with but a very little more daring and perseverance the enemy would have had at their mercy all the remaining shipping, the dockyard, and the arsenal, with all that they contained. Upnor Castle played upon the Dutch ships as they began to descend the river; but the fire was as ineffectual as it had been before, and the enemy seemed to heed those loose and ill-directed cannon-balls no more than if they had been so many summer flies. The battery at Gillingham was as innocuous as Upnor Castle; and the Dutch

came down with the tide in a long line of single ships, the trumpeters on their quarter-decks playing 'Joan's placket is torn,' 'Loth to depart,' and other tunes very insulting and offensive to English pride, while the English renegadoes on board kept shouting, "Now we are fighting for dollars! now we have gotten change for our tickets! Go tell this at Whitehall."

By this time Walter Wynton and Tom of the Woods had gotten their rude battery into order. Rude it was and irregular enough, but still it was capable of firing a few shot for the honour of England; and such good disposition had been made as to afford cover and protection to the brave volunteers who had formed it. By digging and embanking, a tolerable platform had been obtained, and the mouths of the guns had been brought nearly to a level with the surface of the water, so near that it might be called a battery à fleur de l'eau. It lay low and quite concealed among the rushes close to the water, like a wild duck's nest. Keeping only the few sailors and a few of the yeomen who had been soldiers in former days, and who understood something of artillery practice, to work the guns, Walter ordered all the rest of the company to take post behind a green knoll close in the rear of the battery, and there to keep themselves both out of sight and out of danger, only holding themselves in readiness to sally forth and charge if the enemy should attempt a landing. On the two flanks the battery was protected by a ditch and a strong palisade, the ditches being two natural water-courses and running from the two opposite sides of the green knoll right into the river. But these ditches had been widened and

deepened by the unceasing toil of the yeomen; and another ditch had been cut behind the knoll, where a brass gun was placed within another stout palisade. Walter said to Tom of the Woods and Will Gaff, who remained with him in the battery, "We be but slightly covered in front, but we lie so low, and the Dutch must come so close, that their lowest tier of guns will fire over our heads."

As the foremost Dutch ship approached, sounding her trumpets in triumph, and apprehending no further hindrance or harm, our heroes stood to their guns with lighted matches, and when she was at the closest to the bank, without any preceding shout or cheer they gave fire. Every ball told, and hit the ship between wind and water. The trumpeters left off trumpeting that there was a rent in England's honour, and there was evidently astonishment not unmixed with confusion among the crew. They could neither recede nor cast anchor and stop, for, at that spot there was not room enough for the ship to swing; so they put out sweepers and glided past the battery, which they could still only see by the smoke of its guns; but before they got out of reach their ship was hit again and again, and a gun pointed and fired by Walter knocked off her rudder: and then his men gave three good cheers.

The second ship in the retiring line was that which contained Joel Wyke and his desperate crew. Each gun in the battery was well loaded and pointed to give her proper salute in passing; but the cautious old captain, upon hearing the most unexpected explosion, and seeing the crippled state of the foremost ship, had hove-to as best he could, and was making signals and waiting orders from

Van Ghent, who was in the rear. The nature of the orders he received was soon explained: an anchor was let go, and the ship's barge and sundry other boats were filled with soldiers and sailors, who were presently landed on the river bank, some distance above the battery.

"This is what I expected," said Walter. "They mean to dislodge us by a land attack, but they will find a hotter reception than they anticipate!"

"Hang me at a yard-arm," said Will Gaff, "if they can make out where we be!"

There appeared to be truth in what Will said, for the smoke of the guns had cleared off, and the Dutch officer in command of the land party was seen halting on the shingles and peering through his prospect-glass. In a minute or two, however, the Dutchman put his column in motion along the bank.

"And now," quoth Tom of the Woods, "it is my turn, and good time to call out my Kentish yeomen."

Tom quitted the battery, and went up to the rear of the green knoll. As he moved along the higher ground the enemy caught sight of his tall gaunt figure; and setting up a shout that the men in the battery were running away, they began to run forward themselves in rather a disorderly manner. But before they got within a hundred yards of the ditch and palisade, a tremendous English shout was heard; and Tom of the Woods, sallying forth with his brave men of Kent, rushed between the ditch and the advancing foe, and then, leaving a good line in reserve, he threw himself upon the Dutch soldiers, who had no time to form. It was a close hand-to-hand fight, and soon over.

None fought very desperately on the side of the enemy except a band of the English fanatics, at whose head was seen Joel Wyke, laying about him like one possessed by a demon. At this sight Will Gaff could not contain himself: and so, saying to Walter that he would be back anon to work his gun, but that he must go and settle old scores with Joel, he sprung out of the battery and over ditch and palisade; and in little more time than it takes to say it, he confronted the terrible sea-lawyer and divine, who was cutting his way towards the ditch, and shouting to the madmen that pressed after him that he was invulnerable, and that King Jesus would protect his own. As soon as he saw Will Gaff he gnashed his teeth, and sprung towards him, shouting "Ha! backslider! Perish, thou Philistine."

"I'll see you perish first," said Will, parrying his furious blow, and then cutting him across the pate with so deadly a stroke that Joel turned up the white of his eye, and reeled and fell at Gaff's feet, which he tried to bite through the strong leather shoes that were on them.

"Thou wast ever a bitter biter and venomous in thy nature," said Will, bestowing a good kick upon the prostrate fanatic; "but 'tis all over with thee now! so let bygones be bygones, and may God forgive thee thy sin against thy country, and that cowardly shot thou didst fire at me."

As soon as they saw the fall of the great and invulnerable Joel, the English fanatics took to their heels and joined the Dutch in running back to the boats. The bold men of Kent pursued them with pike and sword in their loins, and as Will Gaff found his hand in for cutlass exercise; he went with

the men of Kent. The Dutch man-of-war, which saw nearly the whole of this very rapidly moving scene, could not use her guns, as the contending parties were so mixed together; but she sent off one or two more boats filled with soldiers to cover the retreat, and bring off the thoroughly defeated land party, who rushed neck-deep into the water to meet them or to get into their own boats. As Tom of the Woods saw that the fugitives had had enough of their experiment, and that the Dutch captain had no intention of repeating it, he withdrew his force and his wounded prisoners. At this moment Tom's appearance was more than usually awful, for he had been foremost in the fighting, and his long grey beard was stained and dripping with blood—with blood from his own veins as well as from those of the foe, for Tom was no more invulnerable than was Joel Wyke, and besides receiving sundry scratches from steel, he had been hit by a ball.

As Will Gaff came to the spot where he had left his old and mortal foe Joel, he stopped to see whether his pangs were over. The Fifth-Monarchy man still breathed, and as Will bent over him he opened wide his eyes, raised himself on his elbow, and seemed so full of life, that poor Will thought it was just possible he might recover from the effects of the gash he had given him; and as his own animosity had completely evaporated, and as certain commandments and sacred injunctions flitted through his mind, he said, "Shipmate, what cheer? Canst rise, man? Shall I tie up thy brow and carry thee on my shoulders into the battery?"

Looking savagely at him, Joel said in a horrible husky tone and with apparent difficulty, as if he

were choking—"Never to the accursed Prelatists! No, not to be hanged like Venner! . . . But water, one drop of water!"

Although the distant Dutchmen had brought some of their guns to bear upon the bank, and balls were flying rather thickly about, Will Gaff ran to a little runnel near the ditch, filled his leather cap with water, and ran back with it to the dying man.

"There Joel, drink," said he, "and when thou art refreshed let me remove thee."

Joel drank of the water, and then dashing away the cap and the honest hand that held it, he exclaimed in a clearer voice, "My next remove is to the mansion of the saints. Backslider and sinner that thou art, I am bound for Heaven!"

"Then," quoth Will, "while that blue-peter is flying, forgive and forget, and just shake hands with an old messmate! And do just say before thou goest, 'God bless old England.'"

Gaff held out his right hand: Joel grasped it, but not in friendship or forgiveness.—No! he carried that honest kind right hand to his ghastly, white, and quivering mouth, and tried to set his teeth in it.

"Shiver my hulk!" said Will, when he had withdrawn his hand from this unloving embrace, "shiver me to bits if I have the head to conceive such a black heart as thine, O Joel Wyke! D—n me if I would do what thou hast done to the very Devil himself!"

"No," said the fanatic, with a hideous grin, "the Devil is thy father, and the friend of those thou servest. The Devil reigns in this accursed land.

Will Gaff, thou hast ofttimes thwarted me in

my high intents, and this corruptible part of me now meets death at thine hand. But Will, it was my hand that struck the English colours on board the Royal Charles,—it was my hand that set fire to the London.—I first lighted the flames that are blazing there up the river like the . . . . . !"

And, as he said these last words, the fanatic turned his heavy blood-shot eyes in the direction of Chatham, and so, gazing on the conflagration and ruin, he gave up the ghost.

Will, who had been repeatedly called in, now ran to the battery with a countenance full of horror, and a cheek all but as pale as that of the dead Joel. Tom of the Woods, who had got his wounds bound up, was standing by one of the guns washing the blood from his long beard; and Walter, without hat or coat, was labouring to recover a gun which had been overset at its last firing. At this moment some Kentish gentlemen of note, and two or three officers who had been at Upnor Castle, and who had heard the inexplicable firing of the little battery, and had seen the sudden pause and confusion in Van Ghent's fleet, came galloping over the hills to learn what it all meant. As they drew rein behind the green knoll, they were cheered by the Kentish men. The officers, who could not comprehend what they saw, and who looked as if they were in a dream, went down from the knoll into the battery. There, as they gazed upon Tom of the Woods, the tallest and most conspicuous figure in the scene, and as Tom looked at them with eyes which were rather scornful, their amazement increased. As soon as the officers could speak they said—"In the name of

the King, who are ye? Who sent ye hither? Whom have ye in command?"

"In the name of God," said Tom, holding his wet beard in his hand, "we be a few honest men, with English hearts in us, who, seeing how badly matters were managed by you gentlemen who hold commissions, came here without any commission at all, except that which the law of Nature gives to every man to defend his country."

"Fellow!" said one of the officers, "thou art rough of speech."

"And rough in deed," said Tom, "when the occasion requires it."

An older and discreeter officer now said, "With us there is no need of any roughness: we are come to praise, and not to find fault. Ye have done your duty like men true and loyal to the King's majesty; ye have done marvellously well; but we would fain know who planned this battery, for the King's majesty shall hear of it, and honour and reward will be gotten by it."

"I, for one," said Tom of the Woods, "want neither honour nor reward; but since you must know who traced this bit of a work, I tell you that it was this worshipful young gentleman that did it all."

Walter, at whom Tom pointed, did not look at this moment very like a worshipful young gentleman; for his clothes and shirt-sleeves were torn and covered with dirt and clay, his face was begrimed with gunpowder, and his hair was all dishevelled.

"And may I ask," said the old officer, touching his hat with much gravity to Walter, "who is this young gentleman?"

"It suits me not to give my name just now," said young Wynton; "but I bear a name which the English have heard before to-day—and the Dutch too."

"I think so," said Will Gaff, who was now recovering his natural complexion and good spirits, "I think so, i'faith! and I only wish those Dutchmen there in the river knew whose son it is that is here to pepper them!"

The petulant young officer who had first spoken said that the leader of the party was bound to make his name known.

"I tell you," said Walter, "I have my private and personal reasons for remaining unknown. But there is no time for talk. See! the Dutch are again in motion! I will write my name with cannon-ball on the sides of that ship. If you can submit to the orders of a young sailor, remain in this battery and help us; but if ye cannot, then vouchsafe to depart, for two good commands being mixed together are worse than one bad one."

The officers took the hint and retired behind the knoll, where they vainly questioned the Kentish yeoman about the tall man with the beard and the worshipful young gentleman without coat and hat.

The Dutch, dreading to be left aground by the receding tide, had, after some of their habitual hesitation, resolved not to land any more men or make any further attempt at carrying the battery, but to drop down with the current and get out of reach as quickly as possible. And they now came down in close line, without any insolent trumpetings. Each ship as it passed presented her broadside so near to the battery that every gun fired by

Walter and his friends had a smashing effect on her sheathings; but not one of the many guns discharged by the Dutch did the least harm on shore, for they were too near to the bank and in much too great a hurry to depress their guns so as to bear upon our duck's nest, and all the balls and bullets flew high overhead, hitting the green knoll, or lodging in a long bank of clay. With a few more guns of greater calibre than those he had, Walter would have sunk more than one of those Dutchmen under Hoo. As it was, he did Van Ghent's flotilla no small hurt; and it was mainly through the firing of his improvised battery, and the delay it had caused (which made the enemy lose much of the benefit of the tide), that before they could reach Sheerness one of their ships went down and two were run ashore and burned. The last shot and the last charges of powder in the battery were fired at the hindmost ship—a laggard fire-ship which had been afraid to run the gauntlet, and which blew up off Oakham-Ness before she got out of sight.

When lower down the river the Dutch found themselves obliged to set fire to some prizes which they had intended to carry off; but they were fully determined to take the 'Royal Charles' with them, both as a trophy of their victory and as one of the finest war-ships then in existence. To accomplish this end they threw some of her masts and guns overboard, and heeled her on one side to make her draw less water; for the tide was running rapidly out, and in several places would not have left water enough to float that beautiful leviathan. All this was performed with much coolness and seamanlike skill; and the 'Royal Charles' was brought down during a state of tide and wind in which it was

said the best pilot in Chatham would not have undertaken it. But it is not improbable that in this sad season of disaffection and treachery one of the best of English pilots was serving the Dutch on board that ship.

Long before the fort gave its last fire a great many more gentlemen and officers came to the spot from either side of the river, and a multitude of people arrived and continued to arrive at the only place where honour had been done to the English flag. The people were full of enthusiasm, and many of the gentlemen as they rode up were eager to know and see the heroes of the day. But the last shot of all had no sooner been fired than Walter, and Tom of the Woods, and brave Will Gaff called round them the yeomen and peasants whom Tom had raised and brought with him, and began to move off inland in the direction of Cowling Castle. The people rent the air with their shouts, and called upon them to tarry and show themselves, and allow themselves to be carried in triumph to my Lord General at Chatham; a good many Kentish gentlemen rode after them; and a general officer, whose noble appearance imposed respect, rode up to the dense irregular phalanx, and begged, as an Englishman and a lover of his country, that he might have sight and speech of the true Englishmen who had done so manfully. Walter felt much inclined to come out from the throng which hedged him round, explain his name and condition, and the affair of Plumstead Common, and surrender himself to the general; but Tom strongly dissuaded him from this course, urging him not to put trust in princes and courtiers, and declaring that he would neither surrender with him

nor allow him to give himself up without some sure amnesty for the death of Sir Ralph Spicer; and poor Tom, whose head was again wandering into some of its old tracts now that the excitement was over, looked so wan and faint through loss of blood, that Walter could not find it in his heart to quit him, or to grieve him by attempting it.

"Well, Tom," said he, "it shall be as thou wilt. Where thou goest I will go, and the same amnesty shall hold thy name and mine together."

All this while they had kept moving rapidly off, and they were now ascending the gentle acclivity of the hill on which Walter and Tom had met on the preceding day. The general officer still rode after them, repeating his requests in earnest, but most courteous terms.

"Tom," said Walter, "I would fain say somewhat to satisfy that gentleman."

"I will do it presently," said Tom, "for I do see that all the rest of the red-coats with that jack-anapes that came into the battery are going back again. It would not marvel me if some of them went to Monk and claimed the credit of that little exploit which the Lord hath enabled us to perform."

On the ridge of the hill, Tom cried halt! and standing up in the midst of the honest Kentish men, his grim visage showing itself high above most of their heads, he turned to the general and said, "I was once one of the Ironsides and fought for Oliver as long as my conscience permitted me so to do; I am now Tom of the Woods, the Kentish prophet —or Bedlamite if you will. I am Tom of the Woods that has lived in woods and wilds this many a-year, doing harm to none, but only raising my

voice against the sins of the times. I am poor Tom that hath been hunted about the land, and gyved and imprisoned—nay, that hath been scourged by hangman's hands. But not scourging could whip out of me my English heart, or make me forget that I am native to this soil, and that this earth holds the bones of my kindred and forefathers. I predicted a great calamity without knowing what it would be; but when the shame and danger fell upon the land, I could not help doing my best to avert the blow. Warrants in the king's name have been issued to apprehend me; but I came down hither and brought with me these brave men of Kent, and such artillery and munition as we could find in this corner of the island. Some of these things we did forcibly; but the guns, together with a few prisoners, will all be found down there in the battery, and as for the powder and shot, they have been spent in the way you wot of, and it is reasonable to hope that we shall not be called to account on that score. Yet all I did and got others to do might, perchance, have been of little avail but for this gallant young gentleman that stands here by my side, and who, for reasons of his own, would for the present remain unknown."

The old officer could distinguish the still hatless and coatless Walter in the crowd, and some of the Kentish gentlemen who had ridden up the hill fixed their eyes on the same object. These worthies were chiefly from other parts of the county; but there was one who had his habitation not far from Charlton, and as he looked at Walter's face, he recognised him in spite of the gunpowder and smoke which had so begrimed it. As this gentleman, however, before quitting his home, had heard some

flying report about a duello with a great courtier on Plumstead Common, he thought it best to say nothing; but he resolved as soon as the opportunity should offer to inform Captain Wynton of the condition and doings of his fugitive son, and to bear testimony to Walter's skill and gallantry, and to the effect produced on the Dutch by his little battery.

In the meanwhile the old officer had been almost as much puzzled with the appearance of Walter as he had previously been with that of Tom of the Woods; but, being a generous-hearted man, he forebore to question them any further, and then praised them and thanked them, and bade God speed them.

"Others," said he, "may try to rob you of the honour which is your due: but I will speak to the truth in court and in council, and in the parliament, if need be, *whenever* parliament shall be assembled. Remember my name—General Hilborough."

And so saying, the old officer courteously waved his hand and rode back towards the battery. The Kentish gentlemen who had followed thus far also departed; and then the good yeomen continued their march. In a short time Tom, although he uttered not a word of complaint, showed by his looks and motions that he was suffering agony from the gun-shot wound, and in a few minutes more he became so faint that it was found necessary to carry him. The country between Cowling Castle and High Halstow, in the centre of the promontory, or about midway between the two rivers of Thames and Medway, was almost covered with the goods and cattle of those who had fled from the banks of

the Thames, and with parties of women and children who had bivouacked there, and who had heard all day long the dreadful firing in the Medway. There were tender greetings, and overflowing joys expressed by silent tears, when our returning Kentish men met their wives and children on this spot. Every loving wife among them had thought that her own husband at least must perish; but here they were all back, husbands, brothers, and sons, and no one killed, and scarcely six slightly wounded among them all!

An honest farmer offered in his snug homestead a secure asylum to Tom of the Woods and master Walter; and the yeomen and peasants separated, after they had pledged themselves to protect the two strangers at the cost of their lives, and to meet again in arms whenever Tom or Walter should call upon them.

Will Gaff, with something very like a big tear in his eye, was scraping his starboard foot, and taking his leave of Walter in sailor-fashion; but the young gentleman said, "No, no, Will, thou must not leave us yet;" and so Gaff stayed, and was well lodged in a clean and sweet hayloft, and surpassingly well entertained with meat and drink.

The hundred of Hoo and the neighbouring hundred of Shamel, which yet retain a good deal of their primitive character, were very quaint, curious, and interesting districts in the middle of the seventeenth century. The manors, the hamlets, and townships, as High Halstow, Beluncle, St. Mary, Malmains, Allhallows, Offerland, Tudors, Stoke, Cowling, Chaddington, Cliff, Halling, Cookstone, Shorne Green, Gad's Hill, Horn's Place, and the like (in nearly all of which Tom of the Woods had

recruited), were all places of great antiquity; and although not many old buildings, with the exception of the churches, were left, generation after generation had built their farm-houses and cottages on the sites where the Saxons had built in the times of the Heptarchy, and the farmers and peasants still seemed, in manners as well as in aspect, an unmixed Saxon race. The country abounded in Shaksperean names. At the call of Tom, a good score of Bardolphs and as many Poinses, a good many Petos and not a few Nyms, had rallied round the ancient banner of Kent. Most of the manors had belonged in the olden time to the cathedral, the bishops, and monks of Rochester, by virtue of donations and charters from the Saxon kings of Kent, or from the kings of England of the Norman line. The last lay lord of Hoo was Sir Edward Hales, who, having risked his life and his fortune in the service of King Charles I., and contracted enormous debts, had been obliged to abandon his manors in Hoo and his country as well, to neither of which he ever returned. There was not a gentleman's house, inhabited, nor one resident clergyman in the whole hundred of Hoo (the clergy living in Stroud or Rochester or elsewhere); but the yeomen, who held their lands by the ancient Kentish tenure of Gavelkind, were noted for their substance, hospitality, and wealth. The district was rarely visited by the stranger; and although it was so near to Chatham, the sight of an officer or any servant of government was so uncommon and distasteful, that the mischievous little boys generally pelted such visitant with Hoo mud.

CHAPTER X.

MISTRESS MARION IN LONDON.

WHEN the people of Erith, on the morning of the 10th, were all packing up their goods and chattels, and preparing to run away from the Dutch in the Thames—to run they knew not whither—and when the Dutch guns were heard roaring and rattling close to Gravesend, Sir John Roundtree had thought it time to look to the safety of his womankind; but as for his goods and chattels he scarcely bestowed a single thought upon them, and if some of the family plate and valuables were removed, it was owing to the caution and consideration of her ladyship and Roger Hinde the old butler.

"I will put on harness once more," said the good knight; "and as soon as I have placed the women out of the reach of immediate danger, I will go whithersoever true English hearts be most wanted."

The ladies were soon ready, for her ladyship was doubly hurried by fear of the Dutch cannon and by joy at the thought of seeing the great city once more, Sir John upon reflection having concluded that London after all would be the securest place, and that Mr. Samuel Pepys, her ladyship's very dear friend, would be the wariest and most knowing protector he could find for the ladies during his own absence. There was an old family coach in the stable-yard—for most men of knightly de-

gree had their coaches at this time, albeit they were often drawn by the same horses which ploughed their lands; but Sir John, who liked the old Elizabethan style in all things, had an antipathy to coaches, and his clumsy vehicle had never been mended since the Christmas which followed the restoration of King Charles, when his coachman, getting surpassingly drunk at a gentleman's house where our knight had been dining,—it was the custom of those hospitable times to ply the servants of every visitor with strong drink,—drove into some deep ruts on Lessness Heath, and upset the said vehicle with a mighty smash. Since his second marriage he had ofttimes been worried by her ladyship about the coach; but as Marion had always preferred the saddle, he had invariably said that he would see about it some day or other. There thus being no coach, her ladyship was mounted on a pillion behind the old butler, her waiting-woman was mounted behind one of the grooms, and Marion's maid Lucy was mounted in the same manner behind another man-servant. Marion being a good equestrian, rode her own cantering jennet; and the knight bestrode his favorite bay mare, with pistols in holster, and his good old sword by his side,—that ancestral Spanish blade which in its time had done service for Queen Elizabeth. And as the party ambled across Lessness Heath — her ladyship and the two handmaidens bumping a little upon their pillions, and holding fast to the girdles of the men that rode in the saddles before them — Sir John was so pleased at the now somewhat oldfashioned sight, that he left off thinking about the Dutch, whose guns were still heard roaring in his rear, and

whistled a tune of the Shaksperean age. They passed the Abbey Wood and the ruins of Lessness Abbey, then a picturesque object, covered with ivy, and in the midst of trees, but of which the destructive barbarism of succeeding generations has not left the least vestige. As they rode through the pleasant village of Charlton, her ladyship proposed that they should stop and take a refection with her wealthy and much esteemed friend Sir William Ducie. Now our knight liked not the man, nor even the sight of the fine old house he occupied, for Charlton Place had belonged to his near friend and companion in arms, Sir Henry Newton (son to Sir Adam Newton, tutor to Prince Henry, who had built the house in the days of James I.); and this devoted royalist had so exhausted his fortune during the civil war, and had met with so bad a return since the present king's restoration, that he had been obliged to sell Charlton to this Sir William Ducie, who was but a novus homo, and the second son of a trading London alderman.

"Please you, my lady," said Sir John touching the flank of his bay mare with the spur, and riding foremost, "I would rather draw rein at the house of public entertainment at the other side of Blackheath, for there is an air about this place which strikes cold to my heart."

And so the party rode on, leaving the red-brick tower of the church and the picturesque mansion and the magnificent old cypress-trees, which then stood in front of the house, behind them. Had they stayed at Charlton Place a discovery would have been made which would have spared Sir John much uneasiness and Marion much unhappiness.

There was another house by that village where Marion would fain have tarried, and the sight of which had shot both hot and cold to her young heart:—it was the house of Captain Wynton, the birthplace and home of the now fugitive Walter.

After a short rest at Blackheath, our travellers rode through Greenwich. They were now mixed with many other families, who were running from various parts of the Kentish side of the river to seek shelter in the capital. They saw many dismal sights on the road and in the narrow dirty streets of the Borough, and they heard not a few offensive words addressed to themselves by the alarmed and tumultuous people; but they came to the end of London Bridge without any injury or accident, and got safely through that narrow and perilous pass. The houses and shops which then stood on either side of the old bridge seemed all to be stripped of their goods, and deserted by their occupants. On the city side of the bridge they found the lord mayor and aldermen in their formalities making proclamation by sound of trumpet, and a number of hungry-looking sailors listening to the cryer with their hands in their pockets. Midway down the Minories—a street which was not then occupied by slopsellers and old clothesmen — there was a reputable house of entertainment, or a sort of family hotel, which Sir John had frequented in bygone days. As the house was still in the hands of the same host and hostess, and as it stood so conveniently near to Seething-lane and the residence of that adroit man Samuel Pepys, Sir John determined to leave his family here. He said to himself, "There will be less danger to the women from rioting sailors than from west-end profligates—

besides, they cannot do without the councils and services of Pepys and his wife—and there is another reason besides, and that is, that I have no acquaintance with any other host or hostess, or with any other reputable house in London, so that if I don't leave them here, I know not where I can leave them. My Kentish hinds know no more of the great city and its ways than so many babes. But here Pepys will have an eye upon them—and Samuel Pepys is such a knowing man and so ready to do a service to a friend, particularly when he knows that he will not lose by it."

At our knight's first summons, the Clerk of the Acts, who was at the Navy-office close by, put on his beaver, and came running to the hostel. Lord! the ecstasies he was in to see them all! He would go fetch his wife, and she would be as glad as he, and there was nothing between earth and heaven but they would do for Lady Roundtree and sweet mistress Marion. The knight might rely on their care,—he, Samuel Pepys, knew how to act cautiously in difficult times—the knight might count upon that—and he knew town and its ways and by-ways, and Sir John might rely upon that also. He would be as watchful as a lynx, as sly as a fox. Indeed, since the beginning of these present troubles he had never slept with more than one eye at a time. He had powerful friends and supporters in the city, and, though he said it himself, great friends at the other end of town. "I have friends," said he, in our knight's ear, "I have friends even among the fanatics; and as for our tumultuous sailors, why they do know that the Clerk of the Acts, albeit he hath not been able to do much for

them, hath been a better friend to them than any other man in the Navy-office."

When Sir John led the clerk to speak of public matters, he found from that official and very sufficient authority that the state of the navy and the temper of the mariners of England were even worse than he had thought; he learned that no proper preparations had been made anywhere; that all things in or connected with the government were disjointed; and that serious apprehensions were entertained that Louis XIV., though testifying a desire to accommodate differences, and to act as mediator between the English and the Dutch, would play us false, and invade our country with a great army he had collected at Dunkirk.

"But, whither away so soon, Sir John?" said Pepys, as our true-hearted knight called up his groom and bade him saddle his bay mare if she had eaten her corn, and get his own nag ready to follow him back.

Said Sir John—"Now that my womankind are safe, I will go see what can be done among my Kentish neighbours, and will then ride over to the Medway, for it is there that de Ruyter will be most dangerous."

And without allowing himself time to rest, and without attending to some very prudent advice which Pepys began to give him, the old knight mounted and departed, not without some tears being shed by mistress Marion, and by Lady Roundtree, who thought it very silly in her husband to go in search of danger when he might abide quietly in London, where so many great officers who were paid for fighting were enjoying their usual pleasures.

Her ladyship, however, was delighted to be once more in the great city, and enraptured at the visit of Mrs. Pepys, who discoursed about the court ladies and gallants, and the last new fashion in dress which the Castlemaine had introduced, and of playhouses and the last new play, and of the gay doings they would have as soon as these troubles should be over. But in the course of that evening and night Lady Roundtree was considerably alarmed by cries in the streets, and rumours of gatherings upon Tower-hill, where the sailors' wives and other Wapping women were screaming—"This comes of your not paying our husbands! This comes of your starving out our Joes! So now your work is undone or done by hands that understand it not." And other persons, of better condition, were heard saying in the open streets, that the nation was bought and sold, and betrayed by the Papists and others about the King; and that the next news to expect was that the French army from Dunkirk had landed on the coast of Kent.

On the next night matters looked still worse, for it was then known that the Dutch had taken Sheerness, and had landed troops there. All the night long the drums beat through the city of London and the Tower Hamlets; and proclamation was made in every street that every man belonging to the train-bands must, upon pain of death, appear in arms on the morrow morning, with bullet and powder, and money to supply himself with provisions for a whole fortnight. The City artillery company was also called out. These corps of armed citizens had been materially changed since the first breaking out of the war between Charles I. and the parliament, and since the days

when that sturdy and devout veteran Major-General Skippon commanded them and showed the lustre and strength of the metal they were made of, and led them from victory to victory, with no other harangue than this: "Come, my boys, my brave boys, let us pray heartily and fight heartily! I will run the same fortunes and hazards with you. Remember the cause is for God, and for the defence of yourselves, your wives and children! Come, my honest brave boys, pray heartily and fight heartily, and God will bless us!" Yet, in spite of changes for the worse, the train-bands were still tolerably well disciplined, and had a good deal of the habit of a military life; and the day was yet distant when the commander of the City artillery was to send to the Horse-Guards for a few regular soldiers to protect his guns from the suspected insurrection of some of the people. These citizen-soldiers got themselves ready, and were full of heart; but after being put on duty they were discharged, and after being discharged they were called out again, and when they had again assembled in arms the government knew not what work to set them to. This greatly increased the trouble and distraction of the city. Some cried that the King was afraid of employing the bands who had fought for liberty and Protestantism against his father; but a louder and more universal cry now was "Parliament! parliament! Let the King assemble the parliament and save the country!" The alarm seemed to increase every hour, and the condition of the city was as confused as at the time of the Great Fire the year before. Some of the wealthier sort would have lodged their valuables in the Tower, and some had already deposited their

property there; but a great court lord, who had hitherto tried to pass for one of the greatest soldiers in Europe, and who had the custody of the Tower, after lodging there only one night, declared that it was not tenable, and desired to be removed; and thereupon those who had carried their money and goods thither thought themselves obliged to carry them elsewhere, and so went trooping with their horses and pack-horses, and their waggons and carriages, along the high north road towards Highgate and Finchley, and onward to Barnet and Hatfield, and to other places still farther from the river. And still the court seemed as mad as ever, and to think of nothing but their pleasures after they had doubled the guard at Whitehall: and that very night the Dutch were burning our ships in the Medway, the King and his chosen companions supped with my Lady Castlemaine at the Duchess of Monmouth's, and there they were all mad in hunting a poor moth. But in the course of that night the King, who had been relying upon the assurances of Monk that his chain and boom across the Medway could not be forced, and that the ships at Chatham were quite safe, received intelligence which made him wake at last from his pleasant dream of security, and throw off his habitual indolence. The next day his Majesty and the Duke of York rode into the city, the King being sad and almost in tears. The people in the streets, rejoicing at the thought that he would now do something great, greeted his Majesty as he passed, bidding him be of good cheer, and swearing that they would all stand by him with their lives. In fact the mere appearance of the King in the situation in which he ought to be at such a crisis,

and the sound of the firing of the enemy's guns in the river, and the reports that were every hour brought in, seemed for the moment to have completely dissipated the disaffection and the well-grounded discontents of the citizens of London; to have made them all of one mind, which they had not been for many a year; to have destroyed the antipathies and hatreds of conflicting sects and political parties; and to have filled them all with the determination to rally round the King, as the best means of repelling the enemy and retrieving the present disgrace. And when Charles made a speech to the citizens and the city militia assembled on Tower-hill, imploring them not to desert him and their country at this crisis, unprecedented as was the disgrace, great as were the sums which had been given for carrying on this war with vigour, and notorious and visible as were the negligence and worse faults of the King and Government, and the infamous causes which had brought about all this shame and calamity, not one murmur or disrespectful whisper against the King was heard to escape from all this vast and excited multitude: nor, of all those numbers of citizens who had been so often accused of sedition and disaffection, and who had not unfrequently been severely punished in their purse or in their person upon suspicion only, does it appear that any one man attempted to make a diversion in favour of the enemy, or refused to throw up his cap for King and Country. It seemed as though the last of the men denationalized by fanaticism had taken their departure with Joel Wyke, or had concealed themselves in the dark cellars or between the double walls of old Hiram Bingley's house in

Gravel-lane. Even some few Fifth-Monarchy men, who were present at the great meeting on Tower-hill, forgot for the nonce Venner and Sir Harry Vane, Harrison and the reign of the Saints, in order to think of the best means of beating back the Dutch; and they threw up their caps with the rest, and grasping hands they vowed they would go forth and do battle against the enemy. The people were again one-hearted. Thus, we believe, will it ever be with Englishmen when their country is invaded, or when an enemy is actually on the coast or within our rivers; but let no government, through corruption, carelessness, indolence, or a pertinacity in error, ever bring the country to such a pass as this! Let no government alienate the hearts of our seamen, and by neglecting our navy, the right hand of our power, find itself obliged to trust to popular enthusiasm and to a defence by land, to shore batteries and platforms, and to the force which ought only to be considered as the left hand of our might!

All that day the King and his brother the Duke rode up and down the city and suburbs, encouraging the people, and receiving encouragement, confidence, and hope from the people. The King was serious and earnest, showing that he well knew how to attend to business and to do the duties of a sovereign and a soldier; yet, it is said, that on returning from his visit to the city he laughed at the danger and dismay, and was very cheerful that night at supper with his mistresses and buffoons—which caused some to compare him to Nero singing and playing while the city of Rome was burning.

On the following day it was rumoured that not

only all the train-bands, but also all the regular troops in and about London, were to be marched forthwith to Rochester and Chatham. Many persons now conceived that it was the intention of government to ruin the city and give it up to be utterly undone by the Dutch, and the more timid sort were all thrown into fresh consternation. This was not confined within the barrier of Temple Bar. Alarm, accompanied by a dejection as great as their previous pride, sloth, and ignorance, prevailed among the ministers, courtiers, and servants of government; and those few of them who had any property to take care of, were as eager as the citizens to get it removed to a distance. The Lords of Council were ready to fall together by the ears, none knowing which way to turn themselves, and every one endeavouring to throw the blame of what had happened upon somebody else. There was hardly any money in the exchequer; the commissioners and officers of the navy were reporting that without large sums nothing could be done, and the seamen could not be prevented from running to the Dutch: there was no chance of obtaining money without assembling a parliament, and ministers dreaded the parliament as much as the Dutch, thinking it impossible but that the vengeance of the House of Commons would be directed against themselves, and against the scoundrels and fools they had put in employment, as soon as it should be assembled.

And what was our friend Mr. Pepys, Clerk of the Acts of the Navy, and one of the very best and honestest of the public officials connected with the navy, doing at this crisis? Why Pepys was thinking that things looked very sadly, and had

been managed very badly; was thanking his stars that at this time of danger he was placed at the Navy-office in Crutched Friars rather than at the Dockyard at Chatham; and yet was wondering how the exasperated people did not set fire to his office, and tear him and his colleagues to pieces—"for" as he said to himself, "I do think that in any nation but ours, men that appear so faulty as we would have their throats cut." He was secreting the best of his goods and chattels in his snug strong house in Seething-lane; was removing his money from his bankers and goldsmiths; was getting his silver changed into more portable gold; and was hammering his brain to hit upon the safest means of sending his father and his wife, and his faithful servant William Hewer, off into the country with some thousands of pounds in coined gold, which they were to bury in the earth in the most retired part of the retired tailor's little garden. But when Samuel Pepys had seen to his own private interests, and concealed three hundred broad pieces in his girdle to have ready in case of emergency; and had, with his usual cunning or address, taken measures for concealing and securing his property and all his money (which he had rapidly accumulated by means of official fees, or commission or brokerage upon the selling of places, or upon government contracts with the navy), he attended solely to the duties of his office, and gave his country the benefit of some of his ingenuity and talent for business. He was active in hiring fire-ships, in reasoning with the sailors, and in sending off expresses to naval commanders in different parts of the kingdom; and although Samuel did make one or two of these couriers carry some

of his gold into the country for him, and drop it in passing at his father's—and although it appears doubtful whether he would have despatched the said couriers at all if it had not been for this private object—he soothed his conscience by thinking and saying that the King's service might be benefited hereby, forasmuch as it was possible in the hurry of business they might not have thought of it at court, and the expense of sending an express was not considerable to the King's majesty. We have said that the nerves of the Clerk of the Acts of the Navy were not heroically strung; and albeit he had been twice at sea for a short period with his patron my Lord Sandwich, Pepys was not a practical seaman. His proper and best place, too, was at the Navy-office, where there was no other good man of business, and where but for him the confusion would have been even worse confounded than it was. Yet one day Pepys had gone down to Gravesend within ear-shot of the Dutch guns, and had looked with a pitying or contemptuous eye upon the fooleries of the idle lords and young gentlemen that were manning the batteries there. He and Sir J. Minnes had also succeeded that day in obtaining some money, and had partly paid some of the crews of the ships that were lying at Deptford and Erith. "But, good Lord," said Pepys to himself, "how backwardly things do move at this pinch! We ourselves have been so long used to be idle and in despair, that we know not what to do; and the poor sailors that are ashore have been so long used to be deceived by us as to money, that they won't believe our promises, or come to us now that we have really got some money to give them! It is an admirable

thing to consider how much king and country suffer hereby, and how necessary it is in a state to keep the king's ships always in a good posture and credit!"

On his return up the river Pepys had given a few thoughts to his worthy friends at Erith. "I wonder," said he to himself, "how it fares with Sir John Roundtree, who hath been so misused aforetime by the court that it is a marvel he, at his time of life, should put on harness or give himself any concern for the King's majesty. I wish he were safely back again. I wish (for Pepys, even on a day of national calamity and disgrace could not help dwelling occasionally upon his own little schemes), I wish I could get Sir John Roundtree to trust me with the making of a good match for his ward, for I do think that mistress Marion,—a maiden of most excellent features, and Lord! what a pretty fortune,—would well suit one of my Lord Brouncker's sons, or one of Sir William Coventry's nephews, or one of Commissioner Petts' brothers; and if we are not torn to pieces, and the state do get out of this present trouble, mayhap some match may be made at the Navy Board for Marion Hemingford, and not without some solatium or credit to Samuel Pepys. I have been lucky at such work before now. Who was it but I, Samuel Pepys, that commenced, carried on, and finally concluded the marriage between my Lord Sandwich's eldest daughter, the Lady Jem, and the eldest son of Sir George Carteret, that lives over the water there at Dagenham? Aye, who was it that took the young and rich Mr. Carteret to his first wooing? And Lord! what silly discourse we had as to love-matters, he being the most awkward man I ever met with in

my life as to that business! And who was it that taught the young man what to do, and how to take the young lady always by the hand, and what to say to her, and how to discourse with her father and mother and her uncles and aunts. I'faith, Mr. Carteret was so backward in his caresses, and so awkward, that I did nearly all the wooing for him myself. It was I that got the licence and bought the wedding-ring in London, where the plague was raging at the time. For a wedding it was but dull. But the modesty and gravity of that business was so decent, that it was ten times more delightful to me than twenty times the merriment and jollity would have been. True, the bridegroom was but a laggard. Ha! ha! but it is not given to all men to be so brisk as Samuel Pepys; at times I do wonder how a tailor could ever have been my father. True again, that my Lady Jem was mighty sad on the wedding-day, and has never been very merry since; but then, where could she have got so rich and safe a husband as I found her, and her father and mother forced her to take? She has six horses to her coach any day she likes; and Marion Hemingford may soon do the same, if we can but drive that young Roundhead, Walter Wynton, out of her conceit, and bring Sir John Roundtree to reason. Of my Lady Roundtree we are sure."

And, in fact, her ladyship had already opened the whole of Marion's little story, and the story of Walter and the duel, or, as her ladyship called it, foul and rebellious murder, to Pepys and his wife, together with the plans she had long entertained of matching Marion to greatness.

"I wonder," said Pepys, returning to his match-

making cogitations, "what hath become of mine old acquaintance Mrs. Carter, who hath lived with my Lady Sandwich these fifteen years or more, and the sum of all whose discourse and others for her at the wooing-time at Dagenham was that I would get her a good husband—which I promised to do, but have not been able to get done. I must see to that. Perhaps, Sir John Roundtree's head man hath no wife. Mrs. Carter, thou shalt be thought of. It is rather lucky that master Walter hath gotten into this trouble. If my wife does not make maid Marion fall in love with a town-life, and plays, and fine clothes, and grand equipages, then my name is not Samuel Pepys, or the case is hopeless. But, Lord! here am I making fine schemes with a sword over my head, and the country in danger, and this shame hanging upon it! Bessy, dear, Will Hewer, I would fain know how ye are speeding with the money-bags. May the night be dark when ye hide the gold—

'Come thick night—'

as the players say."

It was well for Marion that Pepys's anxieties about his money, and his numerous occupations, and the absence for several days of Mrs. Pepys from London, stopped the current of the matrimonial scheme, as otherwise she might have been more annoyed than she was. For nearly a week the Clerk of the Acts was too busy to do more than pay a flying visit to the ladies in the Minories; but he put a trusty and knowing servant in attendance on them, and they were otherwise well taken care of by their host and hostess. One day, when the troops had all marched, and the town seemed very

quiet, Lady Roundtree must needs go to the court end of town to see what was doing on the Mall and in the parks, and to try if she could not get a glimpse of my Lady Castlemaine's laced smocks, which, as Sir Ralph Spicer had assured her, were frequently hung out at the back of her lodging in the Privy Garden. Marion, whose heart was too sad to think of amusement, and whose taste was too good to find it in the frivolities which pleased her ladyship, and who thought it a sin to seek for pleasure in the midst of a national calamity, and while her kind old guardian was exposed to danger, and her own true love a fugitive, begged to stay at home with the good hostess, and was at last allowed so to do, though not without sundry strong expressions of her ladyship's astonishment and displeasure. Her ladyship set forth in a hired vehicle, attended by the host, the butler, her own woman, and two of Sir John's Kentish footmen, so that in point of attendance at least she made a considerable show. When she returned she was in an ecstasy at all that she had seen, and wondered how she could have supported life so long in such a clownish dismal place as Erith. Marion handed her a letter which she had just received from a messenger dispatched by her guardian. Her ladyship threw the letter upon the table and said, "Sir John, thou art a fool, and I have been a fool in being so submissive a wife! But I will bear it no longer. A mouthful of court air hath put a new spirit into me, and I will do as other ladies do—I will live a month every year in London, though we should part company, Sir John Roundtree." This idea was so uppermost in her mind, that it was some time before her ladyship would read the

knight's letter, or hear Marion read it to her. At last, however, she said—"Child, tell me what Sir John saith; my eyes are somewhat tired with the splendour of the sights I have seen, and the old gentleman writes but a crabbed hand." Marion almost smiled inwardly, knowing that her ladyship was no great adept at reading any kind of writing; but she instantly broke open the seal and read with a right joyous heart that her guardian was in good health and condition; that he had done some little service in carrying some brave Kentish lads with some arms and stores to Chatham, and in calling out the Kentish militia; that as the Dutch had quitted the Medway after doing all the harm they could, he had come back across the country to Gravesend, where he now was at the head of a band of volunteers, to assist in erecting batteries, and to be ready to march to any point on the banks of the Thames, into which river the Dutch had again sent some of their ships. The knight further said that he had been to his house at Erith, and had found all things there in good order, and as he had left them, except only that the monkey which Sir Ralph Spicer had given to her ladyship was no more. "That mischievous ape," said Sir John, "after getting loose into the flower-garden, and destroying all Marion's pretty flowers, was found one morning hanging from an apple-tree at the end of his own chain; but whether he met his fate at the hands of Hodge the gardener, or hanged himself in a fit of spleen brought on by the solitude of the place, I have not been at the trouble to determine." Here her ladyship interrupted the reading of the letter by saying that it was all the doing of that monster Hodge, and that he ought

to be hanged for it. "And," continued Marion, reading the knight's letter, "as that outlandish talking-bird was reported to me and proved by mine own ears, to be much addicted to speak evil words, and indecent, and such as ill-befit a virtuous and delicate maiden to hear, I have thought fit to send it to Mike Woodenspoon, our barber and constable, who hath engaged to teach the bird better things." "Poor dear Sir Ralph!" exclaimed her ladyship, clasping her hands and almost wringing them; "little didst thou think that thy dear, pretty, mischievous monkey would be hanged like a common thief, and thy pretty prattling bird be given over to a common village barber! 'Tis almost enough to make thee rise from thy gory bed! Ah! ah! Sir John, this is tyranny such as no town-living dame would bear. But read on, tell me more of my wrongs. . . . But child, what ails thee? Why art so mute? Why so red and now so pale? Why dost drop the letter? Nay, sweet Marion, what is it stops thy breath thus? Is there a sequel of woe? Does the letter end in bad news from my husband? God forefend!"

Her ladyship's better feelings had now the upper hand, and thinking no more about courts and parks, or Spicers, apes, parrots, or any other mean thing, she clasped Marion in her arms, who was near fainting and falling upon the floor, and called aloud for help and for vinegar, and cold water and burnt feathers, and prayed an audible and most fervent prayer that no evil might befall her good knight, her kind and indulgent husband. Marion drank of some water and was well again without further aid. Her ladyship took up the letter she had let fall, but not being able to read

it, she laid it upon the table and implored Marion to tell her the worst of the news that was in it, and not to conceal anything from her.

"There follows no news but good news," said Marion.

"Then why that tremor and that faint?" said her ladyship.

"Bid these good people leave the room, and I will read the rest of the letter," said Marion with a deep blush.

The two handmaidens and the kind hostess who had run at her ladyship's loud call, quitted the room; and then, with many more blushes, Marion read a post-scriptum to the knight's letter, which was considerably longer than the letter itself, and which related with honest warmth the noble exploits performed by Walter Wynton and Tom of the Woods in the improvised battery on the Medway.

"These things," said the knight, "were specially brought to my knowledge by an honourable Kentish gentleman, who saw master Walter running from the fame he had earned, and by a general officer of high repute, who saith so good a deed hath not been done in war; and I also, from the cherry-orchards of Gillingham, did see with mine own eyes Van Ghent put to his wits' end, and his ships brought to a dead stop, and then well hammered on their ribs by that little battery, albeit I little thought that master Walter was there. Whither he hath now betaken himself I know not. But this I do know, that, though he may think otherwise, he hath no longer any evil consequences to fear from the affair on Plumstead Common. None of the courtiers and officers of whom I have

had speech know anything of that duello, or care one straw for what hath befallen my unwise and unlucky kinsman Sir Ralph—whose sins may the Lord forgive!—and the Duke of Albemarle and all the great Lords know all about the battery. Moreover, the father of this youth, Captain Wynton, against whom I have been too uncharitable and unneighbourly in the days that are past, hath comported himself most manfully, and like a man whose heart was all for his country. Sick and feeble as he was, and grieving as he was for the flight of his only son, and exasperated, as he tells me, he was, by the belief that the courtiers would accuse that honourable youth of a foul murder, he went down to the king's ships at Deptford that morning we left Erith, and, by presents of money and the old influence he had over the minds of the seamen, he got many to return to their duty, and so got some few of the ships in a condition to fight the enemy. And since that day the said Captain Wynton hath travailed day and night in the good cause; and albeit he hath not been able to prevent many evil and silly things which have been done by order of some of our great men, he hath himself planned and executed nearly everything that hath been well done. Having with mine own eyes seen much of this, I could no longer refuse the hand of friendship—and Wynton and I are friends. He is now lying in the Hope with a few well-manned and well-governed ships, the which, though not by warrant or commission under his command, will certainly obey no orders but his. I would we could know where his son hath bestowed himself."

Before the over-delighted and agitated Marion

had finished reading this long postscript, her fears having all vanished, her ladyship had relapsed into her bad humour. She had never liked Walter, chiefly because he had never flattered her; and she could not forgive him for killing Sir Ralph, who had flattered her to her heart's content. She saw in the sudden friendship between Sir John and the Roundhead captain a bar to her great scheme for marrying Marion to a lord. But, just as she was on the point of giving expression to some of her displeasure, voices were heard on the stairs saying, "Mrs. Pepys, 'tis the sweet Mrs. Pepys;" and in the next instant the gay and pretty wife of the Clerk of the Acts of the Navy swam into the room. She had just returned from the country, which she liked no more than Lady Roundtree did; and was very cheerful and talkative, for she had got all the gold safely buried in her father-in-law's garden; and she had bought a span new dress, and Pepys had just vowed that he had never seen her look so handsome in all his born days.

Mrs. Pepys was not a person to be disliked, for herself, by any; one but Marion had seen ladies she liked much better (though good-natured, she was so worldly, and so vain and fine and wordy); and though of a forgiving nature, she could not quite pardon her for certain reflections she had let drop in her hearing upon the subject of matrimony. On the other side, Lady Roundtree was perfectly fascinated with Pepys's wife. Marion soon withdrew and left them together. Her ladyship told her dear friend all about the post-scriptum to Sir John's letter, and made a mournful comment upon it. Mrs. Pepys applied her ingenuity to dissipate this

uneasiness. "'Tis certainly unlucky," said she, "that these things should have befallen. But, after all that may be said and done, the young Roundhead may not find it so easy to get the King's pardon for slaying a courtier and gallant like Sir Ralph Spicer. So cheer up, my lady."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PROPHET COME TO TOWN.

Tom of the Woods did not recover quite so soon as he and his friends expected. For several days he suffered a slow fever, and even when that was gone, something more difficult to cure remained behind; for a bullet which had entered at his shoulder, had lodged in such a way that our not very skilful Kentish mediciners could not get at it. Walter and Will Gaff attended on him with great care and affection. One day, after a good sound doze, Tom said to Walter, who was alone with him in the room—"I have been dreaming a dream, in which it was made appear that the whole of my life since the day I got this deep cut across my brow has been nothing but a dream. Master Walter, give me those good housewife shears, that I may cut off this beard; for I will be a prophet and hermit no longer; but try and think and live like other men. I fear that in the time of my illusion I may have said and done presumptuous and unholy things; but 't was this wound, master Walter, 't was this hurt on the brain, and then the harrowings and persecutions I met with. But 't is over now—I feel as if something had been taken out of my head—so give me the shears, and let me destroy this evidence of my past madness."

Seeing that he was perfectly reasonable and composed, Walter handed him the scissors, and between them the long beard was presently cut off.

When Will Gaff came in to relieve guard by the bedside, he saw Tom sitting up in his bed, and his beard lying on the floor at the bed-foot. Will could scarcely believe his eyes; and so he rubbed them and looked again, first at Tom, and next at the floor. There was no mistake—here lay the grey tresses of the beard, and there was Tom without his beard. So Will gave a whistle and a tug to either side of his nethermost garment, and then said—"Singe me, old Tom, but now you look like a Christian, and like other people! But let me finish you off with a clean shave. I always shaved my mess when I was afloat, and the ship chaplain and the purser to boot."

Tom gladly assented; and with the well-sharpened razors of the Kentish farmer, Will Gaff shaved the ex-prophet to perfection. Of late Will had only practised upon the stubble of his own chin; and he was so proud of this performance, that he vowed he had got at Tom's bristles a day's march behind the skin. Then he gazed at Tom as a curious connoisseur would look at a picture; and after another whistle, he said that he could hardly have thought that the old chap had been so handsome.

For some time before this Walter had seen symptoms of a returning sanity in the doughty old trooper. This might have been partly caused by the very copious blood-letting which Tom had got in the fight outside the battery. The wound across the opposite side of the head may also have done some good; as men whose intellects have been

injured by one wound in that important region, have been known to recover their wits years after in consequence of a second wound there. But Walter preferred believing that the excitement of patriotism had quieted the stimulus of insanity and fanaticism, and that Tom's mind, being suddenly thrown upon a new object, and kept to that one object for two or three days—which had been days of most active operation and brave doings—had been enabled to recover the balance which had been so long lost. But perhaps, after all, Will Gaff's explanation of the phenomenon was the best. "Our friend Tom, d'ye see (Will used to say afterwards), never hid a black heart under his hatches, like Joel Wyke, and so he has always had a friend up aloft; and so, d'ye see, in good time he hath been brought back to his senses."

One thing was quite certain—Tom was now as sane as most men, and a great deal saner than many great men who then mismanaged and disgraced poor old England. As he continued to suffer much inconvenience from the ball, and as no chirurgeon could be found in those parts skilful enough to extract it, Walter resolved to have him conveyed to London; and as soon as he seemed able to bear the journey, Tom was laid in a horse-litter. If they had fallen among a people less kind-hearted or less well-to-do in the world than these good Kentish men of the Hundred of Hoo, there might have been sundry impediments offered to their proceeding; for master Walter had been lightened of his purse while in the mob at Ratcliffe Highway, and he, Tom, and Will Gaff had not a stiver among them. But his kind host and neighbours gladly lent Walter twenty good guineas, and

clothes and horses for the journey, refusing to take a note for the amount. Some of the best of them would have accompanied the party; but as the Dutch fleet was still lying at the Nore, Walter recommended them to stop at home and attend to the defence of their families and property. "Well!" said the honest yeomen, "it shall be as it pleases you; we have kept your secret while you have been here; but if you should want friends to speak out and up for you in London or elsewhere, even if it should be in the presence of the black-faced chap at Whitehall, we will all come at your call."

The party then set off, the ex-prophet being carried in the litter, and Walter and Gaff being well mounted. The deficient parts of their wardrobe had been made up by the farmers, so that both the young gentleman and the tarpaulin had a slouched hat and a good serge doublet. Walter on his Kentish nag, and in this attire, might have passed very well for a young farmer; but as for Will Gaff—there was hardly any saying what he could pass for, for the sailor part of him could not be disguised, and he managed his horse as if he had been steering a ship. Avoiding the frequented roads as much as was possible, they shaped their course for Erith. They knew how to get quiet accommodation among sure friends in the neighbourhood of that place, and it was doubtful whether poor Tom could bear a longer journey in one day. But it must not be concealed, that Walter on his own private account wished to stop at Erith, whither he half hoped that Sir John Roundtree and Marion had returned. They were kindly entertained in the cottage of a woodman, an old and fast friend of Tom, who did not cease to be a friend

—as there were many that did—because Tom had ceased to be a prophet. In the dusk of that evening, Walter and Will Gaff, with their slouched hats pulled well over their faces, went into the village in quest of information; for, with the blood of Sir John's kinsman upon his head, Walter felt that he could not present himself at the good knight's house.

"There sits a barber at his shop-door," said Will; "and in whatsoever land I have been the barber is the best of gossips."

"'Tis Mike Woodenspoon, the constable," said Walter; "and Mike knows my voice too well for any dress or darkness to disguise me."

"Then do you stay where you are, and I will hail him," said Will.

Mike, who was busied in teaching a better vocabulary to the parrot, was presently accosted by Gaff, who went to work with more ingenuity than might have been expected from him. After replying to Mike's professional question, whether he should trim his beard, Will entered into a dissertation upon the art of shaving in general; and told the Erith professor that his own father had been one of the first men of England at taking off other men's beards, and that he himself had been in a manner bred to the profession: and when Mike's heart began to open, Will offered to show him a trick of shaving he had learned up the Arches among the Turks—"who be (said Will) the best shavers in the world, although they shave the crown of their heads instead of their chins." Mike was so pleased that he sent for a cup of good ale; and over this beverage Gaff got all the information that he, or rather master Walter,

wanted; the cream of it being that mistress Marion and Lady Roundtree were comfortably lodged at the hostel in the Minories, and that Sir John Roundtree and Captain Wynton, and all manner of honourable gentlemen, were down at Gravesend making the defences of the river so strong that there could be no more fear of the Dutch coming up.

On the following morning, at a very early hour, the journey was resumed. Our travellers could no longer shun observation, for every road and path was thronged, and militia and other troops were marching and countermarching in all directions. Tom in his litter, however, was taken to be some poor sailor wounded in the affair at the Medway; so few questions were put, and no interruption offered to the progress of the party by any one. It grieved Walter to go through Charlton without riding aside to his father's house to tell the servants that he was alive and well; but as he knew that his father's housekeeper was almost as great a gossip as Mike Woodenspoon, and as the village was crowded with court gallants and officers of the King's guard, he thought it best to bring the flap of his farmer's hat still more over his face, and to push forward as quickly as the motion of Tom's horse-litter would allow. Since quitting his concealment in the Hundred of Hoo, Walter's heart had been gladdened by the reports he heard of the patriotism, activity, and unanimity of all classes of the nation; but upon Blackheath he saw and heard that which convinced him the madness and immorality of the times were not cured in all quarters. At a sort of encampment the soldiers of the King's guards were reviling some of the train-bands of the

city, and calling them cuckolds, Roundheads, and crop-ears. Some of these guardsmen were singing in insulting chorus—

"My lord mayor and ye aldermen,
Your gowns must make ye breeches;
And if ye do retort agen,
We 'll make you eat your speeches.
O brave common-council-men!
O brave trained bands!
What! do you think to get again
The staff in your own hands?"

Even some of the officers of the guards were joining their men in these indecorous exercises of the tongue.

"'T is well for these profligate gallants," said Tom, rising in his litter, "that old Skippon is not here."

"But Skippon, or no Skippon," said Will, "those citizens would not stand it if they were not so few."

As our friends were descending Greenwich Hill they overtook a few sailors and petty officers, who were walking leisurely towards London; and Gaff, asking them what cheer, they fell into talk.

"Never was worse cheer," said one of the petty officers, an old man with a shrewd countenance. "Never was worse cheer for England! I have weathered many a gale in my time, but this last will be the death of me."

"Tut! Shipmate," said Will, "talk not of dying! Our flag shall be made clean again, man. This present ruffle is over. At least the Thames is made safe."

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no," said the other. "I

take it, it is pretty much as de Ruyter and Van Ghent may chance to be daring or over-cautious. In thine ear, friend, I may tell thee that, with half their force, they might yet come up this river and burn every ship in it, in spite of all the ships that have been sunk by our land-admirals."

"'Tis a cruel pass indeed," said Will Gaff, "when Englishmen sink their ships instead of fighting them."

"The sights I have seen down yonder," said the old boatswain, "be enough to drive an old sailor stark mad. Nothing all day but patteraro batteries, and horse-soldiers and foot-soldiers scrimmaging about, and a set of debauched, damning, swearing rogues of young officers and lordlings, doing or ordering all that ought not to be done. This is a sad instance of the condition we are in!"

"But," said Walter, "there be now officers who know their business, and men of worshipful behaviour."

"Aye!" said the boatswain, "but they cannot undo what hath been done. Prince Rupert, who may be a very good officer of horse, for all that I know to the contrary, has been sinking ships at Deptford, Woolwich, and elsewhere, where they offer no impediment at high-water; and such hath been the confusion among the King's people, that instead of taking unfinished vessels, or old ones of small value, they have scuttled and sunk some of the most precious ships in the river, and sundry which had been completely fitted out for fire-ships at great charge, and which, if they had been sent down at the proper time, would have singed the Dutchman's beard. They have sunk the 'Frank-

lin,' one of the King's ships, which had long been loaded for supply of other ships with stores to a great value; they have scuttled another ship with a rich cargo on board, and have made the same use of a fine foreign and neutral vessel, that had the faith of the nation for her security. Worse than this, they were going to make a bridge of boats for the passage of cavalry, as though the river and the shipping were to be defended by troops of horse."

"Well," said Gaff, "mad as they may be at Whitehall, surely some of these fools will pay for it."

"Not they," said the boatswain; "every one of them will say that he acted under orders; and those who gave the orders and made these precious plans will severally deny what they have done, and throw the blame each man from his own shoulders to those of somebody else; and in truth they were all commanding and ordering together. And the big Lords be too big to be touched, and too strong at court: perchance they may overhaul some poor devil of a captain or third-rate commissioner-man, but that will be all, take my word for it."

"But I know what they deserve," said Gaff, "and what those deserve who stopped the pay of the seamen and advised his Majesty to fit out no fleet this spring."

Quoth the old petty officer, "And so do I—a coil of rope at the yard-arm for the worst of them, and the capstan, bilboes, ducking, and keel-hauling for the rest of them. The dishonour they have brought upon us is never to be wiped off."

On drawing near London-bridge it was necessary for our travellers to settle where they should take up their abode, a point which had not yet been determined. As none of them knew much

about town, and as the greater part of what they had known of the city had been burned down by the great fire, they were somewhat puzzled. As concealment was still held to be necessary, every common tavern-keeper was not to be trusted. Tom said that they might still find quarters at Hiram Bingley's; but Walter could not for a moment think of returning to that cave of fanatics and conspirators, nor did Tom upon reflection relish the idea. At last Will Gaff bethought him of a house of entertainment in Water-lane, which was kept by the mother of one of his old shipmates.

"'Tis but a poorish place for a gentleman of quality like you, master Walter," said Will; "but mother Sherman is a clean and notable woman, and as trusty and honest a soul as ever broke bread."

Walter thought this house would do very well, for it was near the Minories, whither he had resolved to repair in his disguise as soon as he should see Tom comfortably lodged and attended to. Poor Tom, who was suffering considerable pain from his jolting, was only anxious to get to a bed somewhere. The party therefore made for mother Sherman's with all the speed they could.

In the narrowest part of Old Tower-street, near the end of Mark-lane and the ancient church of Allhallows Barking, they were brought to a sudden stop by some carts and trucks which were carrying stores to the Tower, and which completely blocked up the way, so that neither the litter nor a single horse could pass. Walter dismounted to see whether he could induce the drivers to move on or make room for him, and was in the act of addressing a few courteous words to the men, when he heard a voice which made him start as "the

cry of fire" makes men start "in populous cities." It was a voice blustering and swearing in the rear of the horse-litter, and cursing Will Gaff for blocking up the way to men of honour and office; to which Will was replying by pointing forward to the carts and trucks that seemed wheel-locked and wedged all together. Retracing the few steps he had made on foot, Walter saw in the middle of the narrow way, just behind the litter—Sir Ralph Spicer and another gentleman in a stupendous periwig. Somewhat thinner he was and paler than he had been on Plumstead Common; but still he was visibly and unmistakably Sir Ralph Spicer, in broad daylight, and with nothing ghostly about him, for the paleness of his face was relieved by the redness of his nose, and by that thin streak of red across the cheek-bone which rarely forsakes men addicted to strong drinks. Yet as Walter recalled the last thrust he had given him, and his fall into that deep pit, he thought that he must be deceived by some extraordinary resemblance of voice and person—that this impatient and swaggering cavaliero might be some twin-brother of Sir Ralph. But poor Tom, who had raised himself in the litter at the first sound of the well-remembered voice, and who was looking steadfastly at the cavalier, said, as Walter came up to him—"'Tis the Lord's doing, and wonderful in mine eyes; but, as I live, here's the courtier you vanquished and left in the gravel-pit; and seemingly not much the worse for the hole you drilled through him."

Walter continued gazing at the knight, from whom he was not three yards distant: he could not take his eyes off his face to look at his companion

or at any other object; but presently the gentleman in the ambrosial locks said, in a good tempered persuasive tone—"Patience, Sir Ralph Spicer—patience, dear Sir Ralph, these fellows cannot move out of our way until the carts get out of their way. We had better turn back and take another road, for I should not like to soil my best suit. We shall get to the Minories by the time the ladies are ready to receive us."

"Stop!" cried Walter, springing towards them, and nearly overturning the litter.

"What would'st thou, young man?" said the gentleman in the periwig, whom Walter had now time to recognise as Mr. Pepys, but of whom he took no further heed.

"Sir Ralph Spicer," said Walter, grasping the cavalier's arm, as if to assure himself still further that this was no vision, "I am glad to see you thus! Do you not know me?"

"Sirrah!" quoth Sir Ralph, "I have no acquaintance with men of your classis. Take your hand from my arm; this familiarity ill-becomes one of your condition."

Walter, who had spoken in a husky voice very unlike his ordinary one, still grasped the cavalier's arm, but, in an instant or two, recollecting himself, and what coat and hat he had got on, he let go the arm, and taking off his slouched Kentish felt and looking the Knight close in the face, he said—"Do you know me now, Sir Ralph? Have you forgotten Plumstead Common?"

The cavalier stept back several paces, saying nothing and looking somewhat sheepish; but Pepys said, "As I live, 'tis master Walter Wynton, of whom there hath been evil report as well as good."

Giving only a slight nod of recognition to Pepys, whose countenance was rather confused, Walter stepped up to the cavalier, who now leaned against the wall of a house with his hand not upon, yet not far from, the hilt of his sword.

"You know me now, Sir Ralph," said Walter; "and I say again, I am glad to see you here, for much as you had wronged me, your life-blood lay heavy on my soul. Only cross not my path again, and have a care of what you do and say there in the Minories."

"Mr. Wynton," said the knight, "you had me at a vantage—my nerves were out of order that morning, and my foot slipped on the heath, and....."

"If you are not satisfied, Sir Ralph," said Walter, "we had better meet again in a more regular manner and in place of your own choosing; for, though I like not these duellos when my head is cool, I will bear no slur upon my honour. If there was vantage or foul play, 't was all on your side, and you know it."

"It was so, and I was witness thereunto," said Tom, looking out of the litter, and looking so ghastly pale that Pepys almost shuddered at the sight of him.

Sir Ralph, who had not the remotest wish to measure swords again, and who felt it would be useless to try and play the bully, said he thought it would be better to let the matter remain where it was, as a recent court of honour had decided it would be wrong to fight twice in one quarrel. Pepys said he was most decidedly of the same opinion; and that, as a mob of people was gathering round them, they had better part. The Clerk of

the Acts was indeed very anxious to be gone, no man loving discord less, or hating fighting more, than he did. But Tom, who had heard every word, and who knew Pepys's intermeddling character, and the reasons which Walter had for disliking Sir Ralph's visit to the Minories, said he had a word to speak in Mr. Pepys's ear, of great concernment—a secret to tell him which none else must hear. Pepys did not much relish the looks of such an interlocutor, but the bait of a secret was what he could never resist; so, upon assurances from Will Gaff, who was holding the horses, that the sick man was in a sound state of mind, the Clerk of the Acts leaned his head over the litter.

"Samuel Pepys! Oh, Samuel!" said Tom, in a solemn and awful whisper: "Thou art a great man now, and a loyal, and all for king and high church; but dost remember the thirtieth of January, and 'Let the memory of the wicked perish?'"

"Hush!" said Pepys, trembling in his shoes; "hush, man, there be things not to be said even in a whisper! But how camest thou by that knowledge? What art thou?"

"A very lowly man," said Tom, "but one who well knew both thee and thy father the tailor, and who knows others who knew ye both well when ye used to bring home General Harrison's breeches, and make such speeches among the Lord Protector's people that all men took ye for the hottest....."

"Name it not, friend," said Pepys, who had a cold sweat on his brow; "name it not to living man. I will give thee gold to keep this secret."

"Samuel Pepys," said Tom, "I want not money—I care not for thy gold, and thou canst best

tell whether it hath been honestly come by. But listen! Cast loose this reprobate, Sir Ralph. No more of thy match-makings, or thy doings like those at Dagenham, or I will proclaim all that I know of thee by sound of trumpet on Tower Hill!"

"Lord! Lord!" said Pepys, shaking all over like a jelly; "but how camest thou to the knowledge of all this? Who and what art thou?"

"I am he that was Tom of the Woods."

Pepys trembled still more, and the sweat on his brow was colder.

"Friend Pepys," cried Sir Ralph, who was very impatient to be gone, "what are you talking so long about with that sick man, who perhaps hath the plague upon him."

At any other time the word plague would have made Pepys scamper; but now he stood where he was by the litter, and after saying, "Anon, anon," to Sir Ralph, he whispered to Tom, "Friend, I will purchase thy silence with any service that I can do: but prithee what else dost thou know of me?"

"Much," said Tom, "much; but especially this, that thou art a great coward; and from this one fact I feel assured that thou wilt not risk exposure in provoking my sure vengeance by intermeddling in the concerns of master Walter Wynton and mistress Marion Hemingford."

"Friend," said Pepys, "only keep my secret, and I will never thwart master Walter in anything, but befriend him where I may."

"'Tis a compact between me and thee," said Tom; "so go and leave me; for although there is no further need for master Walter to hide himself,

I must not have it known just yet where I am about to abide.....There be warrants out against me."

"We will get them called in," said Pepys; "but nobody will think about them now, so fear nothing, my dear friend. If you should need aid, I live hard by, in Seething Lane."

"I know it," said Tom; "but leave me. The carts are clearing away, and we may now pass; so while we go this way, do you go *that*."

Obeying Tom's signal, Pepys darted up Mark Lane, being closely followed by Sir Ralph, who for some seconds past had been foaming with impatience. Our cavalcade moved onward, and soon came to Mother Sherman's, where the ci-devant prophet amused Walter with an account of his whispered colloquy with the Clerk of the Acts. "Perhaps," said Tom, "it needed not; yet still it may be well to have Pepys for a friend, he is such a shifty and clever man; and I could not withstand the temptation of bringing down his crest, especially as he seemed to be inclined to be less courteous to you, master Walter, than he ought to have been."

A good room, with a down bed in it, was procured for the wounded man, and a stable hard by for the horses. Walter's next care was to get a proper surgeon. A messenger and a fee soon brought one of the best in the city; and, before Tom had been two hours under the roof of Mother Sherman, the ball, to his instant relief, was removed, and proper medicament applied.

Then, leaving the invalid to enjoy rest and sleep, Walter sallied forth with Will Gaff to purchase some linen and clothes. The coat and beaver,

which Walter procured ready-made, would not have satisfied the critical eye of Samuel Pepys; but Walter, who was never very fastidious about these things, was in a great hurry to reach the hostel in the Minories, and so put on the first decent coat and hat he could find. While he was equipping himself at the tailor's, the Tower guns were heard firing, and proclamation was made in the streets, that five of his Majesty's ships, led on by Captain Wynton, had chased twenty Dutch men-of-war from the Lower Hope, and had burned one of them.

"This is a blessed omen," said Walter.

CHAPTER XII.

DOMESTIC PEACE AFTER WAR AND SHAME.

On the day preceding our hero's arrival in town, Pepys had been thrown into consternation, by learning that Commissioner Phineas Pett had been arrested and thrown into the Tower. Fearing that the same measure would be dealt to others, the Clerk of the Acts had hurried to Whitehall to speak with his patrons and protectors, and to provide by other means against the storm. To his no small astonishment, the first man he had met in the matted gallery had been Sir Ralph Spicer. Sir Ralph's story had been soon told. That worthy knight had been so fortunate as to fall upon a soft place—upon the sand, rather than upon the gravel, of that broad and deep Plumstead pit; and although Walter's sword had nearly gone through him, it had touched no vital part. Faittout had soon run to his assistance, as had also some gravel-diggers who occupied an almost invisible little hut inside the pit. By their means the blood was stanched, and the fainting knight brought to himself. The pit-men had a dapple donkey, and upon this unchivalrous animal Sir Ralph had been conveyed from Plumstead Common to Charlton Place, where Sir William Ducie, the city knight, who was aspiring after court honours and loftier titles, had given him a tolerably hospitable reception; Sir Ralph having

contrived to convince him, as he had done so many others, that his influence at Whitehall, and especially among the King's women, was great. A tolerably good surgeon had been brought from the neighbouring town of Greenwich; and under his hands the cavalier's wound had been healed in about a fortnight, during the greater part of which time he had the fine house at Charlton nearly all to himself, as Sir William had been called to the field with some of the Kentish militia. This story had been soon told to Pepys, who, in return, had told Sir Ralph of the whereabout of Lady Roundtree and Marion; and as the Clerk of the Acts had met with an encouraging reception at court, and had been so brought back to the cheerful, social humour which was natural to him, he had readily engaged to conduct Sir Ralph to the Minories, and present him to the ladies as one risen from the dead. But Pepys, always cautious, had put off this visit for the following day, in order to have time to prepare the ladies' nerves.—"For," said he, "were we to go at once, they might take you for a ghost, my dear Sir Ralph; and Mrs. Pepys, who is inseparable with Lady Roundtree, and who hath shed so many tears for your supposed fate, is a silly creature in some things, and somewhat subject to fits."

"And certainly," said Sir Ralph, "my too sudden appearance might be too much for the nerves of Lady Roundtree. As for mistress Marion, who must have been the means of setting that peppery young Roundhead upon me, we will not speak of her just now. But, my dear friend Pepys, you are a man of affairs, and patient and knowing in these things, and we must lay our

heads together, and get up a marriage for that saucy wench. You know her fortune, and how many young lords would snap at her. I would give her to the devil rather than that Walter Wynton should have her." "'T has been thought of already," said Pepys, "and Lady Roundtree and my wife are with us."

The day after this, Mr. Pepys and Sir Ralph had met by appointment at the Devil tavern in Fleet Street, and they were not only on their way to the Minories, but were also engaged in deep talk about Marion and her fortune, when they were brought to a stand by the stoppage in Tower Street, and to the discourse which we have reported with master Walter and Tom of the Woods.

After that talk with the ex-prophet, Pepys heartily wished Sir Ralph back at Whitehall, or anywhere but with him. He could not, however, avoid conducting the cavalier to the ladies. Marion was not in the drawing-room, having resolutely refused to see Sir Ralph. She rejoiced on Walter's account, and perhaps even a little on his own, that the insolent cavalier had not been killed, but meet him she would not. Her ladyship received Sir Ralph with ecstasy, and Mrs. Pepys was scarcely less ecstatic. But the Clerk of the Acts, at the very first opportunity, whispered to his wife, "Bessy, we must proceed no farther in this business. Walter Wynton is in possession of my secret! We must be neutral between him and this cavalier, or befriend him rather than Sir Ralph."

And from this instant Mrs. Pepys, like the dutiful wife she was, was rather cold than otherwise to Sir John's cousin; and when, after an hour's visit, and a deal of nonsensical talk, that gentle-

man took his departure, Mrs. Pepys joined her husband in making sundry moral reflections upon the looseness of his life and conversation, and told Lady Roundtree that she rather doubted whether Sir Ralph was in his right senses. Lady Roundtree, vexed at Marion's rare obstinacy in refusing to see Sir Ralph, and not over-pleased by the fact that Walter was in London and in that neighbourhood, would have concealed the intelligence for the present; but Mrs. Pepys, at her husband's bidding, said a few words to Lucy while her ladyship's back was turned, and Lucy ran up-stairs to her young mistress with the glad news.

Sir Ralph had not been gone much more than an hour when Lady Roundtree, who, with Mrs. Pepys, was looking out of the window, shouted in a glad voice, "As I live, there is Sir John on the other side of the street, and hale and well; thank God for that! . . . . . But who hath he under his arm?"—"'T is Captain Wynton," said Pepys, who had approached the window; "and only hear how the people are cheering him!" In another minute Sir John and his new friend were up-stairs and in the room. The greetings between the old knight and his wife were tender enough, and the civilities of Pepys and his spouse all that they should be. "But," said the good knight, "where is Marion? I trust in God not ill, or not . . . ." In the next instant his apprehensions were removed, for Marion, hearing the good news of his arrival, ran into the room and into his open arms, kissing his hand and next his cheek, down which some big tears were rolling. She did not recognise Captain Wynton—so long was it since she had seen him, and in that interval bad health

had greatly altered the veteran's looks;—but judge her astonishment and joy when her guardian presented to her his neighbour and now fast friend, Captain Wynton, the bravest and best man that ever wore a sword! Then followed the marvellous, and, both to the Knight and the Captain, most welcome intelligence of the resurrection of Sir Ralph Spicer, and the re-appearance in London of master Walter, which was given in a very dramatic and striking manner by our ingenious friend Pepys, who praised and applauded Walter far more than the knight had done his father.

"But where is the dear boy? Where is my long-lost only son?" said the Captain.

"I judge," said Pepys, "that he is not far off, and will soon be here, for he had the name of this house and knew who was in it; and it was no farther off than in Tower Street, and barely two hours ago that I saw him, looking as well and as handsome as ever he did in his life, although he had a felt hat on his head and only a farmer's serge coat on his back. I opine that he hath gone to equip himself in a manner more suitable to his rank. I wish I had thought of sending him to mine own tailor, Mr. Pin; but my heart was overfull with joy at seeing master Walter, and so I forgot it."

"D—n coats and tailors!" said Sir John; "I wish the boy would come as he was."

Pepys, who could never hear a tailor mentioned, and much less d—d, without some emotion, stepped aside and began to assist Lady Roundtree and his wife in mixing a welcome-cup for Sir John and Captain Wynton. It was nearly at the same nick of time that that comforting and comfortable

handmaiden Lucy came in and spoke with her young mistress, who thereupon went out to the corridor at the head of the staircase—to meet master Walter and to be recompensed in one blissful minute for all the agonies and anxieties she had suffered for weeks. She then went to her own apartment to recover her composure, and Walter went into the drawing-room to enjoy happiness scarcely less exquisite than that which he had just tasted. Marion soon re-appeared, looking, as Walter thought, more beautiful than ever he had seen her. Pepys afterwards declared that this domestic drama beat the finest play he had ever beheld upon the stage: he regretted that he had not seen the first meeting of the young hero and heroine on the staircase; but he was so much affected by the meeting of Walter and his brave old father, that he shed more tears than he had shed at the last new tragedy. He was a man of the world, it is true, but Pepys was also a man of feeling. And when he saw the quiet modest raptures of the young couple, and the tender, frank, and manly bearing of Walter, he thought of the match he had made at Dagenham, of that very poor creature the rich Mr. Carteret, and of the tears and deep sadness of Lady Jemima Montague; and his heart smote him. Mrs. Pepys, seeing the momentary sadness of her husband, and reading his inward thoughts, said in his ear, "Samuel, have no more to do with match-making and grand marriages! These things are best left to those that are most concerned in them. This manly young fellow reminds me of you in your courting-days; but I was neither so pretty nor so fond as mistress Marion—was I, Mr. Pepys?" He squeezed her hand, and

said, "Thou wast quite as fond, my Bessy, and *almost* quite as pretty." And with these words his sadness passed away.

It was a happy evening this in the Minories, and the forerunner of many happy days.

When Sir Ralph Spicer repeated his visit, the door was closed to him by the express command of Sir John, who had worked himself up to this resolution by reflecting that as he was not in his own house, but only in an inn, there was no breach of hospitality; and that the visit could only cause vexation and confusion to Marion, Walter, and Captain Wynton, and to his cousin Sir Ralph himself. Indeed, by this time Lady Roundtree had been completely talked out of her partiality for the courtier by Pepys and his wife, who gave (what they were well able to do) a terrible account of the extravagance, recklessness, profligacy, and debauchery of the present race of courtiers in general, and of Sir Ralph Spicer in particular, telling the Kentish gentlewoman tales which she had never heard a breath of, which she never could have conceived, and which made her shake almost as much as Pepys had done at Tom's whispering in his ear "The memory of the wicked shall perish." But the little blow which completed the alienation, and converted her ladyship into Sir Ralph's enemy for life, was adroitly put in by Mrs. Pepys in a *tête-à-tête* in her own drawing-room in Seething Lane. After complimenting her ladyship on the juvenility of her looks, and on the wonderful improvement made in her appearance by a new silk-dress, cut and made by Mrs. Pepys's own milliner, and by a black patch or two on the face, which her ladyship now wore for the first time, although the fashion

of patching had come in with the Restoration, the clever wife of the Clerk of the Acts, bursting as it were into an involuntary passion of indignation and astonishment, exclaimed—"Oh, the perfidy of that wicked Sir Ralph! Oh, his malice and blindness too! What does your sweet ladyship think he had the insolence, the virulence, to say to Pepys that day they were walking from the Devil tavern to the Minories?"

"Why! what?" said Lady Roundtree, much agitated; "what could that graceless man say of a virtuous woman like me?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Pepys, "he said . . . . But I must not tell; Pepys almost made me swear that I would not, and he will be so angry if I do."

"But, my dear madam," said her ladyship, "Mr. Pepys need not know it—nay, I vow he shall not know it from me."

"I can scarcely find words to say it—but Sir Ralph did say to Pepys that, finding that Marion would not listen to him, he, to amuse the dulness of Erith and to promote his scheme of getting Marion's person and fortune for some of his crew, did enter upon some amorous passages with your ladyship *à la mode de France*."

"But if he had that boldness," said her ladyship, reddening a little, "he could never say that I was other than cruel to his suit. And . . . . ."

"Nay, madam, the lying fellow told Pepys that you were fathoms deep in love with him, and thought him as deeply enamoured with your ladyship, and that—" here Mrs. Pepys paused and put on a look of vast mortification.

"But what else did the fellow say?" said her ladyship.

"Why, my lady, he said that at your time of life, instead of thinking of gallantries and amourettes, you ought to be thinking of your prayers; and that a pair of spectacles and a new folio Bible would have been a more suitable present for one of your years, than the monkey he took down to Erith at his last visit!"

"The monster!" said Lady Roundtree. "May he be hanged as his monkey was! My time of life, gadzooks! My years! Why, I am younger than he by——"

"Ten years at least, and twenty years in looks," said clever Mrs. Pepys, while her ladyship was hesitating in her arithmetic. "But do not let this horrible insolence chafe you; he is a godless, beggarly fellow, unworthy of your ladyship's notice, nay, even of your ladyship's contempt."

"If he owes Sir John a farthing he owes him five hundred broad pieces! I would have Sir John arrest him for the debt, but I know he won't. I wish master Walter had finished him outright on Plumstead Common. But I will never see his drunken face again."

"My lady," said Mrs. Pepys, pointing to a small mirror in the room, "look there at your own dear face, and feel how foully the rogue hath lied."

The storm passed over without any injury to the Pepys's in her ladyship's favour—so adroitly had Mrs. Pepys managed the business; but there was no hope or chance that Sir Ralph would ever regain the ground he had lost.

After the gallant affair at the Hope, in which the Dutch lost a great deal of honour, de Ruyter and Van Ghent made no further attempt, either in

the Thames or in the Medway. They merely blockaded both rivers, and captured such homeward-bound ships as came in their way. Their blockade, however, occasioned one serious inconvenience: the Newcastle colliers could no longer come up the river, and London was reduced to a sad extremity through want of coals. The King was obliged to send to Say's Court for the ingenious Mr. Evelyn, and to employ that gentleman and other members of the Royal Society in seeking for other fuel, or for some substitute for coal, in the neighbourhood of London. A fanatic, whom our friend Pepys called and set down for a Quaker, typified at this time, in a very lively manner, the combustion that was in store for this wicked government, and for the sinful parts of the nation, unless they turned from the wickedness of their ways, and repented in sackcloth and ashes. This man came naked through Westminster Hall (only very civilly tied about the loins to avoid scandal), and, with a chafing-dish of fire and brimstone burning upon his head, did pass right through the Hall, crying "Repent! repent!"

Heartily sick of the town, and of almost everything they saw in it, our Kentish friends returned all together to Erith at the end of July. When we say all, we include poor Tom, the ex-Kentish prophet, who had rapidly recovered health and strength, and who had confirmed and strengthened his sanity by a few glimpses he took of men far madder than he had ever been, even when he lived in the woods, and wore the prophetical beard. Place a lunatic among men madder than himself, and he either gets as wild as they or recovers. It was running a risk, perhaps, but Tom, whose heart

had still some cleavings to the religious sect to which he had for a length of time belonged, had ventured once or twice into Gravel Lane, and heard the preachings and saw the wrestlings of Hiram Bingley and his associate fanatics, who were fiercely contending with one another about judgments and prophecies, and railing against the Omnipotent for delaying the establishment of their dominion over the earth.

"I will go no more to these dens," said Tom, "for they are full of traitors and conspirators. These men are mad with many things—but most of all with vanity. Better any church, or any form of government, than such as these maniacs would establish!"

Sir John, who had always been disposed to entertain a kindly feeling for the poor man, and to take the proper view of his case when he lived in the woods, now offered to make him his chief woodsman; and Tom accepted the offer most gladly, for he loved his old haunts still; and the post would keep him near to master Walter; and he understood the woodsman's craft to perfection; and he would not have relished the bread of idleness, old as he was. Will Gaff could hardly be left behind in the great city, or sent adrift, after all that he had done for Walter, and suffered with him. Will was not a Kentish man, nor, indeed, native to any county whatever, for he was born at sea in a gale of wind—latitude and longitude both uncertain, as were also sundry other circumstances connected with his birth. But Captain Wynton undertook to provide for him in his household at Charlton, and so Will went into Kent with the rest of our friends.

Mr. Pepys had not failed of speaking in high quarters about the services rendered by Walter and Tom; and General Hilborough had borne his testimony with right good will, and without any regard to the envying and sneering courtiers, and favourite officers. The Duke of York promised to speak to the King, but forgot so to do for a long while; and when the King was spoken to, he said that he would think about the matter, and see how some rewards or honours might be bestowed upon the brave volunteers. But the merry monarch never found time for any such thoughts; and perhaps at this late date it might have been found very awkward and inconvenient to contradict the lying Court Gazette of the day, which had given great lauds and glorifications to his Grace of Albemarle, General Middleton, Sir Edward Sprague, and other officers of high rank—who had all deserved to be brought to a court-martial—for beating the Dutch in the Medway, and driving them out of that river. Sir John Roundtree was indignant at these palpable falsehoods, and at the ingratitude of the court towards Captain Wynton and his son; but, with the exception of Sir John, none of our Kentish friends cared much about it. Captain Wynton would have despised any honour that such a government could have given him; Walter had no longer anything to fear; and after Tom's change of life and opinions there was nothing to fear for him. Although Tom had renounced prophecy for ever, he could not patiently listen to those who said he had been out in his last prediction, inasmuch as this visitation from the Dutch, instead of being a greater was a much less serious calamity than the Great Fire. "Friends and coun-

trymen," Tom would say with great solemnity, "the shame brought upon the navy and the flag of England is the greatest of national calamities, and if these disgraces are not retrieved we must cease to be a nation. A city consumed by fire may be builded up again with timber and bricks and mortar; but honour and fame, once lost, are not so easily restored. This black spot upon our banner is indelible. Well for posterity if it serve them as a warning! 'T is all up with old England when these events of the year sixteen hundred and sixty-seven shall be regarded as a light judgment, or when Englishmen shall hear the story without anger and shame."

At the end of the month of July, the Pensioner de Witt having yielded to the will of the French King, the Dutch consented to give the King of England a peace, and the treaty of Breda was signed and duly ratified. It was a treaty disgraceful to England; but, with such a mad government, it was far better for the country to accept it, than to continue the war. De Ruyter's great fleet, which had so long blockaded the Thames, and ridden triumphantly from the North Foreland to the Buoy of the Nore, fired a *feu de joie* and went home.

A few days after the disappearance of the last Dutch flag from our shore, Walter and Marion were married in the pretty little old church of Erith. It was a bright sunny day, and the whole village took part in the joy and festivity. Mike Woodenspoon, with official staff in hand, and with an enormous bouquet of flowers on one breast of his best coat, and a proportionately large favour of white silk ribbon on the other, marshalled the

villagers, and headed the procession which followed the bride and bridegroom and their near friends; and he then kept guard in the church porch, with great dignity, while the service was being performed within. Even Lady Roundtree, who had so long made the current of this true love run unsmooth, was contented and jubilant. Everybody was happy at Erith on this sunny day, for all loved Marion and master Walter, and the overflowing hospitality of Sir John Roundtree did not leave time for one sad or serious thought. The feast, to which all were bidden, began at noon with a substantial dinner in the old Elizabethan style, and with a profusion of wine, and supplies of ale of such a quality as excited the astonishment even of Mike Woodenspoon, who "kenned" all the ale that was brewed in the parish. After dinner there were sports and pastimes out of doors, and music and dancing upon the lawn. The bride and bridegroom danced among the servants and tenantry. Nay, even Captain Wynton felt so light-hearted on this occasion that he led out my Lady Roundtree, and danced a coranto with her. As for Sir John, the dear hilarious old man, he danced with gentle and simple, and with nearly every maid and matron present, for he had drunk rather more claret than was his wont, and felt so young and happy that he could not sit still, although his amazed wife repeatedly warned him that gout or rheumatism might follow such frolics. But the most active performer of all was Will Gaff, who, although he occasionally missed stays, being rather top-heavy with the knight's strong ale, whisked, whirled, jumped, and capered from the time they came out from dinner until the time they were

called back to supper. Matrons and maids al declared that Will was a very proper man and right merry one; but one maiden there was tha was so charmed with our honest sailor, and h with her, that within three weeks she became Mrs Gaff.

The bride did little more than appear at th supper-table, to kiss the wassail-cup, and to acknow ledge, by one sweet thankful smile, the toast tha was rapturously drunk to her happiness in th wedded life.

Walter and Marion continued to live entirely i the country, dividing their time between the plea sant house at Erith and Captain Wynton's hom at Charlton. Except to gratify my Lady Round tree, or to make purchases of books and othe things not easily obtained out of London, the hardly ever approached the great city, where, i truth, for many years there continued to be ver little to attract people of honourable and refine feelings, but very much to repel them. It was a unprincipled and disgraceful era, the degradatio of England being completed a few years after b Charles II. becoming the pensioner of the Frenc King. Still there was private happiness wherever there was household virtue. The happiness of ou young friends, and of those around them, was com plete.

THE END.

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